

4. The Child Seer and the Allegorical Moment in Millennial Spanish Horror Cinema

Abstract

Chapter Four presents an analysis of Spanish horror films *THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE* (Guillermo del Toro, 2001), *THE NAMELESS* (Jaume Balagueró, 1999), and *THE ORPHANAGE* (Juan Antonio Bayona, 2007) to show how these films position their uncanny children as terrifying but cathartic eruptions of the historical traumas that were long concealed by the ligatures of Francoist discourse. Using Adam Lowenstein's framework of the 'allegorical moment', the chapter demonstrates how these uncanny children utilize trauma to break through their symbolic bounds in a Spanish context. In addition, the chapter outlines how these films engage with Franco-era art films *SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE* (Víctor Eríce, 1973) and *RAISE RAVENS* (Carlos Saura, 1976).

Keywords: Childhood, Allegorical moment, Trauma, Child seer, Collective memory, Spanish horror film

During the millennial turn, Spanish culture finally became consumed with an impulse to reconfigure the collective memory in order to account for the trauma of the Civil War. As Sally Faulkner articulates, the war became a 'newly urgent question for 2000s Spain' (2013, 253): harnessing the conditions of felt historical transition incarnated by the shift into the 21st century, cultural discourse turned to uncovering and assimilating the traumas long suppressed in Spain's historical narrative. This excavation of the collective memory became the project of the Association for the Recuperation of Historical Memory, formed in 2000, which seeks to collect oral and written testimonies of victims of the war and Francoist regime, and also coordinates the opening of mass graves. Subsequently, a number of other groups emerged

aimed at reclaiming suppressed pasts and reshaping the national narrative, such as the Forum for Memory and the Spanish Civil War Memory Project.

This mounting cultural interest in the darker facets of Spain's past eventually led to the Historical Memory Law, passed in 2007 by Prime Minister José Luis Zapatero. The law recognizes victims on both sides of the war, while formally condemning the Franco regime, including removing plaques commemorating the war and dictatorship from public buildings. The controversy surrounding the law – the passage of which was opposed by both the Republican Left of Catalonia and the conservative Popular Party – illustrates, in the words of Leggott, the 'complex relationship between remembering and forgetting in a society in which the articulation of the past has been forbidden' (2010, 122). The war and dictatorship are thus not historical pasts distanced by the passage of time: as Leggott asserts, 'the recent dictatorial past continues [...] to hold deep significance in contemporary Spain' (2010, 122). The painful reshaping of the collective memory is most affectively expressed in the horror films that erupted in tandem with these organizations aimed at recuperating these long-suppressed pasts.

The spectral children in the films analysed in this chapter – *THE NAMELESS* (Jaume Balagueró, 1999), *THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE* (Guillermo del Toro, 2001), and *THE ORPHANAGE* (Juan Antonio Bayona, 2007) – are caught between death and life, past and present. From this liminal position, they enact the resurgence of repressed collective memories from the traumatic post-Civil War period. Chapter Four thus outlines how the cultural return of the repressed is mobilized through the figure of the uncanny child, who is faced with a traumatic encounter while too young to comprehend or respond to it effectively. As a result, the unassimilated trauma incubates within the child, to be unleashed in monstrous disruptions to symbolic coherence suggestive of a volatile future: a complex temporal process that evocatively captures the anxieties of Spain's millennial milieu. Adding to the temporal complexity of these cultural expressions of trauma, these films draw on tropes established in dissident art cinema of the 1970s – namely, the eerily insightful child characters in *THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE* (Victor Erice, 1973) and *RAISE RAVENS* (Carlos Saura, 1976). Through the figure of the uncanny child, temporal belatedness becomes sewed into the narrative and aesthetic of these horror films with a melancholic yet ultimately helpless urgency, a belatedness bound to the films' preoccupations with the delayed recognition of past traumas.

These child characters ostensibly embody Caruth's characterization of trauma as 'a breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world' caused by an event that 'is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be

fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself [...] repeatedly [...] in [...] nightmares and repetitive actions' (1996, 4). Yet these children come to relish this traumatic breach in homogenous time and meaning, in turn gaining a voice outside of the constrictive pressures of a politically ordained futurity. Through postwar Francoist efforts to validate the Nationalist cause and subsequent transitional fixations with rapid progress and hypermodernity, the child has long been implicated in Spain's resistance to consider the past in favour of crafting utopian visions of the future, in a way that precisely refracts 'the pervasive invocation of the Child as the emblem of futurity's unquestioned value' (Edelman, 2004, 3). However, if futurity is violently divorced from childhood – as is the case in these horror films – such narratives of historical progression are thrown into disarray, as the child instead disturbs the constrictive temporal structures that she usually buttresses. Exigently bound up with the tragedies papered over in narratives of historical progress, the ghostly children of millennial Spanish horror embody transgressions of spatiotemporal coherence coded as both monstrous and powerful. As a result, these characters expose the revolutionary potential of childhood outlined by Walter Benjamin and described by Alison Landsberg, a potential that emerges from 'the child's ability to see through and question the reified structures of society, to imagine new possibilities, new social constellations' (2004, 89).

These child figures are thus monstrous in the Deleuzian sense: they become 'the pure unformed' (2004, 107), embodying a breakdown in accepted (adult) regimes of meaning to generate new ways of approaching disturbing situations. Monstrosity can thus be understood as a 'sense-producing machine, in which nonsense and sense are no longer found in simple opposition, but are rather co-present within a new discourse' (Deleuze, 2004, 107). I consider how these ghostly children raise a monstrous new discourse in this chapter by situating them as incarnations of the 'child seer', a concept Deleuze outlines alongside his introduction of the time-image in *Cinema 2* (1997a, 2-7). Deleuze argues that the child seer first emerged in Italian neorealist films as a response to the massive cultural rupture of World War II. According to Deleuze, the seer becomes trapped in the traumatic gap between perception, understanding, and decisive action, yet, while entombed in this in-between state of physical and cognitive incapacity, the seer gains a powerful insight beyond the limits of linear time (1997a, xi-xii; 2-7).

Caught in the past while shaping the flow of the present, the characters in the films analysed manifest powerful 'allegorical moments' – a term coined by Adam Lowenstein to describe an intersection in certain horror

films that exposes 'our connection to historical trauma across the axes of text, context, and spectatorship [...] [through the mobilization of] the unpredictable and often painful juncture where the past and present collide' (2005, 9). Lowenstein characterizes the allegorical moment as a 'shocking collision of film, spectator and history where registers of bodily space and historical time are disrupted, confronted and intertwined' (2005, 1). He draws on Walter Benjamin's discussion of *Jetztzeit* to conceptualize this moment as a collision which 'blast[s] open the continuum of history' (Benjamin cited in Lowenstein, 2005, 16) in a manner that is both confrontational and liberating. Through Benjamin, Lowenstein links the 'betweenness' that characterizes allegorical representations with the agonizing 'betweenness' of historical trauma, as is potently expressed in Benjamin's discussion of the death's head:

For Benjamin, the image of the death's head, or the corpse, reveals the sorrow behind a false redemptive face of history, just as it reveals the fragments behind a mirage of unified individual identity. Benjamin designates this mode of revelation as allegorical, where 'meaning' is glimpsed between the dead corpse and the living body, between individual interiority and historical exteriority. (2005, 146)

Lowenstein suggests that 'allegory honors representation's promise that trauma can be communicated – its commitment to the image of death is simultaneously a commitment, however conflicted and provisional, to recognition, to the past's value for the present' (2005, 15-16).

Frightening images of death are, of course, a key preoccupation of the horror genre. Hereby, Lowenstein seeks to analyse the 'allegorical confrontation between past and present' that emerges when horror cinema reveals to us the extent to which 'traumatic events lodged in the past' have 'echoes [that] resonate in the present' (2005, 177). The uncanny children of millennial Spanish horror ignite such a process, which Lowenstein describes as 'a return of history through the gut' (2005, 48). Furthermore, the allegorical moment encapsulates the uncanny child's challenge to entrenched historical master narratives: as Lowenstein suggests, 'allegory resists fantasies of strictly teleological history in favour of fleeting instants where "meaning" is forged between past and present' (2005, 15). By raising or even embodying allegorical moments, the child characters in the films under discussion unravel paradigms of national progress that previously worked to mask the cultural wounds of post-Civil War Spanish society. That these figures have clear roots in the enigmatic children of 1970s art cinema enhances

the affects and implications of their traumatic allegorical moments, evoking a confrontation between past and present that extends beyond the films' diegeses. These figures thus incite particularly layered instances of Lowenstein's allegorical moment. They expose that the apparently distinct relations between Spain's past and present are much more tangled than teleological conceptions of progress – themselves remnants of Francoist discourse – dare to acknowledge.

Seething Mutations in the Children of Franco: THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE and RAISE RAVENS

Before examining these horror film children, I will turn to their progenitor, the child seer in 1970s art films *BEEHIVE* and *RAISE RAVENS*. The gaze of the children in these films destabilizes inflexible constructions of temporality in ways that are intertwined with the directors' methodological projects: these child characters are able to see through the stiff and dogmatic narratives of nationhood that characterized Francoist propaganda. Thus, in a practical sense, the child seer is a vehicle through which Erice and Saura critique such cultural metanarratives in ambiguous ways, allowing them to evade censorship.

Deleuze explains that the seer surfaces when a powerless and confused child character experiences a disorienting breakdown in the sensory-motor schema, a condition he associates in the opening of *Cinema 2* with the uncertainty of the post-World War II period. This sensory-motor collapse forces the child to experience a 'purely optical or sound situation' (1997a, 5) that is divorced from the relentless progression of linear time. As a result, these children perceive the loss of a clearly defined, coherent meaning system – or what Deleuze terms an 'encompassing situation' (1997a, 57) – a loss that resonates with the moments of national uncertainty and transition depicted in *BEEHIVE* and *RAVENS*.

The children of *BEEHIVE* and *RAVENS* are trapped within unsavoury situations that they are unable to change or interact with physically: confused and largely ignored in the liminal period characterized by the immediate aftermath of the Civil War in *BEEHIVE*, and in the months preceding the death of Franco in *RAVENS*, they are continually forced to wait and watch rather than act. These arcane moments incarnate Caruth's 'breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world' (1996, 4). Yet the child characters' penetrative gaze upon these inscrutable situations – not a gaze that seeks to *master* the situations it confronts, as in Laura Mulvey's (1975) seminal essay,

but to take in their fissures and opacity – comes to be the very source of their eerie yet generative power. In his insightful exploration of the Deleuzian child seer in world cinema, David Martin-Jones explains that ‘the child seer encounters something “intolerable and unbearable”, something [...] beyond their power to act upon’ (2011, 74). He suggests that ‘these are characters directly encountering contemporary social and political mutations, and who are mutating along with these historically shifting contexts’ (2011, 74). Both *BEEHIVE* (1973) and *RAVENS* (1976) were made and released towards the end of Franco’s protracted period of illness, which lasted from 1962 until his death in 1975, a prolonged liminal moment saturated with uncertain anticipation. As Pavlović articulates, ‘Franco’s slow and interminable dying and agony [...] deeply marked the [...] decade and were accompanied by the gradual and final decomposition of his regime’ (2003, 70). Absorbing the agonizing sense of in-betweenness that permeated this cultural context through their contemplative gaze, the child characters in both *BEEHIVE* and *RAVENS* hover on the threshold of a mutation into something other.

The central motif of both *BEEHIVE* and *RAVENS* is the child’s huge, staring eyes. The child is played in both films by Ana Torrent and her character is also called Ana in each, solidifying her position as a metaphorical every-child around which the anxieties of the period constellate. The emphasis on Ana’s huge eyes highlights her role as seer whose watchful look penetrates the situations in which she finds herself, and her stare is central to each film’s narrative and visual landscape. Yet, in both films, Ana is markedly powerless to affect her situation. Thus, she usually appears in the frame as a silent observer, ignored or unheeded by all but the camera. Ana is unable to act upon the situations she witnesses because many of the things she sees are too painful to synthesize in the present moment, a powerlessness further enhanced by her status as a child. Deleuze claims that the child in particular is equipped to become a seer in traumatic conditions because ‘in the adult world, the child is affected by a certain motor helplessness, but one which makes him all the more capable of seeing and hearing’ (1997a, 3). In Deleuze’s conception, unendurable situations generate an extended gap between perception, understanding, and action that the adult is wont to repress but which the child, denied full access to context and information, is forced to accept, undermining the totalizing dominance of the sensory-motor chain of action.

For instance, *RAVENS* continually draws back to one of Ana’s memories from her recent past, in which Ana’s mother lies on her deathbed, screaming and writhing in agony. Ana’s only response is to stare at her mother in horror before silently backing away, an action that fails to vanquish the



Figure 5. Ana's horrified gaze at the little girl's death in *FRANKENSTEIN* in *SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE*.

disturbing image of her agonized mother. This moment haunts the entire film, repeatedly invading the narrative in truncated form, signalling that Ana remains trapped in the gap between perception and decisive action evoked by the sight of her mother's suffering. In *BEEHIVE*, the intolerable situation is metaphorized by the horror film, *FRANKENSTEIN* (James Whale, 1931), which Ana watches at the beginning of *BEEHIVE* when a mobile cinema brings the film to her village. As Ana watches the scene that traumatizes her throughout *BEEHIVE*, in which Frankenstein's monster throws the little girl into the lake, the camera focuses not on the scene itself but on Ana's horrified, yet transfixed, expression as she watches it (Fig. 5). Like the scene of Ana's mother's death in *RAVENS*, Ana becomes obsessed with this traumatic moment and it repeatedly intrudes upon the film in various ways, culminating in the dreamlike restaging of the scene at the film's climax, with Ana occupying the position of the little girl. It is notable that the actual moment in which the monster hurls the child into the lake is never depicted in *BEEHIVE* – and in fact never appeared in the original release of *FRANKENSTEIN*, having been removed by censors – forcing both Ana and the film to circle around this frightening vision rather than confront it directly. This response can be seen as a symptom of the Franco-era obstructions to the recognition and assimilation of postwar trauma, while also being inherent to the ways in which, to return to Caruth, it is trauma's very unassimilated nature, 'the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance' (1996, 4), which haunts the sufferer.

Ana's viewing of this scene from *FRANKENSTEIN* functions as Deleuze's pure optical situation, which cannot be acted upon but merely gazed at in fear. In this case, a 'cinema of seeing replaces action' (Deleuze, 1997a, 9); Ana's horrified viewing of *FRANKENSTEIN* in *BEEHIVE* and of her mother's death in *RAVENS* aptly metonymizes the overarching structure of the films themselves. This 'cinema of seeing' constructs the conditions of trauma: as Caruth points out, the traumatic experience constellates around a paradox of vision in which 'the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it', which in turn engenders the repetitive intrusion of the traumatic event upon the victim's sight, drawing forth 'the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing' (1996, 92). Although Ana is unable to comprehend or physically engage with these situations, the child's source of power lies in this horrified, repetitive seeing – while she recognizes and even invites the intrusion of this unassimilated trauma, the adult characters remain steadfastly blind to it. That these confused visions of trauma, such as the death of Ana's mother, repeatedly invade the narratives and collapse the boundaries between the diegetic past and present crystallizes the children's vision beyond homogenous time. The Anas appreciate that these dark pasts coexist with the present in ways that the adult characters refuse to understand, as is highlighted by Ana's aunty in *RAVENS* repeatedly telling the child that her visions of her dead mother are simply 'nightmares' that are not 'real'.

These child seers both literally and figuratively inhabit the 'any-spaces-whatever' outlined by Deleuze: liminal zones he associates with derelict post-World War II spaces that could no longer be adequately understood or traversed, leaving inhabitants at a loss as to how to define them or physically interact with them (1997a xi-xii; 5; 8-13). In Spain, at the time the films were released, any-spaces-whatever held both material and emblematic prominence in the form of lingering remnants of the Civil War – decaying structures such as abandoned Republican headquarters and homes stood as haunting, but officially unacknowledged, rem(a)inders of the conflict. Such spaces unsettle triumphal, teleological historical discourse. As Lowenstein suggests, 'the ruin [...] has a privileged potential for generating the shock of the allegorical moment' (2005, 108). Furthermore, both *BEEHIVE* and *RAISE RAVENS* were released during liminal gaps in the national narrative – figurative any-spaces-whatever – deepening the implications of the adult characters' uncertainty as to how to 'progress'.

As outlined earlier, *BEEHIVE* was produced in 1973 towards the end of Franco's prolonged period of illness, while *RAVENS* was made in the summer

of 1975, as Franco lay on his deathbed, and was first released in January 1976, barely two months after his death. At this point, despite the death of the dictator the process of transition had yet to commence; thus, the film was released during a juncture in which Spain remained entombed by the ghost of the Franco dictatorship despite the imminent prospect of a political overhaul. These liminal situations enforce the temporal conditions of trauma in a way that resonates with Deleuze's conception of the any-space-whatever, producing a situation that cannot be assimilated or navigated in the present moment. Both films employ the child's confluence with any-spaces-whatever – metaphorized within the diegesis as deserted, crumbling spaces – to confront the cultural trauma that threatens to (re) surface at the time of their production, and as a means of resisting the linear metanarratives that enable its suppression.

Deleuze describes any-spaces-whatever as 'deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste grounds, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction. And in these any-spaces-whatever a new race of characters was stirring, a kind of mutant: they saw rather than acted, they were seers' (1997a, xi). While the adult characters in both *RAVENS* and *BEEHIVE* attempt in vain to act upon their situations, the children represent such stirring mutants, choosing to welcome and inhabit the any-space-whatever. In *RAVENS*, Ana appears happiest when she plays with her doll in a decaying, emptied swimming pool, as her adult guardians watch on incredulously. In *BEEHIVE*, Ana continually visits an abandoned, disused barn, where an exiled Republican soldier hides briefly until he is killed by the Francoist police. She is also drawn to a crumbling old well – at one point, she calls into the well to summon the spirit of Frankenstein's monster (Fig. 6).

Both the ex-soldier who attempts (and fails) to hide in the abandoned barn and the juddering, decaying monster evoke the adult's disintegration in the face of this postwar break down of both smooth national progression and the sensory-motor schema. Higginbotham describes the use of Frankenstein's monster in *BEEHIVE* as an allegorical caricature of Spain under Francoist mythology, as 'a monster that has lost its memory' (1988, 116), which, as a result, 'has no moral sense and, thus, can behave kindly and then kill' (1988, 120). In addition, the mindless, relentlessly forward-moving stagger of Frankenstein's monster parallels the adult characters' desperate hold on ideals of national progress: they rely on triumphal discourse about fascist military heroes (applied to Ana's father in *RAISE RAVENS*) and Spanish glory or authenticity in order to elide the cultural ruptures of war. While the adults flounder in their vain attempts to maintain teleological temporal progression when faced with the loss



Figure 6. Any-spaces-whatever: Ana plays with the well with which she has become fixated in *SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE*.

of a coherent encompassing situation, Ana draws her power from the loss. This is particularly emphasized in the final scene of *BEEHIVE*, in which Ana stands staring out an open window in a white nightgown, whispering repeatedly to the night sky 'I am Ana.' She appears like the mysterious spectres that haunt later horror films, standing on the threshold of, and *summoning*, a new, unpredictable situation.

Further linking these child seers with their horror movie successors, in each film, Ana's consciousness is intertwined with a supernatural force not perceived by the adult characters: in *BEEHIVE*, the amorphous spirit of Frankenstein's monster, and in *RAVENS*, the mysterious spectre of Ana's dead mother. The child seer's attachment to these ghostly figures invokes the relentless collision of the recent past and the present. This subverts the narrative traditions of mainstream Spanish cinema of prior decades, in particular the *cine con niño*, which tend to manufacture a break with the recent past in favour of positioning the child as the vessel for a utopian future. By contrast, both Anas welcome the intrusion of these spectres and the subsequent dislocation from linear time that they invoke.

Ultimately, *BEEHIVE* and *RAVENS* use the child seer's harnessing of traumatic temporal dissonance to covertly destabilize teleological narratives of victory and progress under Franco. In alignment with this aim, there is also a practical component to the way these films make use of nonlinear time.

As Saura points out, 'for me and my compatriots, to make the stories we wanted to do, we had to use indirect methods. For example, we couldn't use a linear structure or the ideas would be too clear' (cited in Kinder, 1979, 16). In *RAVENS* and *BEEHIVE*, the child seer and her ability to access nonlinear perspectives functions in coalition with the filmmakers need to use indirect methods to evade censorship in their critiques of Francoist dogma. Thus, Ana in both Saura's and Erice's films represents stirring mutations within the officially sanctioned cinematic children of Franco, subtly disturbing the homogeneity of the national narrative.

It is important to note at this juncture that the directors themselves have been described – and saw themselves – as irrevocably damaged children of Franco. This involves a rethinking of romanticized, utopian understandings of childhood, as is made explicit in Saura's suggestion that *RAVENS* expresses his belief that:

childhood is one of the most terrible parts in the life of a human being. What I'm trying to say is that at that age you've no idea where it is you are going, only that people are taking you somewhere, leading you, pulling you and you are frightened. You don't know where you're going or who you are or what you are going to do. It's a time of terrible indecision. (cited in Rob Stone, 2002, 102)

Saura thus positions childhood *itself* as an unnavigable any-space-whatever, rather than a time of growth toward futurity and adulthood. Born in 1931, Saura was a young child during the Civil War, while Erice, born in 1940, grew up in its aftermath. As Kinder explains, these two directors came to see themselves as:

emotionally and politically stunted children who were no longer young; who, because of the imposed role of 'silent witness' to a tragic war that divided country, family and self, had never been innocent; and who, because of the oppressive domination of the previous generation, were obsessed with the past and might never be ready to take responsibility for changing the future. (1983, 58)

Thus, the Francoist 'aesthetic of repression' is manifested through the directors' artistic praxis, whereby the political need to use indirect methods melds with their personal expression of a child's powerless and as yet unfathomable experience of national trauma: a trauma that simmers and incubates within these quietly subversive children of Franco.

The Mutant Child Seer in Millennial Horror Cinema

Of course, millennial Spanish horror films no longer have to deal with such strict political censorship; thus, the child seers' ability to see beyond linear time is no longer intertwined with the films' methodology. Engaging with these seminal art films as key intertexts, the spectral children of Spanish horror retain the powers of the child seer, however in an exaggerated form, as their ability to see beyond the adult's present is taken to uncanny and threatening extremes. In these films, the child seer mutates into a source of horror. Lowenstein suggests that while art cinema and the horror genre are typically considered to be 'diametrically opposed' (2005, 10), in fact, through their expressions of historical trauma, these forms are 'often engaged in interactive exchange' (2005, 10). Drawing self-reflexively from the seminal 1970s art films, the children's physical powerlessness to act upon their situations in *THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE*, *THE NAMELESS*, and *THE ORPHANAGE* has been brought to its utmost conclusion and resulted in their demise. However, through their deaths (whether literal, as in *THE ORPHANAGE* and *BACKBONE*, or figurative and vague, as in *THE NAMELESS*), these child seers escape the confining bounds of linear time entirely and become powerful figures to fear. As Lowenstein argues, due to its generic intentions to invoke shock, dread, and fear, the 'horror film may well be the genre of our time that registers most brutally the legacies of historical trauma' (2005, 10): this is true of millennial Spanish horror films in particularly multilayered ways.

These uncanny child characters expose awful secrets that, like the return of the repressed in Freud's uncanny, 'ought to have remained hidden but have come to light' (2003b, 241). Yet, in so doing, the children evoke Lowenstein's allegorical moment, in which 'an image of the past sparks a flash of unexpected recognition in the present' (2005, 14). By raising previously submerged traumas from the recent past, these children force a renegotiation of narrative and – via allegory – *national* time in the present. As a result, they menacingly trouble the distinctions between the past and present, yet do so in a way that interrogates with potent force the dominant ideological models of teleological progression that have been operational throughout post-Civil War Spanish society. By finally raising and acting out the unassimilated traumas of the Civil War and dictatorship, these children dismantle constrictive visions of national identity, allowing space for their reformation from the rubble of a post-traumatic context.

THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE

Like its predecessor *BEEHIVE*, *THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE* is set in the direct aftermath of the Civil War: a liminal period in which the advancement of the national narrative is threateningly uncertain, and adult characters are left unsure of how to engage with their situations. Unlike *BEEHIVE*, however, *BACKBONE* is able to confront this period in a direct and retrospective way, so this moment of cultural metamorphosis is figured as a mutation that has already occurred: a repressed spectre in the national consciousness. This is suggested by the montage that opens the film – consisting of a bomb being dropped from a plane, an unconscious child drowning, and a foetus with a malformed backbone floating in stagnant water – and the dialogue that accompanies these images, which recurs at the end of the film:

What is a ghost? A tragedy doomed to repeat itself time and time again?
An instant of pain, perhaps. Something dead which still seems to be
alive. An emotion suspended in time. Like a blurred photograph. Like
an insect trapped in amber.

The opening scenes thus self-consciously establish the film as a whole as an allegorical moment, a confrontation with a traumatic period of time – an instant of pain – which, through its ghostly suspension and repetition, interacts with the present.

A number of critics have considered the ways in which *BACKBONE* deploys the ghost story to consider national trauma: for instance, Labanyi suggests that the cultural function of the haunting trope 'becomes explicit' (2007, 101) in *BACKBONE*, a 'literal ghost story as the narrative format' (2007, 101) to express historical trauma (2007, 102). Anne Hardcastle contends that the film 'dramatizes this confrontation with the past in a way that encourages a reconsideration of the contemporary "reality" of Spain's historical trauma' (2005, 126), which in turn helps Spanish audiences 'to overcome the traumatic legacy of the Civil War' from the perspective of 'a stable, successful democracy interested in creating a new meaning for its history' (2005, 129). Yet, as Lázaro-Reboll aptly asserts, such a reading tends to 'reiterate and reinforce official historical discourses on contemporary democratic Spain, which have endorsed reconciliation, compromise, and consensus in an exercise of collective amnesia' (2007, 47). Furthermore, such a reading positions this trauma as distanced and immobilized through being history, the past. In fact, the mutant child seer of the film, via his embodiment of a potent allegorical moment, challenges such 'collective

amnesia', instead suggesting that Spain's past lurks alongside its present via the belated temporal frameworks of trauma.

The film is set in an orphanage for young boys from Republican families whose parents were killed or captured in the Civil War. These children thus counter the orphan martyrs of the Franco-era *cine con niño*, who embody a clean break from the recent Republican and Civil War past and herald a glorious future. The orphanage itself is detached from civilization in the middle of the desert, with an unexploded bomb sitting in the courtyard. The bomb has apparently been defused, however the children are not fully convinced that this is true: as one of the oldest children, Jaime, says at one point, 'They say it's switched off, but I don't believe them. Put your ear against her, you'll hear ticking.' Constantly looming over the children, the bomb mocks the adult's downplaying of the traumatic effects of the war upon the children. Deterritorialized from society, the film's setting functions as the epitome of the any-space-whatever, as is emphasized by the immobile bomb which constantly threatens to detonate; the orphanage's young inhabitants are unable to affect this situation, yet are enraptured by its unnavigable power, and are constantly shown gazing helplessly at the bomb throughout the film (Fig. 7).

As well as being haunted by this unexploded bomb, the orphanage is also haunted by a child ghost, Santi, a former inhabitant of the orphanage who disappeared on the same night that the bomb landed in the orphanage's grounds. As del Toro says of the bomb in the DVD audio-commentary, 'all the stories, occurrences are tied around the bomb, this constant looming reminder of a terrible past'. The young children, the deserted products of a political movement all but vanquished by Franco and his Civil War, also exist as rem(a)inders of this past. Thus, these orphans, through their very existence, trouble Franco's postwar efforts to suppress any remnants of the Republican's cause and set in place a triumphal narrative of national progression. Subsequently, while figuring a monstrous past, the unexploded bomb and the ghost Santi simultaneously suggest a disastrous future: just as the bomb constantly threatens to explode, virtually the only words Santi is heard uttering throughout the film are 'Many of you will die.' By embodying the 'constant looming reminder of a terrible past' which is simultaneously prophetic of a volatile future, Santi and the bomb evoke an allegorical moment that comments on the way in which the past traumas represented by the film continue to seethe beneath the extra-diegetic present.

The scene of Santi's death, shown in full late in the film, is the apotheosis of the seer's physical incapacity, signifying his mutation from innocent child into powerful, monstrous seer. As we learn two-thirds into the film, Santi



Figure 7. The children gaze at and hover around the unexploded bomb in *THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE*.

was caught playing near the cistern in the orphanage's cellar late at night by the violent and angry young janitor, Jacinto, who was covertly searching for gold he believed to be hidden somewhere on the orphanage's grounds. Jacinto is a former inhabitant of the orphanage who has been inexorably damaged by his experience, and thus represents a parallel realist figuration of the child deformed by wartime turmoil. Furious about encountering the child during his furtive search for gold, Jacinto struck Santi, injuring his head and rendering him unconscious. In a panic, Jacinto then placed the motionless boy into the cistern of amber water. His body immobile, Santi was unable to swim and drowned in the murky water. This amber water, which appears like an infinite void as Santi is filmed in a tight close-up sinking into its depths in slow-motion, epitomizes the unnavigable qualities of the any-space-whatever. Through this death, the ultimate extreme of sensory-motor helplessness, Santi is transformed. He becomes an 'insect trapped in amber': a ghost whose consciousness is fused to the any-space-whatever represented by the seemingly endless depth of the amber water.

As a ghost, Santi comes to exist fully outside of linear time. The 'amber' that he is trapped within can also be likened to Deleuze's 'crystal of time', a cinematic moment in which the sensory-motor link becomes completely severed, enforcing a collapse in the distinctions between the 'actual' past as a specific point on a chronological line – a 'dead' present that has already passed – and the 'virtual' past which 'coexists with the present that it was' (1997a, 79). The crystal of time can thus be viewed as an aesthetic that mobilizes the allegorical moment, as meaning is formed in the interstices between temporal and subjective boundaries instead of within them.

Through his death, Santi comes to embody this glimpse of a crystal of time, becoming forever fused to the moment of his drowning so that, through his presence, the past, present, and even the future, refract one another. This is enhanced by the fact that the shot of Santi drowning is shown multiple times throughout the film, including in the opening montage, before the audience has any context through which to understand it or to assign it a clear place in the film's narrative chronology. Ultimately, this allegorical moment, activated by a cinematic 'crystal', ungrounds the linear progression of cinematic and historical narratives that position the cultural rupture of the Civil War as a remnant of the past that has successfully been overcome. Santi's death refuses to remain lodged in an immobilized historical past – a present that has passed – but remains forever alongside the present as a traumatic past that *is*. At the moment of his death, Santi's subjectivity escapes its corporeal, present-grounded confines, as is indicated by the way his spectral presence visually warps the ether around him. No longer bound to the flow of linear time or the physical encasing of selfhood, Santi's mutation to a ghost renders his penetrative gaze all the more powerful, as he harnesses the power of this 'breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world' caused by an event that 'is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known' (Caruth, 1996, 4).

The ghostly Santi is visually constructed as a broken porcelain doll (Fig. 8), with cracks visible all over his body, emphasizing his physical fragility; however, in his ghostly form, it is this very fragility that becomes threatening. The film presents this postwar mutant child as a being who has been shattered whilst undergoing the delicate process of being formed: an eerie incarnation of a trauma that has occurred 'too soon' to be properly integrated. On the DVD commentary, del Toro explains that he wished to express 'how unsafe it is to be a child', before discussing his memory of witnessing children growing up in unstable conditions attempting to kill each other. Del Toro's comment about the danger of childhood – which echoes Carlos Saura's characterization of his childhood – thus suggests a vulnerability that is perilous, as sinister social forces invoke a transfiguration of the child's as yet unformed subjectivity into something monstrous. Recalling Deleuze's definition, this is the monstrosity of the 'pure unformed' (2004, 107) that cannot be contained by the existent symbolic order. Accordingly, after his mutation, Santi functions as a fissure in the coherence of the film's diegetic world. Subverting the rational relationship of the body with space-time, wherever he goes, Santi appears to be underwater, with the blood from his head wound constantly floating upwards. Fused to the any-space-whatever of his death, Santi now exists forever as an expression of his past trauma,



Figure 8. The ghostly Santi in *THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE*.

caught in the inescapable gap between perception, understanding, and action. His haunting thus invokes an allegorical moment that impels other characters – and viewers – to experience the frisson of this previously repressed traumatic encounter. As Lowenstein suggests, the allegorical moment enacts a ‘complex process of embodiment where film, spectator and history compete and collaborate to produce forms of knowing not easily described by conventional delineations of bodily space and historical time’ (2005, 2) – a viscerally allegorical process of interaction also incarnated by Santi’s gaze.

Santi’s most prominent feature is, like Ana of the 1970s art films, his dark, staring eyes. The large shadowy pools of Ana’s eyes, however, have mutated into something monstrous in the character of Santi: the entire surface of his eyes is dark and intensely reflective. His eyes accentuate the uncanny penetration of his gaze, while simultaneously establishing an opaque barrier to those who look back into them. In his discussion of the cinematic gaze, Lacanian film theorist Todd McGowan (2003) counters Mulvey’s influential suggestion that the gaze of the viewer identifies with the characters and situations on-screen in a way that is pleasurable through its scopophilic mastery. McGowan instead explores the gaze’s potential to confront the viewer with a traumatic sense of powerlessness. He suggests that, when watching a film, our perceived scopic mastery over the film’s diegesis can be directly challenged by the impenetrability of another character’s gaze, which lends this figure a deeply uncanny power by ‘exposing a blank spot in the subject’s look’ (McGowan, 2003, 33). The security and mastery of the viewer

is threatened when she is unable to pinpoint the other's gaze at the exact spot from which it (appears to) look back at her. As McGowan explains, 'even when the subject sees a "complete" image, something remains obscure; the subject cannot see the Other at the point at which it sees the subject' (2003, 33) – the subject being either the audience or their character proxy on-screen. Santi's reflective eyes incarnate such impenetrability: as he advances upon other characters and the viewer, his blank eyes reflect the image of those who gaze upon him, an effect that is particularly uncanny when he stares directly at the camera (and viewer). This reflective, inscrutable gaze raises anxieties about what the child represents once he has mutated under the upheavals of war and fascist oppression, while suggesting the ways in which his traumas reflect and reverberate with the present – both that of the film's diegesis and that inhabited by the viewer.

The spectre raises the ominous possibility that the trauma of Spain's recent past may return within the mutant child to engulf the future. Santi's repetitive uttering of the single ominous phrase, 'Many of you will die' is revealed to be accurate by the film's climax, as a conflict incited by Jacinto within the walls of the orphanage results in the death of all of the adult staff. Santi's accurate prediction crystallizes his ability to perceive the volatility of the future – an undermining of 'futurity's unquestioned value' (Edelman, 2004, 3) which functions as a comment on Spain's present, the 'future' in relation to the film's historical diegesis – while he remains forever bound to his traumatic past. The final scene of the film depicts the threshold of this volatile future, as the orphaned children stand as a group staring out at the endless expanse of desert beyond the orphanage's bounds unsure of how to proceed, the adult characters having killed each other in a microcosm of the Civil War.

THE NAMELESS

Unlike *BACKBONE*, *THE NAMELESS* is set in the present and contains no overt references to the Civil War or Franco. However, like *BACKBONE*, the film is consumed by the power of the allegorical moment to unsettle the security of Spain's present: the film's opacity amplifies the Franco-era aesthetics of repression seen in *BEEHIVE* and *RAVENS*, ensuring that Spain's grisly past eerily permeates the film through the very absence of direct references. In a similar – but more malevolent – manner to *BACKBONE*'s Santi, the film's uncanny child Ángela personifies a perpetual traumatic encounter. Ángela cannot be classified as a ghost in the same way as Santi: she resists categorization according to boundaries of life/death, present/past, setting her

completely outside the bounds of adult frameworks of reason and temporal progression. Augmenting the subversive ambiguity of the Anas, the entire film revolves around the impalpable enigma of Ángela's presence as an embodiment of suppressed trauma.

The opening scene suggests that young Ángela was murdered under mysterious circumstances, depicting the excision of her remains from a well in an abandoned factory (an any-space-whatever, of which there are many in *THE NAMELESS*). The child's body has been severely burnt by sulphuric acid, to the point that the corpse can only be identified as 'Ángela' because one of its legs is shorter than the other. After this gruesome opening, the film then jumps forward five years, demonstrating that Ángela's grieving mother, Claudia, is effectively moving forward with her life after enduring a period of intense mourning. Claudia has separated from her husband, Ángela's father, and appears to have a successful career. However, in a sudden disruption to this proficient working through of trauma, Claudia starts to receive mysterious phone calls from a young girl claiming to be her daughter – in a small, desperate voice, the child utters 'Mummy, it's me.' In another call, the child impels her mother to come and rescue her from a derelict sanatorium on a beach where Ángela, her mother, and father used to play.

Up until this point, Claudia has been shown watching a home videotape of her and her former husband playing with little Ángela on this very beach, replaying the tape over and over again. As Claudia receives this second phone call from the child, the videotape remains paused, flickering and juddering ever so slightly, on a shot of Ángela's face smiling at the camera. Looming in the background, behind the cherubic face of the 'innocent' child, is the dark outline of the sanatorium in which, according to the phone call, Ángela is supposedly currently trapped. The repetitive replaying of a supposedly joyous moment from the past is thus suddenly injected with an uncanny charge with this phone call – accentuated by the image of the child's direct gaze at both Claudia and the viewer – as the past's previously ossified, nostalgic relationship with the present shifts on its axis in an uncomfortable manner. Intertwined with the child's eerie shift from *heimlich* to *unheimlich* in this moment is the sudden awareness that the past that she inhabits is not dead and gone.

As a result, while Ángela herself appears on-screen very little, the haunting power of her contradictory (non)presence looms over the film. As is suggested by the images of the child on the home videotape, Ángela's power over her mother and the narrative is, like Santi's, manifested by the uncanny penetration of her gaze. The film opens with a disorientating, rapid-fire

montage consisting of barely discernible shots of a child dressed in white staring directly at the camera, her arms outstretched. With her blonde hair, bright, dimpled smile, and fine features, Ángela is a clear echo of Marisol, poster child of the 1950s-1960s-era *cine con niño* – yet Ángela's inexplicable appearance in this unsettling opening montage, immediately followed by a shot of the child's decaying corpse, subverts the utopian connotations carried by the angelic Marisol. Such images of Ángela reoccur throughout the film – and subsequently depict the child with her white dress soaked in blood – suddenly puncturing the diegesis at unexpected, seemingly random moments (Fig. 9). Intermingled with these images are flashes of a 'not dead' sign written in blood and glimpses of a snuff movie. These shots are accompanied by pounding, jarring sounds that seem to meld a human scream with a camera shutter – implying that the omnipresent eye of the camera is intertwined with Ángela's own gaze – which aurally assault the viewer in parallel with the violent visual fragmentation of the images. Lázaro-Reboll aptly points out that these images 'suggest the interminable replay of Claudia's traumatic loss' (2012, 250). Furthermore, this inexplicable intrusion of disturbing images of the child, an abrupt disturbance to the film's visual and narrative logic, crystallizes the mutant child seer's violent disruption of a coherent encompassing situation.

The child's mysterious phone calls motivate a quasi-detective narrative, as Claudia enlists the help of a detective and, eventually, an expert on the occult in the desperate search for her daughter. Their investigation leads them to an orphanage and similar cases of missing children, revealing that Ángela's apparently unique case may actually be widespread, a sinister fact somehow suppressed from the public's knowledge. Their investigation starts to suggest that Ángela may not have been murdered after all, but abducted by a cult whose members aim to inflict as much pain and trauma upon the Spanish general public as possible. This cult, called 'The Nameless' – a telling resistance to labelling that characterizes the film's allegorical mechanisms¹ – is led by an imprisoned madman called Santini. In a conspicuous side-stepping of Spain's own past, Santini was a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp while a child, a traumatic experience that has damaged him beyond repair. He is in jail for a series of child kidnappings in Spain in the early 1980s, a decade that marked the final stages of Spain's transition period and is thus representative of the nation's very

1 THE NAMELESS is based on an eponymous book by British horror novelist Ramsey Campbell, but I suggest that Balagueró's transferral of the story to a Spanish context establishes these allegorical links.



Figure 9. Ángela as she appears in the disturbing montage, which slices the diegesis of *THE NAMELESS* (left), Marisol in *AN ANGEL HAS APPEARED* (top right), and *A RAY OF LIGHT* (Luis Lucia, 1960) (bottom right).

rapid advancement to modernity and democracy post Franco. Thus, the kidnapping of Spanish children, receptacles for the future, by a malevolent cult leader at this point in Spanish history threatens teleological narratives that emphasize the successful progress of this period and the resultant hypermodernity and national unity of the present.

Santini's cult promotes torture, suffering, and terror, as he tells Claudia from the confines of his cell, and is called *The Nameless* so that they can 'reject the idea of name. As long as they're the nameless ones they can reject human morality.' The impetus behind this sadistic cult recalls the allegorical role of Frankenstein's monster in *BEEHIVE*, who, lacking memory or any clear sense of identity, was similarly free to reject morality. Furthermore, Santini cryptically suggests that the cult abducts and converts young children because they do not yet have a secure and fully formed sense of self, and are thus easily inculcated into the cult's amoral doctrine. *The Nameless* is thus a ghastly product of an unassimilated past childhood trauma that aims to engulf and distort Spanish children on a mass scale, allegorically suggesting the wholesale perversion of Spanish childhood.

In the final minutes of the film, Claudia finally thinks she has found her lost child, now a teenager, at the cult's mysterious headquarters – the now abandoned hotel where Ángela was conceived. Both Claudia's sleuthing partners are swiftly killed by cult members, yet, just as it seems all is lost, she is unexpectedly confronted with her ex-husband. He reveals that he has always been a member of the cult, and that he had claimed their daughter for the cult at the moment of her birth: 'a pure child to be perverted from

the beginning'. Thus, the film constructs a toxic vision of contemporary Spain, in which the perpetual cycle of barely repressed trauma ensures that, from the moment of their birth, children are mutated into crucibles for pain and suffering as result of the dogma force-fed to them by malicious and oppressive fathers. There is no escape for the child in this allegorical collapsing together of Spain's Francoist past and the supposedly liberated present.

Despite this bleak twist, the film momentarily seems to have reached a cathartic conclusion with the long anticipated reunion of mother and child. Claudia's husband introduces her to the now teenaged Ángela, and instructs the child to kill her mother. While it seems initially that Ángela will comply, she suddenly breaks down in tears when her mother symbolically reinstates her identity by repeatedly calling her Ángela, and shoots her father instead. Yet, just as it seems that the film has reached a satisfying resolution with the embrace between mother and child, Ángela suddenly tells her mother to stop calling her Ángela. She states 'I have no name', and proclaims that her sole purpose in life is to perpetuate her mother's traumatic loss ('you'll suffer more this way'), before putting a gun to her own mouth. The film then cuts to black and ends with the sound of a gunshot.

It is first signalled to the viewer that there may be something horribly wrong with the seemingly exultant mother-daughter reunion when Ángela opens her eyes while embracing Claudia and focuses a cold stare directly to the camera, behind her mother's back (Fig. 10). While suggestive of her malevolent intent, Ángela's gaze is threatening in that it appears to abruptly break the boundary between the real of the viewer and the fictional diegesis of the film; as the other suddenly stares back, the viewer's imagined mastery over and distance from the world of the film collapses, a particularly uncanny, layered incarnation of Lowenstein's allegorical 'flash of unexpected recognition in the present' (2005, 14) which implicates the viewer in the film's traumas. Before putting the gun in her mouth, Ángela says to her distraught mother, 'I'll call you again sometime.' Thus, in the final seconds the neat resolution – and in fact the entire quest narrative laid out in the film – is overturned. It becomes impossible to discern if this girl truly was Claudia's daughter, and the film ends with the suggestion of a volatile future in which Claudia will be tormented endlessly by a chain of 'nameless' children posing as Ángela. At the end of the film, both Claudia and the viewer are trapped in a perceptual gap incarnated by the child's subversive ambiguity – a monstrous amplification of the enigmatic quality of the Anas. This threatening ambiguity can be elucidated using Deleuze's conception of 'indiscernibility', which he associates with the



Figure 10. 'Ángela' directs a cold stare at the viewer behind her mother's back in *THE NAMELESS*.

child seer's inability to establish a sensory-motor link between perception, understanding, and action: 'we no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental, in the situation, not because they are confused, but because [...] there is no longer even a place from which to ask' (1997a, 7). The child in *THE NAMELESS* forces the adult to inhabit an inescapable position of indiscernibility, as the final scene suggests that Claudia will be forever entombed by the any-space-whatever of traumatic loss.

Thus, *THE NAMELESS* positions the mutant child seer as a seething, infectious threat to contemporary Spanish society. That a single figurative child character is replaced in this film with an amorphous group of nameless beings (which could constitute any number of children), echoes *WHO CAN KILL A CHILD?* (Serrador, 1976) in its suggestion that children as a subjugated social group have become threateningly indecipherable and unpredictable in the post-traumatic collectivity of contemporary Spain. In a similar manner to Santi's cracked body in *BACKBONE*, Ángela posits a dangerous fragility that can all too easily be permeated by trauma and malicious ideologies, and, via a 'nameless' cult, this process is allegorically extended to the category of Spanish childhood wholesale. This anxiety is crystallized when Claudia explores the abandoned sanatorium by the beach (the site of supposedly happy memories with her young daughter), which is filled with decayed and deformed images of childhood, such as broken dolls in bizarre positions melding with dead animals hanging from the walls – an image that suggests a macabre children's mobile. *THE NAMELESS* thus implies that the conditions of innocence and purity that traditionally

define childhood have long since mutated in contemporary Spain, as the child's growth is perverted by the simmering undertow of unassimilated past traumas rather than progressing towards a utopian future.

THE ORPHANAGE

The child seers in *THE ORPHANAGE* are nowhere near as actively malevolent as Ángela; however, they similarly engage the protagonist and viewer in the sensation of being fused to the traumatic any-space-whatever between perception and action. They thus similarly challenge teleological models of both narrative and, via allegory, historical progression. The film self-consciously echoes *BACKBONE*: it was released six years after del Toro's film, and del Toro produced the film. Exposing the film's allegorical preoccupation with the power of concealed traumatic pasts, a medium enlisted to inspect the film's haunted house for ghosts explains to protagonist Laura: 'When something terrible happens, sometimes it leaves a trace, a wound that acts as a knot between two timelines.' *THE ORPHANAGE* is set in the present in a building that was once an orphanage, but is now the home of a former inhabitant, the now middle-aged Laura, and her family. By featuring a haunted former orphanage that is now a grand and imperious house, the film, like *BACKBONE*, engages with and rewrites Francoist mythologies of the orphan martyr, who embodies a split from the recent past and functions as an 'emblem of futurity's unquestioned value' (Edelman, 2004, 3). Laura herself was one of the orphans who once inhabited the property, and by returning to the home of her childhood is unable to break from her trauma-soaked past. The film thus depicts the relations between Laura's childhood and adulthood as circular and reciprocal, rather than constructing a teleological progression from child to adult.

The seer of the film is Simón, Laura's adopted son. The cycles of orphanhood and adoption that overarch the film suggest the troubling of a seamless process of intergenerational continuity. Furthermore, Simón is afflicted with HIV: he is the helpless victim of a disease passed down from the preceding generation, again evoking a fractured intergenerational continuation and a vulnerability to adult malaise that comes to be figured as a threat. Throughout the film, Simón's huge dark eyes are continually emphasized, echoing the Anas. Like Santi, Simón's death is brought about by a situation of sensory-motor helplessness through being entombed within an any-space-whatever: Laura unknowingly traps young Simón in a cavernous cellar hidden beneath the house early in the film, after placing some heavy bars against the cellar's door, which has been concealed by new layers of

wallpaper. Thus, the dark secrets of the orphanage's past have literally been papered over in the quest for a fresh start. The heavy bars obstruct Simón's way out and his parents do not hear his screams in the huge house, leaving him powerless to do anything but wait in the cellar to be found. The film follows Laura's quest to find her adopted son – she at first thinks he may have been abducted or run away. When Laura finally finds him trapped within her own house, he is already dead.

It is revealed that Simón has been engulfed by the concealed traumas of the past, sharing the fate of a 'friend' he has made within the haunted orphanage: little Tomás, the ghost of a child who, while alive, was an inhabitant of the orphanage at the same time as Laura. An illegitimate child afflicted with a facial deformity, Tomás was concealed and isolated in the cellar by his mother, a nurse at the orphanage. One day, the other children (with the exception of Laura, who had recently been adopted) discovered Tomás in the secret space, and teased him by leading him to a nearby cave by the ocean and running away. Tomás remained frightened and alone within the cave as the tide came in. Unable to comprehend the situation in time and thus physically powerless to escape it, echoing Santi, Tomás drowned. Tomás's grieving mother, traumatized and furious at the other orphaned children, placed poison in their food – they too were thus killed by a violent event that occurred too soon for them to recognize it taking place, and, like Tomás, became ghosts forever trapped in the any-space-whatever between perception, understanding, and action. Underscoring this agonizingly elongated temporal interval, in a dramatic moment in which the medium² encounters these ghosts, the children cannot be seen but are heard shouting 'We are sick! Please help us, why are we sick?'

Laura was not even aware of Tomás's existence during her time at the orphanage, and she does not realize that all of her childhood friends are dead until she uncovers their remains in a concealed incinerator within a boat shed on the orphanage's grounds. The dramatic scene in which she retrieves these previously hidden, unacknowledged remains – a moment both tragic and horrifying – allegorically reflects anxieties about Spain's long-unacknowledged Republican dead, whose memories and corpses were finally exhumed in early 2000s Spain. Notably, *THE ORPHANAGE* was

2 The medium is played by Geraldine Chaplin, who also played both the adult Ana and Ana's dying mother in *RAISE RAVENS*. That Chaplin performed both roles in *RAISE RAVENS* constitutes an often indiscernible folding together of the child's traumatic past and her future. Chaplin's role in *THE ORPHANAGE* thus establishes a conscious link to the earlier art film, and *THE ORPHANAGE* echoes the depiction in *RAISE RAVENS* of a woman eternally trapped by unassimilated childhood traumas.

released in 2007, the same year that the Historical Memory Law was passed. Laura's inability to fully recognize the hidden traumas lurking alongside her childhood past is what ultimately kills Simón. She initially insists that Tomás is imaginary, and, despite growing up in the building, she does not know that the room within which Simón is stuck exists. As a result, the tragedies of the past are repeated, and Simón too becomes caught in an inescapable gap between perception and action. The child is caught in this room for almost the entire duration of the film: particularly on second viewing when the spectator is aware of the lost child's whereabouts, time is felt in its full force while Simón remains trapped in this space of waiting, and the fruitless detective narrative driven by Laura simply accentuates the viewer's awareness of agonizing temporal protraction. Although Laura ostensibly 'solves' the mystery of Simón's disappearance at the film's climax, discovering Simón's body in the cellar, in a painfully felt undermining of narrative progression and resolution, she is unable to act upon the situation, for he is already dead.

Throughout the film, the past is mobilized by the (supposedly) passed temporal state of childhood, as the adult's childhood becomes entangled with this tragic repetition of unassimilated trauma. Immediately prior to her discovery of Simón's body and subsequent suicide, Laura experiences a particularly uncanny moment of collision between her past and her present, which is extended to the viewer via cinematic repetition. The film's opening scene shows Laura as a child playing a game with her friends at the orphanage: Laura incants 'one, two, knock on the wall' with her back to the other children, who quietly creep up behind her, freezing whenever she turns around. Even this opening scene, filmed in a bright wide shot outside on the orphanage grounds, seems eerie: the orphaned children, shrouded in shadow, stalk Laura from behind and stiffen like immobile dolls whenever she attempts to catch them in the act. This childish game comes to metonymize how Laura's childhood friends stimulate shifting relations between past and present through their mutation into ghosts. For much of the film, these dead children seem to be frozen in the past as tragic remnants of recent history, as is depicted through their dusty appearance in sepia-toned photographs and by their aged and cracked porcelain dolls, both of which Laura pores over nostalgically. However, through the children's ever-escalating hauntings, this seemingly immobile past is activated and lurks ever closer to the present.

This process is foregrounded in the sequence immediately prior to the scene in which Laura finds Simón's body, which echoes the film's opening shot. In an attempt to compel the ghostly children to materialize, Laura has

dressed up in a replica of her childhood orphanage uniform, and starts to play the game of her childhood. The game signals the impending collapse of Laura's past childhood into her present adulthood, a subjective breakdown of temporal boundaries that parallels the film's overarching knotting together of past and present, reflecting Lowenstein's commentary on how the allegorical moment creates meaning via the intersections 'between individual interiority and historical exteriority' (2005, 146). Laura nervously chants 'one, two, knock on the wall' – this time in a darkened room – as the ghostly children start to creep up behind her. In contrast to the opening wide shot, the camera now shares Laura's obstructed view of the children approaching her from behind through a tight close-up on her face. Thus, the viewer shares her dread as an unknown force sneaks ever closer outside of our field of vision, as the ghosts appear like fixed shadows whenever the camera, in conjunction with Laura's point of view, whips around to catch them in motion. One of the film's final scenes shows Laura's own ghost sitting on a windowsill with all the other ghostly children – including Simón – suggesting that Laura's childhood past and her adult present have now well and truly folded together following the initial frisson of this collision.

Similarly, the uncanny gaze of the child seer is marked by a lack of distinction between the lost child of the present, Simón, and Tomás, the ghost from the past. Tomás wore a sack mask while alive to conceal his facial deformity, which Simón subsequently finds. Both children are seen wearing the mask at various points in the film; by covering the child's real face, the mask confounds Laura's and the viewer's ability to differentiate the two children (Fig. 11). The mask thus erodes the boundaries between the two boys as singular identities. When Simón/Tomás appears masked, staring ominously at Laura (and the viewer), the point from which his real eyes stare back is disguised. Returning to McGowan's discussion of the inscrutability of the other's gaze, the child's look in this context has become a traumatizing threat in that 'the gaze of the object gazes back at the subject, but this gaze is not present in the field of the visible. [...] [the gaze] constantly eludes our grasp [...] because it gives body to a void' (2003, 33-35). In this case, the oscillation between Simón and Tomás created by the mask ensures that both children revolve around a void of indiscernibility. Furthermore, the blurring of boundaries between the ghost of a child who died decades ago and a child who disappeared only weeks ago constitutes a particularly uncanny allegorical moment; the eerie mask simultaneously provokes the commingling of both two separate identities and the past and the present, as the children collapse 'conventional delineations of bodily space and time' (Lowenstein, 2005, 2). Simón consciously enforces this



Figure 11. Simón/Tomás simultaneously disturb the boundaries between their singular selfhoods and the past and the present through the adornment of the dead child's mask in *THE ORPHANAGE*.

indiscernibility by not only dressing in the dead Tomás's clothing, but by deciding to dwell in what he calls Tomás's 'little house' – the cellar in which Tomás spent the majority of his short life, concealed and alone. Thus, the children in *THE ORPHANAGE* function as the loci for concealed traumas of the past, disallowing teleological narrative progression and preventing the adult protagonist from blindly papering over recent history.

Conclusion

The cultural rupture represented by the war – violent in both its disruption to cultural unity through solidifying the fissure between the 'two Spains', and in its vast loss of life – was typically uneasily patched over throughout the mid to late 20th century in the quest to maintain cohesive conceptions of national identity. This mechanism was perfected and institutionalized by the Franco regime. Even in early 21st-century Spain, a time in which memorials were finally being constructed to recognize and honour the Republican dead, the traumas of war and the oppression of Franco were often neutralized by being positioned at specific points on the continuum of history: as tragic moments of the past, immobilized and defused by the progression of time.

However, Santi's, Ángela's, and Simón's/Tomás's overdetermined relationship to temporality ensures that these uncanny children resist being locked in a frozen historical past that is irretrievably distanced from the present. Instead, these 'insects trapped in amber' suggest the organic de- and reconstructions of collective memory, raising allegorical moments that evoke the collision of past and present and in turn 'blast open the continuum of history'

(Benjamin cited in Lowenstein, 2005, 86). These child characters create an uncomfortable flash of recognition of the extent to which Spain's past lives within its present – a device literalized extra-diegetically by the fact that those who grew up as stunted 'children of Franco' are now adult filmmakers, political leaders, and constituents of Spanish society. The uncanny child in this context points to the danger inherent in misrecognizing national history as a present that has long since passed, instead of as a past that *is*. Through their position of powerlessness, these children become fused to the any-spaces-whatever in which they died or disappeared, incorporating fissures in spatiotemporal coherence into their beings and drawing their supernatural force from this fusion. Thus, through their deaths, Santi, Ángela, and Simón/Tomás come to inhabit the any-space-whatever permanently, maintaining an existence outside the rational bounds of linear time and physical space. It is these children's status as insects trapped in amber that ultimately lends them their uncanny power, as they escape the confining bounds of linear teleological progression and return to bring about its destruction.

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