

The Demon Pazuzu as Noise in *The Exorcist*

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Against a blackened screen blood-red lettering announces the beginning of William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973). But it is not only what we see that unnerves us, it is what we hear. From the very first discordant strings' sudden transition into the *adhān*, the Muslim call to prayer, the film creates an atmosphere of uncertainty through its innovative sound design. While sound and horror share a long-established history in the production of cinematic dread, sound in *The Exorcist* does more than simply prompt an emotive response or mood in audiences. Rather, by listening closely to the sonic elements of the often critically unappreciated Iraq prologue, I will demonstrate that the central evil of the narrative, the demon Pazuzu, is in fact best understood as 'noise'. By reflecting on media theory's concept of noise as one with affective, ontological and philosophical concerns this essay will argue for a renewed critical approach to the film, one which recognises the demon's aural association with wind, shrieking voices, garbled language and insect drone as intimately bound to its function as a disruptive and destabilising agency. Accordingly, the possessed body of the film's adolescent protagonist Regan MacNeil's (Linda Blair) is aurally and visually constructed as a medium, albeit one that is immersed in noise. I will argue that a sounds studies perspective is useful in identifying a more diffuse kind of horror in *The Exorcist* beyond its more obvious religious anxieties and visceral special effects, one that, like the presence of noise, disturbs our ability to make sense of the world as something essentially knowable and hence, meaningful. As such the climatic rite of exorcism resembles a communicative performance wherein the exorcist is called upon to expel noise and re-establish meaning through restorative acts of language.

Ever since Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver's pioneering work on information theory during the late 1940s, media theorists have come to consider 'noise' as an unavoidable part of the mediation process. Whilst the initial concern was a purely material one, aimed at reducing

interference incurred through the transmission of a signal between sender and receiver within telecommunications technology, this model soon suggested broader theoretical and even philosophical implications for all communication systems (Parikka 2013: 95). The difficulty has always been in determining what constitutes ‘noise’. It is usually seen as something undesirable, a form of distortion or interruption of an intended source of meaning or message. To Weaver noise included ‘distortions of sound (in telephony, for example) or static (in radio), or distortions in shape or shading of picture (television), or errors in transmission (telegraphy or facsimile)’ (1964: 8). Aside from this material aspect – that of a technical glitch, static on the line – the ubiquity of noise revealed by these technologies in fact demonstrates that we are ‘always already “in” noise’ and therefore our systems of meaning are necessarily conditional, temporary contingences that arise out of noise but nevertheless carry its trace (Goddard et al. 2012: 4; see also Hainge 2013: 12-13). For French theorist Michel Serres noise is like an unwelcome guest in an exchange between two interlocutors, what he calls ‘the third man’ or ‘parasite’ (1982b: 52). He even suggests that ‘[w]e might call this third man the *demon*, the prosopopeia of noise’ (1982a: 67; original emphasis). This parasitic aspect of noise extends perilously to language itself by which we structure and define value to sounds in order to parse meaning (Goddard, Halligan and Hegarty 2012: 2). The presence of noise is disturbing because it exposes the deficiencies of our understanding of the world by abruptly confronting us with realities hidden or unrecognisable to our senses. Little wonder then, that noise is frequently associated with feelings of disorientation. Serres draws special attention to the etymological link between ‘noise’ and ‘nausea’, likening the experience of noise to seasickness whereby our ‘being’ pitches and lurches in relation to a rolling, forever unstable ‘ground’ (1995: 13). Thus, noise as a sound studies and media theory concept can be usefully applied to *The Exorcist* because it can help us consider some of the more startling aspects of the film—the loud and unsettling special effects, the discordant musical score, Regan’s unearthly and profanity-laden voice, even its prolonged silences—as more than the calculated use of sound to distress or frighten its audience. Perhaps the lasting horror of a film like *The Exorcist* resides not in its affective shocks but in the suggestion that we may become cut off from ‘making sense’, that for all our ‘connectivity’ we may in fact, like Regan, just as easily become bodies invaded by noise as bodies that can lay claim to any meaningful narrative. Consequently, this essay

proposes that the demon Pazuzu in *The Exorcist* be considered as noise. With this in mind the relationship between sound and horror, between noise and nausea, shifts from being understood solely in terms of scare tactics to one that extends horror's philosophical and ontological concerns.

Pairing the demonic with failed or corrupted communicative acts, as a 'noisy' interlocutor, can actually be found quite consistently throughout the formative literature on the subject. In *Satan's Rhetoric: A Study of Renaissance Demonology* (2001), Armando Maggi looks at the linguistic and rhetorical elements of the various supposed demonic interactions recorded in a number of treatises and texts from the middle ages onwards. He discovers in these texts a common preoccupation with demonic forms of 'speaking' and language as a kind of affront to the privileged role of angels as 'messengers' of a divine presence. If angels have a direct line, as it were, with God, if they speak a divine will, then, Maggi asks, 'whose words do the fallen angels announce?' (2001: 5). The answer, it seems, is simple: 'Like...a plague spreading through a city, demonic language utters chaos and annihilation...If a good angel is the linguistic statement connecting a speaker with his interlocutor, a devil is the memorial of a perennial exclusion from meaning' (2001: 5). The demon in *The Exorcist* manifests precisely this information corruption or failure to make sense, evident in the insufficiency of the interpretive schemas of those around her. For Maggi, demons communicate in a 'non-idiom', a kind of garbled message with no higher purpose, only a perpetual disconnection (2001: 5). Eugene Thacker interprets Maggi's rhetorical analysis of Renaissance demonology as equivalent to the concerns of media theory. Thacker reads Maggi as demonstrating that, for early theologians, cases of possession imagined the demon as 'the communication of noise, the mediation of nothingness', what Thacker calls 'anti-mediation' (2011: n.pag). By careful consideration of the use of sound, music and dialogue in *The Exorcist*, beginning with the Iraq scenes, the demon Pazuzu emerges as a form of disembodied noise, situating Regan in the guise of a medium, left to mediate this disconnection.

Often referred to as the 'Iraq prologue', the opening scenes of *The Exorcist* seem suspended outside the main narrative. As opposed to the majority of the film's more familiar North American setting of Georgetown, Washington, the story actually commences in a vaguely identified 'Northern Iraq'. Here we encounter an aging archaeologist, only belatedly identified as Father Lankester

Merrin's (Max von Sydow), involved in some kind of excavation of ancient ruins and who subsequently fades from the plot only to return considerably later. Apart from the introduction of Merrin, this portion of the film affords viewers the only significant visual representation, apart a few recently added CGI effects, of the film's demonic antagonist: first in the unearthing of a small talisman and moments later in a scene featuring a sentinel-like, oversized winged statue. The habit of minimising the significance of these scenes began almost from the outset. In an early consideration of the techniques used to build suspense in *The Exorcist*, Stephen E. Bowles does draw attention to 'the unnaturally loud and grating background sounds' in the film's opening scenes, but implies that the 'irritating music' serves only to 'prepare us' for the more climatic elements that are to come (1976: 202). The link between the pervasiveness of sound here and in later exorcism scenes is certainly worth acknowledging, however its status is all too often downplayed as little more than a sonic motif. Perhaps a similar oversight is at work in Mark Kermode's assessment of the Iraqi sequence when he insists that it is 'material of only minimal narrative value' (1998: 27). The simplest explanation for why critics tend to ignore the rather lengthy prologue is because it detracts from the preferred reading of the film as a reflection of the social anxieties of the time, most especially those concerning the American family, which was perceived to be under attack from the women's liberation movement, the decline of religious belief, high levels of divorce and the generational conflict marked by the Vietnam War (Semmerling 2006: 31). There is certainly a strong basis for such interpretations which go a long way to addressing the impact of the film during that period. However, devaluing the importance of the Iraqi prologue risks losing a sense of the deeper anxiety buried in the text that, like the uncovered amulet of Pazuzu, insists on being heard.

More recently, a reappraisal of the Iraqi prologue has been aided by the release of the '25th Anniversary Edition' DVD (1998) and a cinematic re-release just two years later with *The Exorcist: The Version You've Never Seen* (2000) which promised unseen footage to go along with the newly remastered sound design (Evans 2009: 112; Martin n. d.). The enhanced audio refocuses attention on the clever intermixture of music and sound effects that earned the production an Academy Award for best sound (Beck 2010: 4). Responding to the updated sound, critics have revisited a number of

scenes in the film with a new appreciation of their sonic textures. This re-evaluation has particularly benefited the Iraq sequence. On this subject the work of Mark Evans has been notably instructive. Evans spends considerable effort convincing readers that the sounds of workers wielding their pickaxes at the dig site or the foundry hammering during Merrin's visit to the marketplace create an important sense of rhythm, what he calls 'the sound of the natural order—the rhythm of life' (2009: 113). In contrast, moments of silence or 'dysrhythm' mark those instances in the film's narrative when the demonic disrupts this order. While undoubtedly helpful, such efforts fall short, I would suggest, of following the implications of why disorder or 'evil' are constructed in this manner within a horror context, aside from the usual dichotomy. Perhaps seeing, or rather hearing, this 'disorder' or 'dysrhythm' as synonymous with noise allows for a broader appreciation of the complexities of sound design in the film. This more ambiguous aspect is demonstrated aurally during the archaeological dig coinciding with Merrin's discovery of the Pazuzu amulet, a sound which Evans describes as 'wind, chant and drone' (115).

Father Merrin's unearthing of the amulet is an important moment in the audio design because it subtly announces what Jay Beck refers to as one of the 'signature sounds' of the film (2010: 6). Merrin's handling of the artefact is matched sonically with what sounds like an insect drone or buzz. Musician Ron Nagle was brought on to oversee sound effects along with composer Jack Nitzsche after Friedkin rejected Lalo Schifrin's proposed original score on the grounds that he felt it too readily frightened audiences (Morrow 2; Beck 2010: 6). Instead, the carefully crafted soundtrack complicates the distinction between sound effect and music, leaving viewers/listeners less certain as to the source of what is being heard. For the droning of the amulet Nagle recorded the sound of bees trapped in a jar and like other effects in the film manipulated the mix in the studio, purposefully obscuring it (Beck 2010: 6). The insect drone is important because it departs from what until then in the film had been a clearly established diegetic soundscape in which each sound could be clearly accounted for. The scarcity of dialogue during the opening of *The Exorcist* encourages us to attend to the dramatic interplay between moments of silence and the deliberate use of sound effects in the film. In fact, this

privileged act of listening becomes an important element in the film's thematic and philosophical concerns.

Having passed on the discovery of an amulet to a colleague, Father Merrin revisits the archaeological site at Nineveh to seek out the life-sized equivalent, a statue of the ancient Babylonian demon Pazuzu positioned prominently over the ruins. Interestingly, the demon is named only in the screenplay and in subsequent sequels; within the diegetic world of the first film it remains unidentified. Like the familiar imagery from Hollywood Westerns in which two rivals size each other up from opposing edges of the frame, Merrin faces the statue of Pazuzu in a classic 'stand-off', clearly demonstrating to viewers the dualistic struggle of good versus evil that lies at the centre of the film's narrative (Kermode 1998: 25). However, this confrontation between Merrin and Pazuzu is, importantly, presented through a cacophony of sounds including a nearby dog fight intermixed with the electronic 'screeching' of the soundtrack (Bowles 1976: 202). Once again there is the sound of insects buzzing, only this time it is joined on the soundtrack by the turbulent strings of 'Night of the Electric Insects', from George Crumb's *Black Angels*. The irregularity and near dissonance of this piece implicitly invokes the fallen angels and demons of its title (Morrow: 6). The dissonance of this music forms part of Friedkin's strategic use of 20th century avant-garde composers including Anton Webern, Krzysztof Penderecki and Mike Oldfield's now iconic 'Tubular Bells' to unsettle audiences via their unusual musical language rather than relying on 'scary' music (Beck 2010: 6; Morrow 2). However, it is not the use of effects or music to punctuate the suggestion of the supernatural that interests me here—one might expect as much on a horror soundtrack—it is how sound in the film does not merely *accompany* the presence of Pazuzu but rather invites us to understand the demon *as* noise, as an attribute of distortion or obstruction. In this regard it is helpful to recall that historically Pazuzu was a minor demon within ancient Babylonian and Assyrian religious belief, who was referred to as 'king of the evil spirits of the air' (Kappelhoff 2015: 177). Pazuzu's characterisation as a violent wind from the mountains helps explain both the locale and the howling background sound of this stand-off scene. More interestingly though, this depiction of Pazuzu as wind, as air, permits us to imagine the demon as that which both carries noise and is the source of noise, that is both medium

and what is mediated. William Whittington notes that in this scene '[t]he sound design begins as a realistic accompaniment to a shot of nearby dogs at each other's throats. But then the sound becomes amplified and processed, exceeding its grounding in the tangible world' (2009). Whereas Whittington sees this 'ungrounding' of sound as a preface to the reappearance of demonic violence in later scenes, I regard this split between, and finally convergence of, identifiable sound and ungrounded noise as essential to understanding the demonic in *The Exorcist* as a disturbance to ontological certainty. That is, the lack of clear boundaries between these sounds and noise, like the later ambiguity over the medical or spiritual realities of Regan's behaviour, suggest that the relationships and meanings between things that could be said to exist or not exist are unfixed and therefore a cause for anxiety within the film. As Serres asserts, noise is not limited to discrete phenomena but is 'a matter of being itself' (1995: 13). The nearly overwhelming noise in this scene is configured as 'evil' because it troubles a clear distinction between a being and thing, the singularity or multiplicity of the subject, an uncertainty that will play out across Regan's besieged body in later exorcism scenes.

Importantly, when the film's location shifts to Georgetown in North America the narrative action begins with noise. The audience is introduced to actress and single-mother Chris MacNeil (Ellen Burstyn) going over lines in her bedroom late at night. She is roused by an unfamiliar sound and steps into the hallway separating her bedroom from that of her 12-year-old daughter, Regan's. The camera angle shifts to a low angle shot of a hatch leading up to the attic. After checking on her daughter the scene cuts to the next morning as Chris informs Karl (Rudolf Schündler), one of her staff, of the presence of rats in the attic. Of course, no rats are ever discovered. Composed of 'guinea pigs running on a board covered with sandpaper, the scratching of fingernails, and the sound of a bandsaw as it flew through the air', this noise is allowed by Friedkin to remain unplaceable and unidentifiable by either the characters in the film or members of the audience (cited in Beck 2010: 7).

Built up gradually, the disturbance in the MacNeil house becomes linked to Regan, who begins to exhibit signs of unusual behaviour, something which is first revealed during a scene at a doctor's office. After what appears an extensive but routine examination the doctor describes Regan's behaviour to her mother as a 'disorder of the nerves'. As Regan's 'disorder' becomes more

pronounced and dramatic she is forced to endure a succession of invasive and painful tests. In fact, the film devotes a considerable proportion of its running time to convincing us just how thorough the appeal to a rational explanation has been. What began as a solitary family doctor incrementally expands to include a whole boardroom of medical professionals. Aside from preparing us for a supernatural cause for Regan's afflictions, the procession of medical exams is portrayed as a series of loud and Inquisitorial acts owing to their specialized, but excruciating treatment of the human body (Kermode 1998: 43). Nevertheless, as Craig Martin points out, the suggestion of demonic possession—and it is the doctors themselves who first put forward the idea of an exorcism—effectively 'silences the rational, technical, mechanical, medical, jargonistic, automated sounds of the modern age' (2011: 2). It is worth noting that although these diagnostic scenes are presented as clamorous and chaotic affairs their 'noisiness' is positioned as subordinate because it can be dismissed rather pejoratively within the film's religious narrative as the clumsiness of the human sciences to wrestle with matters either divine or demonic. These scenes are significant, however, because they play into a dominant line of narrative discovery, propelling the story forward as one in which Regan's body is conspicuously prescribed as a site of disorder and the legitimacy of her relation to the world actively questioned.

The case for possession, the belief that Regan's body is inhabited by a self, or selves, other than her own, by a diabolical invader, is dramatically realized in the film by the sudden transformation of her voice. Mercedes McCambridge provided the vocal performance for the demonic presence on screen and this voice, treated in the studio sound mix, marks one of the more frightening features of the film. Encouraged to chain-smoke and consume raw eggs, McCambridge's delivery was greatly admired by Friedkin who recalled that the 'most curious things would happen in her throat. Double and triple sounds would emerge at once, wheezing sounds...these strange counterpoint noises; little skittering whistles and strange creaking rattles' (cited in Evans 2009: 120). More than simply demonstrating the proof of her possession for her onlookers, including the audience, the demonic voice strikes us as 'unnatural' because it shakes our assumptions of the relationship between the sound, body, and ultimately, identity of Regan, constructed previously in the

film as an innocent, all-American girl-child. Instead her body is marked, quite abjectly, as mediumistic, given over to an uncertain number of voices and existences.

If Regan mediates, however, it is a perverted, dissentient mediation, an ‘anti-mediation’. When the rationalism of Western medicine fails to ‘account’ for Regan the film’s narrative invests in a religious recourse. Himself a kind of intermediary between science (psychiatry) and faith (the priesthood), Father Damien Karras (Jason Miller) is called in by Chris in a desperate attempt to reclaim her daughter. From the outset the encounter between Father Karras and Regan is one in which the possessed body is figured as a message delivery system. Firstly Regan/Pazuzu appears to mimic or playback an earlier entreaty from a homeless man to the priest for help. Having captured his attention, the demon again addresses the priest: ‘Your mother’s in here with us Karras. Would you like to leave a message?’ Again, this coupling of the demonic with medial disruption was familiar in medieval demonology. According to Maggi, one of the theological texts featured in his study, Sylvestro Mazzolini da Prierio’s *De Strigimagarum Daemonumque Mirandis* (1521), insists that while ‘good angels *are spoken* by the Divinity to the world, the devil mines the “phonemes” of the world itself’, that is, the demonic are left to mimic or re-direct the ‘linguistic artifacts’ of human speech (2001: 23; original emphasis, 30). In this way, Pazuzu aligns with Michel Serres’ notion of the parasite in that its communicative acts manifest ‘an interruption, a corruption, a rupture of information’, a purely negative modality (1982b: 3). Pazuzu is a noisy interlocutor with no message of its own because its ‘presence’ is expressed as a multiplicity rather than any singular entity or will. Regan/Pazuzu’s vocalisations are continually presented in such a way as to emphasize this assemblage of identities or ontologies. Aside from the mimicry of voices both living and dead, the demon manifests itself through a succession of languages (Latin, French), pre-language (yelps, growls, hissing) and obscenities intermixed with studio effects like the sound of ‘slaughtered pigs’ (Evans 2009: 119).

The overlaying of animal noises onto interior scenes has been interpreted by some critics as a simple illustration of the unnaturalness of the demonic presence, or perhaps a reminder of human beings’ association with animal baseness (Evans 118-119; Morrow 8). However, such readings

unduly minimise their function. Quite apart from a convenient aural cue to audiences the ubiquity of animal noises throughout the soundtrack of the film undermines the very categories of the human and the non-human whilst also gesturing toward the most canonical of possession stories in which the demonic is depicted as a kind of multitude or swarm. The Gospel of Luke holds the most famous biblical account of Jesus casting out a devil. In it we are told that he chose a rather novel way to expel the demons from a man:

A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs (Luke 8: 26-37).

In *The Exorcist* the association of the demonic with swarming is suggested aurally in the Iraq prologue with Merrin's handling of the amulet and its accompanying insect buzz. The inference is made even stronger at the statue of Pazuzu with the frantic 'Night of the Electric Insects' intermingled with the amplified wind and fighting of dogs. This auditory resemblance to swarming should not be taken as incidental. The inferior sequel, *The Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977), picks up on this theme and stages Pazuzu as a swarm of locusts descending upon an African village. Eugene Thacker comments on the connection between swarms and demons by drawing attention to the etymology of the word 'swarm' itself, which he informs us 'is derived from the Sanskrit *svārti* meaning "to sound," or better, "to resound"' (2007). Thacker's argument is that swarms are heard first more often than seen, that swarms are experienced as an affect, often a disorientating one, before they are 'seen'—identified, named, given meaning. Likewise, Pazuzu functions in the text of the film as affective agent with ontological importance that pollutes confidence in a 'soul' in communion (communication) with a divine will or, in Cartesian terms, an individual consciousness uniquely placed to distinguish both self and world.

Throughout *The Exorcist* the identity of the presence within Regan remains a vexed question. As has been noted the name Pazuzu does not appear in the film, but as Maggi points out 'what matters in an exorcism is the identity (the name) of the devil in the body' (2001: 12). To name the demon is to have power over it, to make it yield to a human epistemology. Within the film, however, the

impulse to name what is happening to Regan is an elusive project. Given that the medical jargon of the doctors consulted fails to accommodate for Regan's behaviour it falls to the priests to assign meaning. This priestly intervention is frequently interpreted as a surrogate for the absent figure of the father. The anxiety induced at the time by high divorce rates, women's liberation and the perceived breakdown of the traditional family is expressed in the story as an absence of patriarchal authority (for discussion see Arnzen 2011). Recalling the Iraqi prologue, however, the larger insinuation seems to be that this 'evil' has persisted despite the passing of time or the crumbling of particular social orders. What interests me here, in fact, is the demon's propensity to refuse such easy categorisations as evidenced by the lack of agreement within the narrative amongst the priests themselves and, even more strikingly, an inconsistency on behalf of the demon/s to name what inhabits Regan. As a response to Karras' introduction, for example, comes the reply: 'And I'm the Devil!' Yet the conversation quickly lapses into plural pronouns as in the case of Pazuzu's taunting of Karras that his 'mother's in here with us'. Similarly, when Karras enquires where Regan is the answer again is: 'In here. With us.' To Karras' psychiatric mindset this multiplicity implies a case of potential split personality. Upon his first contact with Father Merrin, however, Karras is decisively rebuffed:

KARRAS: I think it would be helpful if I gave you some background on the different personalities Regan has manifested. So far, there seems to be three. She's convinced-
MERRIN: There's only one.

Despite what is presumably Merrin's final word on the issue, Pazuzu's status throughout can perhaps be best described not as a *being* but as *medial*, an open channel in which languages, voices and vocalisations, sender, receiver and transmission overlap in a fluid exchange.

Given that we have seen how technology acquaints us with the presence of noise we cannot fail to note that in *The Exorcist* Father Karras' attempts to secure proof of the demonic, to establish that it 'exists', is itself presented as an act of mediation. In his dual role as psychiatrist and priest, Karras turns to media technology in order to interpret and account for Regan/Pazuzu. Karras is shown in a number of scenes either in listening booths, using audio recording equipment to interview Regan or straining over the playback of tapes in a clear demonstration of the privileged act of listening that

the film insists on. Evans likewise comments on the special attention given to these recordings, emphasising Karras' need to 'decipher... to get to the heart of the vocality' (2009: 120). Struggling to make sense, to decode, the apparent non-language and gibberish of some of these recordings, Karras is advised at one point by a lab technician to play the tapes backwards. The '...nowonmai...nowonmai...' spoken by Pazuzu becomes when reversed 'I am no one', what Matt Foley succinctly sums up as a 'paradoxical articulation of nothingness' (2015: 230). Again, we are presented with the ontological uncertainty of Pazuzu, whether a one, a three, a multitude or a no-one. The answer, of course, is that Pazuzu is all and none of these things but is rather, what Serres calls, the 'excluded middle', the perpetual state of 'in-betweenness' attributable to noise (1982b: 110).

Perhaps not surprisingly then, given Pazuzu's status as noise, the communicative act most frequently disrupted in *The Exorcist* is language. Mention has already been made of the growls, screams, wheezing and, what Foley calls, the 'pre-symbolic' utterances emanating from Regan's mouth (2015: 231). But it can also be said that the violence inflicted upon Regan's body — the self-mutilation, welts, convulsions, urination, neck rotations and, most unforgettably, the vomit — are in effect the articulation of an '*unspeakable* body', a body, a voice, a language that speaks against itself, in reverse, and that relates in a self-contradictory way as a kind of negation; a nauseous, and nauseating, other to our understanding of being (Thacker 2011; my emphasis). Regan's observers are regularly left mute, unable to communicate. Tim Jon Semmerling tells us that the characters in the film 'lose control over language and succumb to the point that they are rendered speechless' (2006: 40). Noise, then, is to be found where message, sense and language teeter on the edge of collapse, threatening, as Simon Reynolds observes, 'the obliteration of meaning' as well as 'the very constitution of our selves' (2006: 56). With so much at stake it is left to the ritual of exorcism to recommit to an expectation of meaning and it achieves this through the restoration of language.

The climatic exorcism sequence in *The Exorcist* is presented as a performance of language that relies heavily on endurance, repetitiveness and rhythm. Evans remarks that the call-and-response structure of the exorcism ritual, culminating in the singular phrase 'the power of Christ compels you!' is important because the 'rhythmic insistence' counteracts the 'dysrhythm' that the demon signifies

(2009: 121). But this insistence on dualism diminishes Pazuzu's crucial importance as noise, as something that permeates throughout all expressive and communicative acts. Maggi, on the other hand, recognizes a deeper aspect to the exorcism ritual. He tells us:

We must understand that the practice of exorcism is based on the assumption that the world has only one story to tell (Christ's death and victory over the forces of evil). An exorcist 'reassembles' the pieces of a chaotic account...according to a fixed narrative scheme (2001: 20).

The 'narrative scheme' of the film, of course, faithfully treads a familiar religious arc from a fallen state to sacrificial salvation and renewed innocence. But as Greg Hainge rightly observes, noise 'matters', especially in the context of horror narratives, because it 'arises out of a troubling of taxonomies...that which does not fit within the bounds of an ordered and safe existence' (2013: 87). It is on account of her violation of a set of seemingly fixed codes that Regan becomes identified with horror, the demonic and as a source of noise. The ritual of exorcism, then, is a concerted act of exclusion, one in which two parties, Regan and Merrin, must work together to expel the 'parasite' or interference from a shared project of sense-making and signification. It is only when the traffic of semiotic and linguistic potentialities is reduced to a singular text, the rhythmic insistence of the rite of exorcism, that it can be said that the demon of noise has been allayed. Echoing the Muslim call to prayer that began the film the recitations of the priests make apparent that it is through the specific authority of language, or an agreed upon narrative, that order is restored – at least temporarily.

By listening closely and re-examining *The Exorcist* the demon Pazuzu emerges as synonymous with the concept of noise. Through its innovative sound design the demonic is staged as an intermixture of wind, snarling animals, corrupted human language and insect drone. These sounds do more than simply unnerve the audience, as noise they permeate the film like a parasite, invading the body of its adolescent protagonist and contaminating the categorisations of self and being. Noise in *The Exorcist* remains necessarily irreducible. It eludes all but a limited accounting because noise, like horror itself, reveals only the contingencies of our ordering of the world around us. Like an act of exorcism, we seek to exclude noise, the demon, through a persistent reiteration of our social and cultural beliefs. Perhaps the film's indulgence in the fantasy of recuperated familial and religious

meanings remains compelling – as evidenced by the proliferation of sequels and prequels that helped birth the exorcism subgenre in film and television – because it allows us to rehearse the fiction of a transcendent struggle for meaning, perhaps because the greater horror would be to discover that there is only noise.

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