HAUNTED DETECTIVES:
THE MYSTERIES OF AMERICAN TRAUMA

DISSERTATION

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By

Brian R. Hauser, B.A., M.A.

The Ohio State University
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Dissertation Committee:

Professor Jared Gardner, Adviser
Professor James Phelan
Professor Linda Mizejewski

Approved by

______________________________  Adviser
English Graduate Program
ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I investigate American motion picture narratives from the 1990s in which detectives encounter the supernatural. These narratives did not originate during this decade, but there were a remarkable number of them compared to previous periods. I argue that the supernatural is often analogous to personal, national, or cultural trauma. I further suggest that a detective investigating the supernatural stands in for the psychoanalyst, who studies and treats this trauma. I then trace the origins of the supernatural detective in history, as well as in British and American popular fiction. To begin, I discuss Tim Burton’s 
Sleepy Hollow (1999) as an example of a supernatural detective, who is himself traumatized but who also manages to solve the supernatural mystery in the eponymous village. That solution points to the obscured narrative of women’s rights in the early-American republic. Next, I suggest that spaces can be traumatized like people. I introduce the concept of the chronotope of the traumatized space, which I then apply to Shirley Jackson’s 
The Haunting of Hill House (1959) and its various film and television adaptations to argue that these influential haunted house tales have helped repress scientific research into the paranormal as a reputable field of inquiry and the paranormal researcher as an admirable calling. Next, the entire country of the United States is portrayed as a traumatized space in The X-Files, which presents its
primary supernatural detective, Agent Fox Mulder, as an analyst of the state, exposing the national guilt concerning the treatment of Native Americans. Finally, I investigate several turn-of-the-millennium fake documentaries. I argue that in *The Last Broadcast* (1998), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), and the novel *House of Leaves* (2000), rational investigators are more likely to meet impossible moments than they are to meet supernatural entities. These impossible moments reflect a growing desensitization to the slippage between televisual media and the world it represents. I conclude that the surprising prevalence of these narratives during the 1990s is due to a resonance between the mechanics of trauma and memory and the patterns of millennial thinking in the United States in the 1990s.
Dedicated to Christina
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VITA

June 1, 1972………………………………Born - Charlotte, Michigan

1994……………………………………….B.A. English, The Ohio State University

2001……………………………………….M.A. English, The Ohio State University

1999-present…………………………...Graduate Teaching and Administrative
Associate, The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS

Research Publication

1. Hauser, Brian. “‘Vanishing Americans’: James Fenimore Cooper’s Detectives
and the Trauma of Alien Invasion in The X-Files.” Ed. Sharon Yang. The X-Files and
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The supernatural detective and the allegorical moment

What are we to make of detectives who embrace the supernatural?

From Edgar Allan Poe to S. S. Van Dine, those authors who have attempted, in one form or another, to codify the rules of detective fiction have agreed that the supernatural should figure into neither the investigator's techniques nor the mystery's ultimate resolution. Therefore, plot elements such as, “slate-writing, ouija-boards, mind-reading, spiritualistic séances, crystal-gazing, and the like, are taboo. A reader has a chance when matching his wits with a rationalist detective, but if he must compete with the world of spirits and go chasing about in the fourth dimension of metaphysics, he is defeated ab initio” (190). Van Dine’s focus is primarily on the deductive skills and powers of the investigator, but the same prohibition obtains for the focus of the investigation itself. Sherlock Holmes famously points out to Watson that if, "we are dealing with forces outside the ordinary laws of Nature, there is an end of our investigation" (Baskervilles 428). These statements, whether from critics or fictional detectives, are largely concerned with shoring up the walls of the detective genre from other, competing formulae. Of course, these prohibitions against the supernatural did not
appear out of thin air. Holmes’s observation and Van Dine’s rule were set down in reaction to a specific trend within or opposed to detective fiction around the turn of the twentieth century, a trend which reveled in paranormal mysteries and even in detectives who themselves possessed psychic abilities or used the accoutrements of popular spiritualism to solve conundrums. Chris Willis perceives the link to be historical, noting that, “the rise of the fictional detective coincided with the rise of spiritualism. Both began in the mid-nineteenth century and were widely popular in Britain from the turn of the century until the 1930s. Both attempt to explain mysteries. The medium’s role can be seen as being similar to that of a detective in a murder case. Both are trying to make the dead speak in order to reveal a truth” (60). These “supernatural detectives” formed a small but insistent alternative to the rational thinking machines deducing their way through the analytical mysteries of the fin de siècle. Though these supernatural detectives and their mysteries never rose to the same heights of popularity as the classic detective story, they have been extremely popular at various periods throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries.

The mere existence of these genre hybrids, but even more so their periodic popularity, begs the question, why would a genre based in the rational embrace the irrational? Mysteries have long been recognized as a narrative form remarkably adept at ordering the chaos of the world, if only as entertainment. Classic detective stories, for example, were the favorite stories of people enduring the Blitz in the London underground system. Once life in the subway tunnels began to stabilize somewhat, the British established, “’raid’ libraries … in response to popular demand to lend detective stories and nothing else” (Haycraft vii, emphasis added). The tales of ratiocination were
a kind of escapist literature of stability in the midst of the mechanistic madness of the nightly bombings and other trappings of total warfare. We might extend the reasoning of the British during the extremity of the Blitz to mystery readers for most of the twentieth century; that is, in a world so complex, fragmented, and fast-moving that it seems completely random, the detective story offers a narrative genre whose sole purpose is to make sense, repeatedly and finally, of the seemingly unfathomable in the world around us. What, then, are we to make of the popularity of detective stories that incorporate the supernatural as a diegetic reality? When we give up on the prohibition against the marvelous in detective or mystery fiction, do we give up on rationality entirely within the story, or are we merely watching the conscious mind exploring the unconscious? Do supernatural detectives abdicate the rational or simply modify it? Can the irrational ever offer a solution? Can rationality and irrationality ever be reconciled? When rational investigative methods lead inarguably to an irrational solution, what are we to think? How are we to react? What does it mean?

These stories prompts these questions, and their recent popularity makes the questions more urgent. At the end of the twentieth century, American film and television witnessed a remarkable proliferation of the supernatural detective narrative. Beginning with Twin Peaks in 1989 and moving through The X-Files, and Buffy the Vampire Slayer throughout the 1990s, television in particular brought forth a number of detectives who regularly encountered the supernatural in the form of ghosts, demons, vampires, and (in The X-Files) virtually the entire pantheon of motion picture monsters. These detectives also found themselves on theater screens around the country in mainstream films like Sleepy Hollow (1999), The Haunting (1999), and The Sixth Sense (1999). Perhaps most
explosive was the phenomenal success of the independent feature film *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), where the detectives are cast as documentary filmmakers investigating the legend of a colonial Maryland witch. Why this surge of supernatural detectives in the 1990s and into the early 2000s? In what specific ways do these shows resonate with the culture(s) that produced them that might also explain their widespread popularity?

It would be easy to claim that these films and television shows achieved such popularity simply because they mix two already popular genres: the detective story and the ghost story. Detective stories — and associated genres like police procedurals, courtroom dramas, and hardboiled detective stories — have been staples of television since the 1950s, though they have been less prevalent in film. The ghost story or supernatural tale has been popular on the big screen, but in general it has been less so on television. However, the hybrid of these two genres has met with success on both the big and the small screen. The success of the supernatural detective tale seems even less likely when we consider that the logic of each genre seems incompatible with the other.

In the detective or mystery story, there is a central question or mystery, which will eventually be solved through the application of rational investigative techniques. The solution, as a rule, must be logical. The revelation of the logical solution satisfies the audience by providing eliminating the destabilizing effects of the original crime or mystery. However, in a ghost story or a supernatural tale, the audience is satisfied by the experience of the pleasurable *frisson* of fear associated with the existence of supernatural beings, e.g., all those spiritual questions implied by the existence of ghosts, as well as the mortal peril in which characters often find themselves when confronted with supernatural creatures. In one genre, the audience is satisfied by the re-establishment of order out of
temporary chaos, while in the other, the audience revels in that temporary chaos. Perhaps these detectives serve a different function than either providing epistemological revelations or experiencing physical peril.

If these monsters are often viewed as projections of our deepest fears, then we may also approach these detectives as if they are investigating our deepest fears, just as though they were intrepid psychoanalysts setting out, with flashlight in hand, into the abandoned graveyards of our psyches. They may be confronting the irrational and monstrous, but they do so with the tools and techniques of one of the most rational character types in fiction, and there is nothing new in applying the psychoanalytic framework to the study of either the gothic tale or the detective story. Most often, however, these tales seem to lend themselves to Freud’s concept of the uncanny or the unheimlich. In his famous 1919 essay “The Uncanny,” Freud claims that, “an uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed” (249). Ghosts and the walking dead (e.g., vampires, mummies, zombies, etc.) are among the many things that Freud claims are apt to evoke the sensation of the uncanny. In the case of the dead returning from the grave, the repressed belief is actually a belief once held by the culture or species as a whole, that the dead in some way are able to return from the grave and menace the living. Freud writes specifically of the sense of the uncanny evoked by haunted houses:

Many people experience the feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts. As we have seen some languages in use to-day can only render the German expression ‘an unheimlich house’ by ‘a haunted house’. We might indeed have begun our investigation with this example, perhaps the
most striking of all, of something uncanny, but we refrained from doing so because the uncanny in it is too much intermixed with what is purely gruesome and is in part overlaid by it. (241)

Freud’s warning that the haunted house is a complicated site for the uncanny is important. First, he is right to point out that some of the anxiety and fright associated with the haunted house is likely to come from “what is purely gruesome” rather than from the repression of primitive beliefs. Second, he is quick to admit elsewhere in the essay that his formula for the uncanny is by no means complete, especially where its manifestations in literature are concerned (220). In fact, in stories where the author clearly intends the audience to understand that the diegetic world includes the supernatural (Dracula, for instance), the vampires in the novel would not be said to be uncanny (250). It is only when the author “pretends to move in the world of common reality” (250) that fiction can evoke the uncanny. Conditions for the uncanny might be ripe in detective fiction, with its emphasis on realism, but most supernatural fiction would preclude the possibility at least with regard to the supernatural entities themselves.

In those instances in supernatural detective stories where the uncanny is not the best mechanism by which to explain the experience of fright or psychical disturbance, the psychoanalytic mechanisms of trauma and hysteria provide a similarly illuminating and robust model for exploring the meanings, themes, and cultural resonances of these films and television programs. Instead of the repression at the heart of the uncanny, hysteria and trauma are functions of memory as affected by severe excesses of anxiety. In the case of hysteria, a severe emotional shock makes the normal processing of memory impossible, and the excess energy associated with the shock is transformed into seemingly unrelated, repetitive somatic behavior. Trauma can manifest in much the same
way, or it can present as the involuntary repetition of the memory of the traumatic event as though it were continually happening in the present (so-called flashbacks are examples of this sort of symptom). Hysteria is one of the earliest psychoanalytic concepts in Freud’s published works — first appearing in Studies in Hysteria, co-authored with Joseph Breuer in 1897 — but trauma is a concept that he refined and continually returned to over the course of his career. As a result, Freud’s concepts of trauma and hysteria and the mechanics of emotional abreaction are hardly uniform over the course of his career. This inconsistency, magnified by the various clinical approaches to post-traumatic stress disorder, is still found in critical trauma studies in, for example, the tensions between critics like Cathy Caruth and Ruth Leys. I will not presume to take up the mantle of any one of these critics. Instead, I feel that the effectiveness of each school or strain of trauma studies as a hermeneutic can only be addressed on a case-by-case basis. The supernatural detective, like all detectives, seeks to uncover an obscured narrative. Depending on the situation, this obscured narrative was either repressed (in the case of the uncanny) or abreacted (in the case of hysteria or trauma).

I argue that when detectives investigate the supernatural, they are uncovering an obscured history that reveals an “allegorical moment,” which further reveals the underlying anxieties of the narrative. The allegorical moment is a concept used by Adam Lowenstein in Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film. Lowenstein describes 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” (2). It is also a moment with 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” (2-3). For the purposes of this project, we will not always limit trauma to bodily trauma, as Lowenstein does. Instead, we will extend the understanding of allegory to include spatio-temporal trauma, the scarring of space in time. The allegorical moment allows us to move beyond relatively simple constructions of historical representation to engage with more circuitous representations of the sort analogous to the displacements commonly associated with hysteria and trauma narratives. By way of example, let us sketch how Lowenstein’s allegorical moment manifests in a specific supernatural detective film, Alan Parker’s 1987 film *Angel Heart*.

*Angel Heart* is an adaptation of William Hjortsberg’s 1978 novel *Falling Angel*. In the film, set in New York in 1955, Louis Cyphre (Robert De Niro) hires the private detective Harry Angel (Mickey Rourke) to find Johnny Favorite, a pre-war crooner who owes a debt to Cyphre. Favorite has disappeared, and Cyphre wants Angel’s assistance in collecting the debt. Angel’s investigation leads him from New York to New Orleans and into the worlds of voodoo and witchcraft. He meets Johnny’s daughter, Epiphany Proudfoot (Lisa Bonet), whom he eventually seduces. The investigation is complicated by a series of grisly murders; everyone Angel interviews about Favorite winds up dead. Along the way, Angel pieces together a fantastic story about how Johnny Favorite sold his soul to the devil for fame and fortune and then tried to escape his damnation by transferring his soul to another body. Two things complicate Johnny’s plan. First, he is drafted into World War Two, and second, he comes home from the war grievously wounded and for some time unable to complete the black magic ritual that would switch his soul with someone else’s. Harry Angel learns too late that he is Johnny Favorite (and,
not incidentally, also Epiphany Proudfoot’s father), and that Harry Angel was the unlucky young serviceman, who Favorite and his accomplices chose to complete the ceremony. The detective finds his mark in himself and at the same time recognizes his soul is lost.

In a standard mystery story, even in a labyrinthine film noir like the ones *Angel Heart* patterns itself after stylistically, Harry Angel would never come to the conclusion that he does in the film. Though voodoo and black magic may figure in mysteries for atmosphere, they never actually *work*. However, in *Angel Heart*, voodoo and black magic have real power, and Lucifer walks the streets, making Faustian bargains and collecting his outstanding debts. But Harry’s eventual revelation is not a repudiation of rationality, because it is Harry’s very logical and linear investigation that brings him to the realization that the only answer is the supernatural one. Harry Angel is, quite literally, a supernatural detective.

The trauma that Harry Angel the supernatural detective uncovers is a trauma of displacement, and the revelation points to anxieties about unrestricted Cuban immigration in the 1980s. The displacement manifests in a number of the “collisions” among film, spectator, and history that characterize the allegorical moment. In terms of the film as an adaptation, the narrative has been displaced from the page to the screen. The cinematic adaptation has also displaced the action of the mystery from New York to New Orleans. In the novel, the voodoo rights take place at night in secluded locales within Central Park, but the film uses New Orleans as the much more traditional American conduit to the ritualistic influences from the Caribbean islands. More significantly to the mystery at the center of the film, Johnny Favorite was displaced from the U.S. to the North African
theatre of World War Two, and then after the war his soul was displaced into the body of Harry Angel (and Angel’s soul was consequently displaced into Favorite’s body). The film is also displaced in time. The novel is set in 1959, and it was published in 1978, while the film is set in 1955, though it was released in 1987. All this displacement helps to reinforce the unsettling effects of both the mystery and the more horror-oriented supernatural elements to the film. However, the repeated displacements also point toward the historical resonance of the film with public fears about large-scale Cuban immigration in the late 1980s.

When Angel Heart was released, the publicity surrounding it was largely focused on the explicit and somewhat morbid sex scenes between Mickey Rourke and Lisa Bonet, who had until recently been a cast member on the family-friendly Cosby Show. The fact that the relationship portrayed was interracial was likely far less inflammatory to critics and audiences than the graphic depiction of violent sexuality followed by the post-facto revelation of (spiritual?) incest. If viewers were made uncomfortable by the images and situations in Angel Heart, it was easy to point to the sex and gore as the source. However, the central twist at the core of Angel Heart is more revealing than these surface issues. If there is a solution to the mystery in the film, it is that the detective is the villain, that he is unable to recognize himself as such until the final moments of the film, and that he is ultimately unable to escape his past actions despite his ignorance of or inability to recall them.

What Angel Heart fails to recall explicitly is the legacy that brings voodoo and other forms of ritualistic and animist beliefs to American shores. Certainly the race relations depicted in the film are reflective of a New Orleans milieu that grows directly
out of American history and its legacy of slavery. West African slaves often brought their spiritual beliefs with them when they were forcibly transported to North America. Though Christian authorities would censure open practice of native beliefs, they would often turn a blind eye when slaves cloaked the religions of their homelands beneath a thin veil of Catholicism. This covert worship of African gods under the mantle of Christian hagiography is what gave Caribbean practices like voodoo and Santería their particular contours. The slaves, in a sense, transferred the soul of their beliefs into a new body so that their faith might live on unmolested. But audiences in the late-1980s were less likely to be moved by oblique references to the legacy of slavery. Instead, it was far more likely that they viewed Angel Heart as a reaction to that decade’s influx of Caribbean immigrants and their cultural influence. When tens of thousands of Cuban immigrants fled their country for the United States in the early 1960s and in 1980 (in the Mariel Boat Lift), many Cubans brought their belief in Santería with them, and that belief eventually spread to other members of the Hispanic and African-American communities (Clark 2). Santería, though different from traditional Haitian voodoo, utilizes similar accoutrements such as animal sacrifice, ritual consumption of rum and tobacco, as well as ecstatic dance as a vehicle for spirit possession. Though Santería, like virtually any religion, is in no way evil or “satanic,” misperceptions along these lines flourished throughout the 1980s fuelled by xenophobia and especially the fear that the exotic or the Other was already inside. Almost five years after the Mariel Boat Lift, the massive influx of Cuban refugees into South Florida had created a backlash. According to a February 4th, 1985 Business Week article:
Nonetheless, in living rooms and political gatherings all over south Florida, anxious talk of another Mariel invasion is topic A. The public debate is being fueled by several Miami radio talk-show hosts who are conducting a campaign aimed at fanning resentment to large-scale Cuban immigration. Anxious listeners are jamming the stations’ phone lines. Their biggest worry: being displaced by Cuban newcomers. (86)

Hollywood played upon the same fears when they released *The Believers* (1987) with Martin Sheen and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1986) with Bill Pullman, both films about the dangerous presence of Santería and voodoo (respectively) in modern America. The supernatural detective in *Angel Heart* not only finds out the horrifying truth about himself and Johnny Favorite, he also points toward the anti-immigration anxiety in the United States at the time.

Harry Angel, moving through the nightmare world of *Angel Heart*, is the quintessential figure of the reluctant supernatural detective. He is the hard-boiled detective of Raymond Chandler and Dashiel Hammet more than he is the consulting detective of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle or Agatha Christie, but he is a practical and rational investigator all the same. One of Harry Angel’s character arcs in *Angel Heart* is his reluctant acceptance of the reality of the supernatural in his world. All supernatural detectives go through this transition, though some — like Dr. Martin Hesselius, Dr. Abraham Van Helsing, or Flaxman Low — have accepted the existence of the supernatural prior to the beginning of the stories in which they figure. When a rational detective encounters the supernatural, a compromise must take place if the detective is to retain his or her role and the supernatural is not to be explained away as a hoax or the like. Normally, this compromise includes a recognition that the supernatural exists at the same time that there is an implicit assumption that the supernatural is still subject to the
same laws of causality and logic underpinning the rest of human knowledge not to mention underpinning the mechanics of the detective story.

In order for a rational detective figure to “solve” a supernatural mystery, that which is called supernatural must be made to conform to a similar logical model of cause and effect. If the supernatural were simply to remain in the realm of the irrational and the unpredictable, then an investigator would find it virtually impossible to induce the viable causal chain necessary for the explanation of the mystery. In the detective story, the irrational has erupted into the fabric of everyday life with, let us say, the appearance of a bloody corpse in the living room. There are not supposed to be bloody corpses in living rooms; this is one of the reasons they are called living rooms. Living rooms are places for light and warmth and family and conversation and guests and mirth, but not for coldness, death, and silence. But perhaps the most upsetting aspect of the bloody corpse in the living room is the fact that it is unexplained. We generally agree that living rooms should not contain corpses, but we could perhaps stretch our minds to construct a series of reasons for such a thing to occur. Perhaps we are talking about the nineteenth century, and one of the inmates of a given house has died, and her body is now on display in its casket in the living room so that family and friends may come and pay their respects. Similarly, there would be nothing strange about the mere presence of a corpse in the living room if there were also living witnesses of the death in the room, as well. If it was well known to the other occupants precisely how the corpse came to be in the room at all, then there would be no mystery per se.

The fact that no one knows how the corpse in a detective story wound up on the floor in the first place is the kernel of the irrational that motivates the entire genre. The
presence of the apparently irrational mobilizes the Enlightenment forces of rationality in a quest to reset the balance. In the mystery story, the detective comes in, sees through the apparent irrationality to the rational heart of the conundrum, and then sets the rest of the world right with regard to what exactly happened in the living room, with regard to whodunit. The reason that the corpse in the living room is irrational is because the chain of events that resulted in the presence of the corpse is not apparent at first glance. In terms of a chain of events in time and space, it is not apparent at all, but it is literally evident. There are physical tags that link directly to specific presences and actions along that chain of events in time and space. These physical tags, e.g., clues, function metonymically for larger events in the chain. Footprints indicate a certain kind of event and perhaps narrows the timeframe in which that kind of event could have occurred. Gunpowder residue is another kind of tag, fingerprints still another. The two most important characteristics of these tags are that they appear to be disconnected along axes of both space and time.

A clue is only a clue when it is recognized as a metonymic tag for something else. It is a proverbial puzzle piece, but the puzzle is tremendously complicated. In this analogy, the detective is aware of what the picture on the puzzle will be — the picture is the tableau of the corpse in the living room — but the detective is not yet aware of exactly what shape the individual puzzle pieces will take. The task is further complicated by the fact that there are many objects and facts that appear as though they could be puzzle pieces, but they are ultimately not shaped properly to fit into the final, completed image. They fit with the available image, but they do not fit into the specific chain of events in time and space that most concerns the investigator. Most characters in the
narrative (as well as the reader, most of the time) are unable to put these tags into their proper perspective. What Sherlock Holmes and C. Auguste Dupin practice as acts of deduction appear to other characters as acts clairvoyance or telepathy. Holmes sees much, whereas Watson fails to see the signifieds at all, and Watson therefore is unable to access the rational perspective. The only people who are able to see the puzzle correctly, based on the evidence at hand, are the detective(s) and the perpetrator(s). All others are baffled by the bits and pieces of disconnected and jumbled evidence.

In the case of the supernatural detective, the puzzle is even more arcane, because the solution to the mystery need not conform to the understood laws of nature and realism. Supernatural detectives still deduct, still look for clues, and quite often still “get their man.” However, to do so, they must constantly engage with the tensions between the rational and the irrational, the known and the unknowable. These tensions and the detective’s engagement with them, define the allegorical moment that provides a glimpse of the real historical anxieties underlying the pop culture genre stories that proliferated in the 1990s and beyond. However, the supernatural detective did not originate at the end of the twentieth century. Before analyzing what individual examples of supernatural detective films and television programs have to tell us about American culture in the 1990s, we should first examine those characteristics of the character and genre that originate in other times and places in order to better understand how the meaning and/or dynamics of the sub-genre may have changed between its origin and its specific incarnations at the end of the twentieth century.
1.2 The origins of the supernatural detective in fact and fiction

In one form or another, the supernatural detective has been in America since the early colonial period of American history. The history of the supernatural detective in America begins in Salem, Massachusetts in the late seventeenth century. The Puritan colonists who witnessed, conducted, and suffered through the witchcraft trials of the late-seventeenth century believed that they had both the spiritual theory and the available evidence to root out evil from their midst. However, the witchcraft trials that shook Salem and Salem Village in 1692-93 also provided an object lesson in how dangerous were the contradictions at the core of Puritan philosophy and theology. These same contradictions inform the tension between the rational and the irrational for supernatural detectives. The crux of the paradox manifested itself in the use of “spectral evidence” in the Courts of Oyer and Terminer, whose magistrates conducted the trials and handed down the sentences in Salem. Spectral evidence was knowledge gained of an individual’s use of witchcraft based upon supernatural attacks perceived by the victim, regardless of whether these attacks were witnessed by anyone else. Someone could speak out against another person, claiming that “the shade” of the accused was seen sitting among the rafters of a house at the same time that the accuser felt a series of vicious pinches. The courts considered testimony of this sort, though available only to the accuser and not verifiable by any rational means, admissible in witchcraft cases. However, Puritan theology also held that the material world contained outward signs of

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1 The Elizabethan “ghost controversy” of the late-sixteenth century strongly influenced Puritan beliefs regarding the supernatural. The gist of the controversy concerned the ontological existence and provenance of encounters between the living and the animate dead. The Protestant view, encapsulated most forcefully and influentially in Ludwig Lavater’s 1570 *De Spectris, Lemuribus Et Magnis Atque Insolitis Fragoribus* (*Of Ghostes and Spiritses Walking By Nyght*), argues that most ghost sightings are the result of mistakes, madness, intoxication, or, when all other explanations fail, the devil.
the spiritual influence of the divine. For instance, an individual’s state of grace should be apparent through external and visible signs of that grace. Inasmuch as some of the Salemites accused of witchcraft were not considered to be “saints,” or persons whose salvation was thought to be self-evident, this philosophy held. No one would seriously question the possibility that a “bad” character was perhaps in league with dark forces.

Puritan theology was stymied when outwardly saintly people were accused of witchcraft based on spectral evidence. Though Puritan luminaries from Boston, like Cotton Mather, argued strenuously for taking the witchcraft epidemic seriously and rooting out each and every witch in the region, many inhabitants of Salem were dismayed by the sights of so many of their friends and associates incarcerated or executed. Most citizens were unable to speak out against the trials and mounting numbers of accusations due to a combination of the culture of fear that spread as a result of the accusations and an abiding confusion connected with many of the accusations of apparently upright persons. As Alison Tracy points out in “Uncanny Afflictions: Spectral Evidence and the Puritan Crisis of Subjectivity,” the flawed logic of spectral evidence not only exposed the shortcomings of the belief in outward signs of spiritual things, it also profoundly destabilized the Puritan subjectivity based on that belief (20). This destabilization was brought about because the Puritans felt that they could address a spiritual threat in courts of law, using drastically modified secular evidentiary procedures to “prove” the existence of witches in their midst. By the end of the trials, with nineteen people executed and hundreds accused and incarcerated, the Puritans viewed their actions as folly, and the shame felt as a result of the trials helped to push the descendants of the original Puritan colonists farther away from the covenant theology of their forebears.
As the fierce devotion of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries waned with the rise of the Enlightenment, rationality and religious conviction took largely separate paths. In England and America, Deism replaced the far more evangelical faiths of some of the earlier New England colonists. This move away from fierce religiosity was occasionally interrupted by religious revivals such as the “Great Awakening” of the 1730s through the 1750s, as well as the period of utopian millennialism that took place in America in the 1830s and 1840s. However, these revivals always had to address the presence of Enlightenment rationality within the culture of the time. During the Great Awakening, the Puritan minister Jonathan Edwards attempted, with considerable success, to recapture the old devotion of covenant theology practiced so fervently by previous generations of New England Puritans. To achieve this end, Edwards used his sermons to engage Enlightenment philosophy directly, arguing point for point that an empirical approach to human experience offered a viable path to Grace. But Edwards attempted to push his revival too far. When his congregation recoiled at the increasingly strict requirements for openly proving one’s salvation, Edwards was voted out of his ministry. Edwards’ fall from grace underscores the extent to which a less fervent religiosity had become the baseline for New Englanders in the first half of the Eighteenth Century.

Religion was not the only way that people in England and America occasionally rebelled against the skepticism and empiricism of the Enlightenment. In art and literature, the Romantic movements of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries played a role in mitigating the ascendance of the rational over the irrational. For over a hundred years, philosophers and scientists (natural philosophers) had dissected the natural world in orthodox neoclassical terms and, to the minds of many artists, bled it dry
of spirit. Romantic artists and writers, including the authors of Gothic novels influenced by the philosophies and ideals of the Romantics, embraced nature and the irrational as ways for the individual to gain access to something larger than him or herself, the sublime *qua* divine rather than the divine *qua* divine.

During the American Romantic movement, Edgar Allan Poe helped to split once again the concern with the rational and the irrational. Though Poe’s short stories tend toward a focus on the irrational, several of them focus intently on the rational or the analytical. These two topics remain relatively distinct in his writing; a Poe story deals with the rational or the irrational but generally not both at once. One might argue that “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” uses the seeming irrationality of the crime to counterbalance the analytical feat of Dupin’s deduction, and one could easily trace the continued use of the affective tropes of horror in crime fiction. However, the seeming irrationality of the crime in “Rue Morgue” exists only to prompt Dupin’s involvement in the first place and then sweeten the analytical victory in the end. The rational solution to the case reveals that there was nothing irrational about the crime at all. Thus, the irrational never really existed in the story, as is the case with Gothic novels of the Radcliffean variety. The appearance of irrationality is simply a means to heighten the reader’s emotional response before finally offering the reassuringly rational solution to the mystery. Poe offers a scientific approach to something that only seems irrational; it fell to others to use science to confront the supernatural directly.

1848 is a watershed year for bringing the supernatural into focus for rational and scientific study in Anglo-American culture. In London, the popular novelist Catherine Crowe followed up her 1845 abridged translation of the original 1829 German text of *Die
Seherin von Prevorst (The Seeress of Prevorst) with a book titled The Night-Side of Nature; Or, Ghosts and Ghost-Seers. The Night-Side of Nature is mainly a collection of stories about paranormal or supernatural occurrences throughout world history, though with a focus on contemporary British tales. Crowe’s explicit aim in her introduction is to examine the available evidence for life after death, but she is keenly aware of what she sees as the prevailing intellectual opinion regarding supernatural phenomena. She recognizes that science is both unwilling and unable to answer the questions posed by the seeming existence of the supernatural and concludes that, “experience, observation, and intuition must be our principal if not our only guides” (8).

A singularly different event, the advent of Spiritualism, had an equally powerful effect on the Anglo-American interest in the study of things supernatural in the same year that Crowe published The Night-Side. Spiritualism became a prominent topic in newspapers and public discourse almost immediately after the Fox sisters (Kate and Margaret) inaugurated the trend of “spirit rapping” in Hydesville, New York in 1848. Spiritualism soon grew into a pseudo-religion in the United States and abroad. According to contemporary reports, millions of Americans believed in the abilities of psychic mediums to communicate with the world of the dead. The bereaved from all parts of the country and indeed the world sought out the services of mediums who claimed to be able to put “sitters” in contact with the spirits of their loved ones who had passed over into the afterlife. Skeptics hounded the spiritualist movement from its very beginnings, but the critics could not stave off the growing popularity of séances and psychic seminars all across the country. When mediums began to charge fees for their services to individuals, criminal charges of fraud were not far behind.
The rise of spiritualism in America and England, the attendant investigations into spiritualist hoaxes, and the growing popularity of sensational crime literature in the form of detective fiction as well as lurid newspaper and broadside accounts of real crimes eventually coalesced into the creation of the first examples of supernatural detectives in print towards the end of the nineteenth century. Two general types of supernatural detectives were created during this early period. The earliest supernatural detectives in literature are occult doctors, who treat supernatural manifestations as though they are physical, mental, or spiritual maladies. The other major type is the monster chaser, who is portrayed primarily as a man of action more focused on chasing and destroying the supernatural than on learning about it. Both types place a heavy emphasis on the body of knowledge one must amass before entering into the role of supernatural detective and the necessity of that knowledge to conducting the “diagnosis” or the chase.

The first supernatural detective in literature is Dr. Martin Hesselius, created by the Irish author Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. In 1869, Le Fanu published “Green Tea” in Dickens’ annual *All the Year Round*. This short story relates the last few weeks in the life of Reverend Jennings through a series of nested narrative lenses. First, at the core of the story, Jennings tells the better part of the story to Dr. Martin Hesselius in consultation as Jennings’s physician. Hesselius then writes his report of the entire case as a letter to a colleague. This letter is then found among Hesselius’s papers, edited, and related to the reader of “Green Tea” by an unnamed character-narrator, who previously acted as Hesselius’s secretary and protégé.

“Green Tea” is the only story of Le Fanu’s in which Hesselius appears as a character, though the same unnamed narrator refers to him again in the introductions to
the other stories in Le Fanu’s 1871 compilation *In a Glass Darkly*. Through “Green Tea” and the prologues of the other stories in the collection, we get a picture of the first occult detective in fiction. The subtitle to the Prologue is “Martin Hesselius, the German Physician” (5). From the narrator, we learn that the doctor’s “knowledge was immense, his grasp of a case was an intuition” (5). Hesselius writes his letters and papers variously in English, French, and German (6). Perhaps most importantly for our understanding of these stories and the character of the occult doctor, the narrator explains the manner of Hesselius’s telling:

His treatment of some cases is curious. He writes in two distinct characters. He describes what he saw and heard as an intelligent layman might, and when in this style of narrative he had seen the patient either through his own hall-door, to the light of day, or through the gates of darkness to the caverns of the dead, he returns upon the narrative, and in the terms of his art and with all the force and originality of genius, proceeds to the work of analysis, diagnosis and illustration. (5-6)

It is the doctor’s custom to lay out the details of the case, from start to finish in a straightforward style of reportage. Only after the case is complete does he then return to the beginning, analyzing the details previously set forth and providing an explanation or solution to the case in written form. In effect, Hesselius leaves the reader in suspense regarding the true causes of the case until he reveals all in the “second character” of his writing. Readers will recognize this strategy as one of a number of approaches to the classic tale of mystery or suspense, in Jacques Futrelle’s “Thinking Machine” stories, Rex Stout’s Nero Wolf stories, and even Poe’s Dupin in “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt.” Hesselius writes himself into his records and letters as a consulting physician-detective, much like a combination of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson, who would appear on the fiction scene ten years later.
Hesselius is a man of science, but he is equally a man of spirit. In fact, Hesselius admonishes those who would tend too much toward materialism in their conception of medical science. Writing to his colleague, Professor Van Loo, he says:

I believe the essential man is a spirit, that the spirit is an organized substance, but as different in point of material from what we ordinarily understand by matter, as light or electricity is; that the material body is, in the most liberal sense, a vesture, and death consequently no interruption of the living man’s existence, but simply his extrication from the natural body — a process which commences at the moment of what we term death, and the completion of which, at furthest a few days later, is the resurrection “in power.” (8)

Hesselius wants his reader to understand his “comprehensive” view of matter and spirit, but note how he points out that “spirit is an organized substance.” At the same moment that he links the spirit world and the material world, he eschews the possible move to complete super-signification. It is not that anything is now possible at any time. Spirit is organized and can therefore be understood by the appropriately rational and adequately trained mind.

Hesselius inaugurates the character of the occult doctor, but this character type dwindles in popularity after the turn of the twentieth century, giving way to the investigative man of action patterned primarily after mainstream detectives like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. Almost thirty years after Le Fanu introduced his readers to Dr. Hesselius, another Irish writer, Bram Stoker, gave the public Dracula (1897) and along with it the second supernatural detective, Dr. Abraham Van Helsing. Like Hesselius, Van Helsing is not only a doctor, he is also “a philosopher and a metaphysician, and one of the most advanced scientists of his day” (106). Like Hesselius, Van Helsing is a physician who has extended his mundane medical knowledge
into occult realms. Dr. Van Helsing is brought onto the scene in *Dracula* by Dr. Seward, another physician/psychologist who does his best to treat the peculiar wasting disease affecting Lucy Westenra. Van Helsing knows almost immediately what is wrong with Lucy, though he guards this knowledge from his protégé and his friends until he is absolutely certain. Van Helsing is the classic supernatural detective in that he comes to the investigation already having accepted the existence of the supernatural into his thinking, and he has engaged in a long course of study on the subject. He can diagnose a case of vampirism as readily as we suspect he could diagnose hysteria. His special function as bearer of knowledge at this early stage is to convince the others of the reality of the threat posed by Count Dracula.

If Van Helsing’s role stopped there, he would have been merely a minor variation on the character of Martin Hesselius. Le Fanu’s character uses his knowledge for the benefit of his patient, but he leaves the execution of the treatment largely to the patient himself. Dr. Abraham Van Helsing, in the later sections of *Dracula*, transforms into the second major strain of early supernatural detective, the monster chaser. In this guise, the supernatural detective becomes the man of action, using his knowledge of the occult to track and usually destroy the thing that plagues the other characters in the story. Dr. Abraham Van Helsing sets the pattern that will be taken up time and again in later supernatural detective fiction. His combination of rational investigator and man of action resonates with the sort of crime fighter readers came to know in Sherlock Holmes.

The other well-known early supernatural detectives follow this type. In 1898 and 1899, *Pearson’s Monthly Magazine* ran two series of short stories by the British mother-son writing team of Hesketh V. Hesketh Prichard and Kate Hesketh Prichard (writing
under the pseudonyms E. & H. Heron). These twelve stories featured the Holmesian supernatural detective Flaxman Low. Low’s chronicles mirror those of Holmes in the way that they build up a picture of the supernatural detective over the course of the series. Most of Low’s mysteries have a supernatural solution, though several turn out to have human perpetrators. Aside from Low’s position as the first fully Holmesian occult detective, the stories are significant for the way in which Pearson’s presented them to the public. The two-part series was offered under the title “Real Ghost Stories,” and both parts of the series began with an introduction, ostensibly from the magazine’s editors. This introduction, as the series title indicates, makes an emphatic claim for the authenticity of the narratives by connecting them to the heightened interest in psychical research:

Have ghosts any existence outside our own fancy and emotions? This is the question with which the end of the century concerns itself more and more, for, though a vast amount of evidence with regard to occult phenomena already exists, the ultimate answer has yet to be supplied. In this connection it may not generally be known that, as one of the first steps towards reducing Psychology to the lines of an exact science, an attempt has been made to classify spirits and ghosts, with the result that some very bizarre and terrible theories have been put forward — things undreamt of outside the circle of the select few.

With a view to meeting the widespread interest in these matters, the following series of ghost stories is laid before the public. They have been gathered out of a large number of supernatural experiences with which Mr. Flaxman Low — under the thin disguise of which name many are sure to recognise one of the leading scientists of the day, with whose works on Psychology and kindred subjects they are familiar — has been more or less connected. He is, moreover, the first student in this field of inquiry who has had the boldness and originality to break free from old and conventional methods, and to approach the elucidation of so-called supernatural problems on the lines of natural law.

2 The Flaxman Low stories also feature a recurring arch-villain (a la Professor Moriarty) in the form of Dr. Kalmarkane.
The details of these stories have been supplied by the narratives of those most concerned, supplemented by the clear and ample notes which Mr. Flaxman Low has had the courtesy to place in our hands.

For obvious reasons, the *exact* localities where these events are said to have happened are in every case merely indicated. (60)

This appeal to authenticity is a relatively common trope of both mystery and supernatural fiction — Watson offers his chronicles of Sherlock Holmes as truth, and *Dracula* is told through a compilation of different types of fabricated documentary evidence. However, unlike Algernon Blackwood ten years later, who simply comments upon modern psychical research through the voice of his main character, *Pearson's* tries to sell these stories to the public by claiming more than a topical connection to the contemporary interest in psychical research. This tactic gestures toward what will become a much more central documentary impulse as the twentieth century and the importance of motion pictures progress.

The popularity of the occult detective as man of action continued into the middle of the twentieth century and beyond. Two other early print supernatural detectives deserve notice here. The first is Thomas Carnacki, invented by William Hope Hodgson, and appearing primarily in *The Idler* in 1910 with a book of the collected stories, *Carnacki the Ghost-finder*, published in 1913. The Carnacki stories are short pieces, which all utilize the same frame narrative. A trio of friends meets at the home of Thomas Carnacki for dinner and a ghost story. In each story, Carnacki describes his latest investigation into the supernatural. Carnacki stands out among the early supernatural detectives because of his repeated use of technology in his investigations. Aside from the essentially mundane use of communications and business technologies like typewriters and gramophones in *Dracula*, no other occult detective focuses much attention on the use
of new technologies to fight the supernatural. Carnacki’s primary weapon in his investigations is the Blue Pentacle, a collection of pale blue vacuum tubes, which, when properly arranged into their star shape, form a protective barrier against supernatural entities. Here is an early example of the supernatural detective as technological innovator in the same way that Constable Ichabod Crane will embark upon his investigation in *Sleepy Hollow* with scientific and medical instruments of his own design.³

A survey of the earliest supernatural detectives would not be complete without a mention of the Seabury Quinn’s Frenchman, Dr. Jules de Grandin.⁴ Quinn introduced de Grandin and his Watsonian narrator, Dr. Trowbridge, in “The Horror on the Links” in the October 1925 issue of *Weird Tales* magazine. Over the next twenty-five years, de Grandin would be instrumental in keeping *Weird Tales* afloat through the Great Depression and beyond. Quinn’s supernatural detective became the most popular character in the entire magazine, and featured in a total of ninety-three tales, including short stories and a serialized novel, *The Devil’s Bride* (published in six consecutive issues of *Weird Tales* in the first half of 1932). There is little manifestly new in the character of Jules de Grandin: he is a brilliant doctor, he is from the Continent, he is equally adept at employing magical learning and scientific technology in his struggles against the supernatural, and he is a man of action. Quinn’s most significant contribution to this sort of fiction is seriality, which in many ways reaches its pinnacle around the turn of the millennium with all of the television series featuring supernatural detectives. Until de

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³ Crane’s instruments are all connected to technologies of seeing and discovery, however. The “devices” of protection in *Sleepy Hollow* are all magical in nature.

⁴ Even though de Grandin is a brilliant surgeon and occasionally uses his medical training in the stories, he is not psychic nor does he approach the supernatural as a malady, so I do not class him as one of the occult or psychic doctors.
Grandin came along, Flaxman Low appeared in print the most often. However, *Pearson’s* had commissioned all twelve Flaxman Low stories, to be delivered in two batches, based solely on the public’s interest in ghost stories and psychical research. Low was by no means so popular of a fictional character that he was responsible for keeping *Pearson’s* afloat. If the Prichards’ stories indicated that the public would tolerate a supernatural detective as a serial character, then Quinn proved that a supernatural detective could effectively carry a media outlet by itself.

During and after this initial spate of supernatural detectives in fiction, other examples emerge and continue to warp the boundaries between mystery and supernatural fiction. One other type of supernatural detective to appear near the turn of the twentieth century is the detective that uses psychic powers to solve crimes. Like Hesselius, this sort of supernatural detective is also often a doctor. The first psychic doctor to join the growing ranks of fictional supernatural detectives was Dr. John Silence, the creation of Algernon Blackwood, a prolific journalist, short story writer, and playwright who wrote several of the most anthologized ghost stories and weird tales of the early twentieth century. In 1909, Blackwood published *John Silence*, a collection of six short stories featuring his eponymous psychic doctor. Dr. John Silence is not the protagonist of all of

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5 Both Martin Hesselius and John Silence appear in multiple stories, but all of these stories were published at the same time in single volumes, *In a Glass Darkly* and *John Silence*, and so were not serialized as such.

6 Blackwood is perhaps best known for his lengthy story “The Willows” (1907), though he also wrote the novel *A Prisoner in Fairyland* (1913) that was eventually turned into the musical *The Starlight Express* (1915). Later in his life he became much more renowned as a reader of ghost stories on BBC radio and television.
these stories; in some, he merely relates tales he has heard from others. However, in the first and most well-known of the Silence stories, “A Psychical Invasion,” John Silence is front and center throughout the story along with his Watsonian personal secretary and narrator, Hubbard. After John Silence, the character of the psychic doctor does not appear in fiction as often as the occult detective, the monster chaser, or even the occult doctor. Other than a brief appearance in the form of Dr. Taverner, the creation of the self-styled mystic Dion Fortune, psychic doctors crop up only occasionally throughout the middle of the twentieth century. It is only more recently, in particular on television, that investigators with psychic or magical powers — or who are supernatural beings like vampires — have come to the fore (e.g., Forever Knight, Medium, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Charmed, and the Blade franchise).

Supernatural detectives of all sorts continued to appear in short stories, comic books, in films, and on radio and television throughout the twentieth century, but not as often as they did from the 1890s through the 1930s. After World War II, the supernatural detectives that do appear are often either scientists or some other form of academic, e.g., Dr. Montague, the anthropologist ghost hunter in Shirley Jackson’s The Haunting of Hill House in 1959. Perhaps most often they are professionals in one of the fields allied with psychology or psychiatry like the researchers-turned-entrepreneurs in Ghostbusters (1984). Journalists also provide their share of supernatural detectives, such as Karl Kolchak as television’s Night Stalker (1972, 1974). There are also a number of instances of modern returns to the Radcliffean gothic, in which one or more detectives believe they

7 “Ancient Sorceries” is of this sort. The tale of a traveler who stumbles upon a small European town of cat-people was adapted into film Cat People (RKO Radio Pictures) by Jacques Tourneur and Val Lewton in 1942.
are investigating ghosts only to discover that the mystery is far more mundane than they first realized; *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You?* (1969-72) is the most well-known of these. These examples were popular in their day, but those periods did not see the high concentration of narratives with supernatural detectives evident at both the beginning and end of the twentieth century. It is to the meaning and significance of that high concentration that we now turn.

1.3 The mysteries of American trauma

In the chapters that follow, I examine a number films and television series as examples of recent supernatural detective narratives. In choosing my texts, I have tried to find the clearest examples of detectives encountering the supernatural as possible. In the case of television shows, I also chose programs that have completed their production runs in order to be able to talk about them (with as few reservations as possible) as finished narratives. In each of these readings, I trace the detectives investigation of the supernatural or the irrational and identify the allegorical moment (or moments), which reveals the historical and/or cultural resonance. In most cases, each chapter also explores the echoes of an influential work of American literature. These works, from a literary perspective, fulfill a function akin to cultural memory for the supernatural detective story, and the discussion of their influence is a crucial part of understanding the historical and narrative tensions at play in these texts.

In “Chapter 2: *Sleepy Hollow* and the Figure of the Supernatural Detective,” I argue that Constable Ichabod Crane is the quintessential reluctant supernatural detective. Over the course of the film, the audience witnesses Crane’s transformation from no-
nonsense police investigator to terrified victim and finally to intrepid ghost hunter in his quest to capture the person responsible for the murders of several residents in the village of Sleepy Hollow. As he uses his rational investigative techniques to solve the mystery of the Headless Horseman, he reveals two past traumas. The first is a trauma in his own past, the murder of his mother, which resulted in his dogged adherence to sense and reason in his work. The second trauma is the one that ultimately motivates the killings in the town, and it is the tearing apart of families because of the prejudice against witchcraft. Since this is also the prejudice that resulted in Crane’s mother’s murder, Tim Burton’s Sleepy Hollow is a supernatural murder mystery that is finally about feminine power and what happens when that power is repressed.

In films like Sleepy Hollow, it can be easy to see how psychoanalytic concepts of trauma are represented through the characters in the story. In “Chapter 3: The Chronotope of the Traumatized Space,” I argue that spaces can be depicted in narratives in such a way that they can — analogically — be traumatized, as well. Crime scenes and haunted houses are hysterical spaces, places that have been traumatized by past events that have a way of recurring in the present. In this chapter I use the Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope — literally narrative time-space — to articulate the traumatized space. By examining Shirley Jackson’s The Haunting of Hill House and its various filmic adaptations, I argue that these traumatized fictional spaces (the various versions of Hill House itself) reflect a specific form of the uncanny: the largely discarded belief that the supernatural is a proper subject of scientific research.

In “Chapter 4: Vanishing Americans: Abduction and Invasion in The X-Files,” the supernatural detective not only represents the psychoanalyst, but the entire United States
and its history represent the patient. As FBI Special Agents Mulder and Scully investigate the supernatural and paranormal, they uncover a vast and secretive government conspiracy to conceal the truth about the existence of aliens from the public. At key points in the nine seasons of the series, the investigation intersects with the country’s long history of contact and conflict with Native-American culture. The trauma that *The X-Files* begins to fear — the trauma of alien invasion — is precisely analogous to the historical trauma of the European settlement of North America. When Agent Mulder, the more intuitive of the agents in show, comes into contact with Native Americans, he looks more and more like the pathfinders of James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales. As such, Mulder’s character is a liminal figure whose connection with both the rational and intuitive enables him the perspective to see the truth.

Finally, in “Chapter 5: The Impossibilities of Millennial Horror,” I explore documentary and non-fiction conventions as analogs for rational investigation. In effect, the documentarians stand in for the supernatural detectives. In mockumentary films like *The Blair Witch Project* and *The Last Broadcast* and in novels like *House of Leaves*, viewers are tacitly asked to believe that they are watching a non-fiction film or reading a non-fiction book about the supernatural. Though none of these narratives ever directly depicts anything obviously supernatural, they all depict impossible moments, in which standard notions of space and time are violated in order to produce the expected fear effect of the horror genre. I argue that the use of these non-fiction codes works to enhance that effect while the horror of the impossible is training audiences to blur the boundaries between the rational and the irrational, the possible and the impossible, in all of the media they consume.
This project engages in analyses of print, cinematic, and televisual narratives. I do not mean to imply by this diverse selection of texts that the medium does not matter. Indeed, media do matter, and I have accordingly attempted to address each text with as much consideration of the particular limitations and affordances of its medium as possible, especially in the case of adaptations (e.g., *Sleepy Hollow* and *The Haunting*). However, I also proceed with a sense similar to Marie-Laure Ryan (quoting Claude Bremond), in her introduction to *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, that there is something about narrative that is transportable between media, that one can see a film and then tell a friend the story (1). The film and the oral telling are different, particularly on the level of discourse, but the points of recognition between the two are numerous enough to invite a transmedial approach to story. I will sometimes move between print and film and television versions of a single story, but I will always do so with consideration of how the medium matters.\(^8\)

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\(^8\) That said, this particular project is not engaged in Ryan’s narratological project of defining and illuminating transmedial narrative theory.
CHAPTER 2

SLEEPY HOLLOW AND THE HAUNTED DETECTIVE

All these, however, were mere terrors of the night, phantoms of the mind that walk in darkness; and though he had seen many specters in his time, and been more than once beset by Satan in diverse shapes, in his lonely perambulations, yet daylight put an end to all these evils; and he would have passed a pleasant night of it, in spite of the devil and all his works, if his path had not been crossed by a being that causes more perplexity to mortal man than ghosts, goblins, and the whole race of witches put together, and that was — a woman. (“The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” 300)

2.1 Tim Burton’s Sleepy Hollow

Washington Irving’s short story, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1820), is less a ghost story than a folk tale about how an arrogant and yet naïve schoolmaster completely underestimates the sexual politics of a small Dutch-American village in the New York highlands. In Tim Burton’s big-screen adaptation of the tale, the sexual politics are still evident, but no longer can the narrative be called a folk tale. Instead, Sleepy Hollow (1999) is a mystery film in which a New York City detective, in the form of Johnny Depp’s Constable Ichabod Crane, is dispatched to Sleepy Hollow to solve the mystery of the murders of several residents. However, Depp’s Constable Crane still finds himself up to his neck with regard to gender politics in Sleepy Hollow, just not precisely in the same way that Irving’s schoolmaster does.
As the film begins, the audience is introduced to a detective who is alone in his drive to be forward thinking. “The millennium is almost upon us! In a few months we will be living in the nineteenth century!” declares Constable Ichabod Crane. His words are not filled with joy or excitement but rather exasperation and indignation, for Crane utters these words in a court of law while standing next to a man encaged in what looks like a medieval torture device. Crane is a man who wants to move forward, but the world around him is focused on the traditions of the past. As a result, his regard for the new values of science and rational investigation are held in contempt by the embodiments of social and legal authority. When Crane decries the use of these implements to wrest confessions from anyone — guilty or innocent — his superior, the High Constable (Alun Armstrong), orders him to “stand down.” “I stand up,” he replies, “for sense and justice.” The Burgomaster (Christopher Lee) in charge of the proceedings is all too familiar with Crane’s “song,” and when he suggests that the young constable will benefit from a stint in jail, Crane calms himself and explains, “I beg pardon. I only meant well. Why am I the only one who sees that to solve crimes, to detect the guilty, we must use our brains to recognize vital clues, using up-to-date scientific techniques”? Constable Crane has already posed the central tension of the supernatural detective, i.e., the collision of the rational and the irrational, though the supernatural has yet to make its appearance.

The Burgomaster suggests that Constable Crane’s “up-to-date scientific techniques” be put to the test by investigating a string of recent murders in the isolated farming village of Sleepy Hollow in the Hudson Highlands. Someone or something is decapitating villagers in the night, spreading terror throughout the populace. Three citizens of Sleepy Hollow have already been assassinated — Peter van Garrett, Dirk van
Garrett, his son, and the widow Emily Winship — and the townsfolk are sure that there will be more. The town elders — those that have not already been murdered — are unable to apprehend the killer, so they have appealed to New York for help. Though Crane is visibly unnerved by the news that all three victims were decapitated, he accepts the charge to detect the murderer, apprehend him, and return him to New York to face the Burgomaster’s “good justice.” When Ichabod accepts the assignment, the Burgomaster makes it clear that it is Constable Crane who is now “put to the test.” At this stage, the film has established a conflict between the lingering medieval justice of forced confessions and the new concepts of detecting the guilty using rational and scientific investigative techniques. If this remained the central conflict of the film, it would have wound up an apologia for the detective story at a time in America when there seemed very little need for it. Detective, mystery, and police stories filled bookstore shelves and movie theaters for a century and television programming for fifty years prior to the release of Sleepy Hollow, and they continue to do so. No epistemological shift has taken place that would negate the interest audiences show in tales of deduction. As Sleepy Hollow progresses, however, the audience comes to learn that it is not simply a murder mystery pitting medieval notions of law against modern concepts of deduction and evidence.

When Constable Crane arrives in Sleepy Hollow from the city, the town elders receive him in the salon of Baltus Van Tassel (Michael Gambon), a successful farmer. Van Tassel introduces Crane to the Reverend Steenwyck (Jeffrey Jones), Dr. Thomas Lancaster (Ian McDiarmid), Magistrate Samuel Philipse (Richard Griffiths), and Notary James Hardenbrook (Michael Gough). Crane attempts to establish his authority by
recounting recent events, as he understands them, while walking around the room and
staring the men down accusingly. The assembled men quickly make it clear that
Constable Crane has not been told everything concerning the murders. Van Tassel tells
the young detective the story of the Hessian mercenary (Christopher Walken), whose
love of carnage earned him a bloody reputation with the rebellious colonists two decades
before. One winter’s day in 1779, colonial soldiers cornered the Hessian in the Western
Woods outside of Sleepy Hollow and decapitated the mercenary with his own sword.
After a hasty burial, the local residents moved on with their lives, forgetting about the
brutal warrior in the tumult of war and the establishment of the new republic, until the
Hessian rose again, just weeks ago, to begin “taking heads wherever he finds them,”
seemingly in a quest for vengeance.

The Reverend Steenwyck, sensing Crane’s wavering resolve in the face of the
group’s testimony, asks if it is true that Crane has brought with him “books and other
trappings of scientific investigation.” When Crane replies that he has, Steenwyck drops a
mammoth Bible on a nearby table and suggests that it is the only book he will need.
Steenwyck’s move to keep the issue of the Headless Horseman completely within the
realm of the supernatural backfires, however. Ichabod rises from his seat and declares,
“murder needs no ghost come from the grave.” Reaffirmed in his mission to discover the
murderer using his “up-to-date, scientific techniques,” Crane takes his leave to begin his
investigation. Though Crane eventually has cause to revise his theory regarding the
murderer, he does not completely convert to Reverend Steenwyck’s vision, either. The
truth turns out to be somewhere in between the two men’s stances. On the one hand, Van
Tassel’s Bible does turn out to be one of the only books Crane needs, as it contains that
family tree that will help him understand what is behind the killings. On the other hand, there is nothing of the religious (or at least nothing of the Christian) order that Crane uses to solve the mystery and defeat the Horseman. Instead, the mystery is solved by opening up the limits of what is real and what is rational to include ghosts, witchcraft, and magic while never discarding Crane’s professional and personal buttresses of “sense and reason, cause and consequence.”

From a certain point of view, it is not at all surprising that *Sleepy Hollow* would present itself as both a ghost story and a detective story. It is a critical commonplace that both the detective story and the ghost story as we now know them grew out of the gothic novels of the late eighteenth century. Many of those gothic novels, particularly those written by or in imitation of Anne Radcliffe, cloaked sensationalist mysteries in supernatural garb while always managing to finish with a rational explanation for the supposed ghosts. Another strain of the gothic, more in line with the original impulse of Horace Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto* and carried on by Maturin in *Melmoth the Wanderer* and Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk*, presented the supernatural as fact, usually in starkly Catholic terms. Despite the differences in the treatment of the supernatural, scholars of the early gothic tend to agree that the sub-genre’s thematic concerns with Italian villains, medieval castles, and Catholic superstitions highlight the fears upon which the burgeoning Protestant, middle-class sensation fiction could capitalize. It would not be until well into the nineteenth century, after the heyday of the British Romantics, that the American Romantic Edgar Allan Poe would rework the gothic and, in the process, split his source material into two new sub-genres. On the one hand, Poe ensconced the tale of ratiocination in the analytical detective story exemplified by his C.
Auguste Dupin tales: “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “The Purloined Letter,” and “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt.” On the other hand, Poe turned the supernatural tale inward and plumbed the terror of the soul in stories like “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “Ligeia,” and “The Oval Portrait.” From this point on, mystery fiction and supernatural fiction travel separate paths, with devotees on both sides defending their generic boundaries against encroachment. A good ghost story would no longer end with a rational explanation of the seemingly supernatural events. Likewise, a reader justifiably feels cheated when the solution to a murder mystery is revealed by magical means. In both cases, the generic contract with the audience has been violated.

Supernatural detective stories are, therefore, all the more strange. In a ghost story, a repressed or forgotten past irrupts into the present in ways that inspire terror or horror for those characters who experience the irruption, as well as for the reader (ideally). In the detective story, the triumph of rationality allows a society disrupted by crime to point “the wavering finger of suspicion” (qtd. in Cawelti 142), as Northrop Frye terms it, at a single culprit rather than at itself. Both types of narratives can be structured along culturally subversive or conservative lines; a political stance is not inherent in either formula. The one looks back at the past with a shudder, while the other nods grimly at what has gone before but with supreme self-confidence in the efficacy of the human intellect and the fundamental goodness of the society at large. However, in those instances when these two sub-genres overlap, and a rational investigator is brought into contact with a clear and unmistakable manifestation of the supernatural, something else is at work.
Sleepy Hollow is an especially apt example of the supernatural detective story. Constable Crane confronts not only the mystery of the Headless Horseman with his up to date, scientific techniques; he also confronts a personal trauma from his past. Both of these mysteries, the local and the personal, concern feminine magic and are tied to his capacity to become a supernatural detective. Specifically, the mysteries in Sleepy Hollow surround families that have been torn apart because women are accused of witchcraft. In Washington Irving’s original tale, the Dutch women of Sleepy Hollow have a limited but very real power within the household, especially within the kitchen and around the hearth. In Tim Burton’s film, however, women are powerful because of their connections to a New Age conception of natural magic. The traumas in Sleepy Hollow and their lasting effects have at their core the question not simply of a woman’s power in the home but of women’s power in American society more broadly. But Crane must first solve a more personal, though still related, mystery.

2.2 Supernatural detectives and trauma

Before Constable Crane can solve the mystery without, he must first solve the mystery within; he must psychoanalyze himself. In 1959, Nandor Fodor published The Haunted Mind: A Psychoanalyst Looks into the Supernatural, presenting himself as something very close to a real-life version of the occult doctors like Dr. Hesselius and John Silence discussed in Chapter 1. The title is misleading, since Fodor began his interest in the paranormal in the 1930s as an enthusiastic follower of the Society for Psychical Research and rival ghost hunters like Harry Price. Only later, as his interest in Freudian psychoanalysis began to overtake his interest in contemporary psychical
theories, did he shift his emphasis over to mainstream psychology. From that point on, Fodor tended to look for the psychological rather than the psychical explanation whenever he investigated a haunting, for his interest in all things paranormal never did completely wane.

In *The Haunted Mind*, Fodor chronicles many of his early investigations into ghosts, hauntings, and poltergeists, revising earlier theories regarding the phenomena by giving his narratives a Freudian commentary. In most instances, this shift in approach means that Fodor is more interested in the private and sexual lives of the people who have allegedly witnessed the phenomena he was called in to investigate than he is in the phenomena themselves; he wants to find what sort of neuroses or psychoses might be responsible for the reported manifestations. However, Fodor is never entirely able to give up his belief in the possibility that certain manifestations may lie entirely outside the psyches of the people living in a haunted house. In one instance in *The Haunted Mind*, he analyzes the interaction between a space and the inhabitants of that space in such a way that the inhabitants’ psychological make-up is in itself insufficient to explain the seemingly supernatural events.

Fodor set out to investigate a haunted bed with fellow psychical investigator, Professor C.E.M. Joad. This haunted bed was a classic of its type, preventing those resting in it from ever getting a full night’s rest. At some point late into the night, reports contended, those sleeping in the bed would be violently thrown to the floor. Fodor and Joad arranged to stay the night in the room, sitting up all night together in the bed, waiting for the manifestations to take place. Fodor reports that nothing happened, but he
does not completely discount the testimony of others who reported being thrown from the
bed and offers his explanation for how such a thing might come about:

The haunted bed’s behavior, after all, is very similar to the stories of clock
stopping and pictures falling at the time of death, except for the fact that
the bed acted in a more intelligent and more insistent manner. The
repetitive element in its behavior is a feature that we find in all haunted
house narratives. It has a similarity to the sudden appearance of somatic
symptoms that hint at forgotten, painful events. (42-3)

Fodor hits on a psychoanalytic formula that has only recently been applied to
supernatural literature, that of trauma. Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer’s theories
regarding trauma were among some of their first psychoanalytic theories to be published.

Studies in Hysteria, first published in 1893, outlines several cases of female patients
suffering from what Freud and Breuer diagnose as hysteria, or repetitive somatic
symptoms brought on by the “abreaction” of an emotional event too severe to process
under normal conditions (1-13). Each analyst describes cases in which they treated their
patients with a combination of psychotherapy and hypnotic behavior modification\(^9\). After
initially meeting with a patient, they would use hypnotic suggestion to convince the
woman to cease a particular repetitive somatic symptom (e.g. stammering, paralysis of a
limb, etc.). These women would invariably manifest the symptoms again and again, and
Freud or Breuer would again combine psychotherapy and hypnotism, eventually getting
closer and closer to the buried memory that, as they saw it, constituted the original
trauma causing the symptoms.

Based on their experiences with these cases, Freud and Breuer put forward their
tentative hypothesis regarding trauma and hysteria. They believed that when a disturbing

\(^9\) Freud and Breuer were experimenting heavily with therapeutic hypnotism at this point in their research,
though they would later disavow its efficacy.
event occurs, which is so traumatic that it overwhelms the psyche’s ability to assimilate the experience normally, the conscious mind is forced to sublimate the event. This sublimation creates an excess of mental and emotional activity, which often finds its outlet in seemingly unrelated somatic symptoms. These “hysterical symptoms” are the evidence that some trauma has taken place in the patient’s past, and the therapist must recognize that the only way to treat the condition is to get the patient to confront the trauma again with the conscious mind. The distance in time and space from the traumatic event allows the patient the perspective necessary to finally assimilate the emotions surrounding the event in a relatively healthy way, thus countering the abreaction. The manifest irruptions in the detective and ghost story are analogous to the somatic symptoms arising in the wake of traumatic events in Freud and Breuer’s conception of hysteria. The body is the physical indicator that something egregiously wrong has occurred, and the ghostly apparition fulfills the same purpose. In both cases, that egregious wrong is untimely death. Those who die naturally are not generally considered cause for concern. However, a ghost is the manifest memory of a physical or psychological trauma or the remnants of the will to enact these sorts of trauma. A murdered corpse is evidence of both.

Both the detective story and the ghost story focus on the revelation of alternative historical narratives, and these narratives are analogous to the repressed memories of the hysterical patient. Though no critic has discussed this connection at length, a number have noted this particular function in one genre or the other. In his “Introduction” to the collection *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination*, Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock suggests, “The ghost is that which interrupts the presentness of the present,
and its haunting indicates that, beneath the surface of received history, there lurks another narrative, an untold story that calls into question the veracity of the authorized version of events” (5). A similar model of remembering an obfuscated past can be seen in detective fiction. In “Tracking Down the Past: The Detective as Historian in Texts by Patrick Modiano and Didier Daeninckx,” Claire Gorrara argues that some mystery fiction can also do the cultural work of uncovering alternative histories, “Centered on a quest for a repressed narrative, that of the original crime and the identity of the murderer, detective fiction and its models of detection can be said to operate with the aim of establishing the parameters of a ‘lost’ narrative” (281). If we view the events of murder mysteries and ghost stories as originating in a particular traumatic event, the three-stage structure that Freud posited as common to all psychoanalysis — remembering, repeating, and working-through — applies to these fictions. That is, a) they begin in what is viewed as the normal world, b) upset that world through the manifestation of some sort of repetitive irruption, and then c) the investigation of these irruptions eventually leads to the mending of the irruption via the establishment of the “proper” view of history. This proper view of history re-stabilizes the world, but generally in a new way. In the detective story, the re-stabilization restores both legal and moral order while also lionizing rationality. In the ghost story, order is restored with the inauguration of a world in which the previously irrational is combined with the rational to form a new worldview. That is, the supernatural is brought into the natural, and the “known world” (or at least the known diegetic world) is made larger.

The link between the physician’s casebook, in the case of Fodor above as well as the early occult doctors, and the consulting detectives of later nineteenth-century fiction
is not at all random. Heather Worthington points out in her book, *The Rise of the Detective in Early Nineteenth-Century Popular Fiction*, that one of the models for Poe’s Dupin was Samuel Warren’s *Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician* (published serially in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 1830-37). Worthington argues that Warren’s pseudo-autobiography, “offers a serial investigative figure, albeit in the field of medicine rather than crime, and brings into textual being the case structure that the work of a doctor necessarily requires and which becomes a recurring feature in later detective fiction” (3). Since Warren, the “case” has become interchangeable between medicine and crime. It hardly seems strange, then, that when Constable Ichabod Crane arrives in Sleepy Hollow, he does so carrying a doctor’s bag full of chemicals, medical tools, and anatomy texts.

2.3 *Sleepy Hollow* and the trauma of the supernatural detective

In *Sleepy Hollow*, Constable Ichabod Crane fulfills his role as a supernatural detective by uncovering the trauma that haunts the village, as well as the trauma that haunts him personally. These traumas are rooted in the obfuscation of feminine power as it is represented by magic. It is finally the reconciliation between reason and magic that has the most profound implications, both for Burton’s romanticized world at the dawn of the Nineteenth Century and our own world at the dawn of the Twenty-first. As we have already seen, the manifest evidence of trauma is normally an apparently unintentional, repetitive action. In *Studies in Hysteria*, these repetitive symptoms can include the paralysis of extremities, neuralgia, nausea, or any number of other abreactions seemingly unrelated to the original traumatic event. I argue for a more abstract understanding of
these symptoms, since quite often the trauma is not something that happened to an individual (a character, in the case of fiction and film). However, sometimes the trauma that does occur for a character will be metonymically linked to more abstract notions of trauma, for instance the trauma of a city or a region or a nation. This is the case with *Sleepy Hollow*, and some argue that there is something similar at work in the original short story.

Washington Irving’s tale, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” is filled with references to ghost stories and suggestions of the supernatural, but it is not precisely a ghost story itself, and it certainly makes very few gestures toward the mystery genre. In the short story, Ichabod Crane is a schoolmaster, who delights in the ghost stories told by the women of the village as much as he enjoys reading the Cotton Mather’s chronicles of the witchcraft trials of Salem. He takes pleasure in these supernatural stories, but the story does not turn on the solution of any mystery or the discovery of any trauma. If anything, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” presents a mystery to the reader — the mystery of what actually happened to Ichabod Crane the night he rode home on his horse, presented very much in the fashion of a crime scene description — but it does not choose to solve that mystery. Crane could have been the victim of the Headless Horseman, or he could have been the victim of Brom Bones’ vengeful prank. However, recent criticism suggests that the short story may have a trauma lying at its root.

In “Sleepy Hollow: Fearful Pleasures and the Nightmare of History,” Robert Hughes argues that Washington Irving’s original tale is a tale of trauma. He argues that in “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” Irving uses a Dutch colonial ghost story to obfuscate the real horror that Hudson River Valley villagers experienced during and after the
American Revolutionary War. Hughes points out that the residents of Sleepy Hollow sat in what amounted to a no-man’s-land during the war, with the battle lines repeatedly moving through the tiny hamlet. Soldiers on both sides of the conflict (including Hessian mercenaries fighting for the British) would often descend upon the town demanding food and other provisions (9). In this context, residents of the Hollow never knew exactly what side they were on, and this confusion lent itself to a heightening of the normal horrors of war: indiscriminate death, political upheaval, and sudden poverty. Hughes is also quick to point out that not only is Irving’s tale one that we generally find pleasurable — both for its comic flourishes and for the moments of gothic frisson — but it is also clear that the characters within the narrative find these ghostly tales of fallen warriors to be pleasurable pastimes (16). Traditionally, the repetitive behaviors associated with abreacted trauma are not thought to be pleasurable at all, but rather disconcerting and confusing. Hughes explains the way in which Irving’s “Legend” transforms these recurring tales of decapitated mercenaries and traitorous officers into an expression of the uncanny (19). Whereas there is little in the pathology of trauma to suggest that narratives based upon it would be at all pleasurable as entertainment, the uncanny has long been a central ingredient in those sub-genres of fiction with which we are here concerned: the gothic, mystery, and supernatural fiction. Rather than recurring as senseless and seemingly unrelated repetitive behaviors, the trauma of the past emerge into the present as the startlingly familiar, the “unheimlich.” This critique of Irving’s “Legend” will not serve as a fully satisfying reading of Tim Burton’s Sleepy Hollow, even though the film still references most of the same historical traumas, and one could argue that it does so while simultaneously renaming the manifestations of that trauma in uncanny terms (the
ghost of the Hessian mercenary, the exhumation of corpses, and the prevalence of witchcraft in the film). Hughes’s critique is ultimately not transferable because of the elements that the film adaptation adds to the original narrative.

Though the Revolutionary War does exist as a point of reference within the narrative — and is thought to be the starting point for the haunting in the film — the most obvious traumas in the film are various instances of murder, decapitation, and dismemberment. When Constable Crane is dispatched to Sleepy Hollow, four decapitations have already taken place (though he is only apprised of three at the beginning). In all, eighteen decapitations are depicted in the film, with additional murders of various sorts thrown in. One of the most striking visual aspects of these assaults is that they provide one of the chief motivations for straying from the relentless gray, white, and black color palate of the rest of the film. Though Crane specifies that the neck wounds created by the Horseman’s decapitations are “cauterized in the very instant,” there are a number of occasions when decapitations and other bodily assaults are depicted on screen as intensely bloody affairs, and Burton chooses the reddest of reds for his stage blood. Great gouts of it spurt across Crane’s face in several scenes, and Lady Van Tassel is similarly anointed, though she seems to enjoy it more. These scenes that are awash in red highlight those moments of bodily trauma, helping them to stand out as acts of violence different from the more action-oriented violence in other sequences in the film. For instance, when Brom Bones attacks the Horseman and Crane tries to help him, none of the large amount of blood in the scene, which is produced when the Horseman cuts Brom in half, is actually shown in color (it is only shown in silhouette), and the wound Crane receives from the Horseman is never seen to bleed at all. These
wounds and their blood are not directly a part of the scheme of vengeance being played out by Lady Van Tassel and the Horseman, and so there is no need to color code them in the same way as the rest of the decapitations and assaults.

The decapitations are also, as Ichabod and the audience discover, the ongoing manifestations of a previous trauma. In this way, the Horseman’s nightly rides and grisly works are actually the abreacted symptoms of some earlier traumatic event. His rampage is not the cause of traumatic abreaction, but rather the result of it. What does cause abreaction in the characters tends to be the dismemberment of the family based on accusations of witchcraft, and those accusations always fall upon women. As Crane quickly begins to realize once he comes to terms with the reality of the ghost, there is actually a human agent controlling the Headless Horseman for some evil end. For most of the film, Crane is uncertain who this person is, though he is quite certain that someone is controlling the Horseman and that no one has anything to fear from it save those whom the obscure agent wishes to see dead. In the aftermath of the scene in the village church, in which Doctor Lancaster, Reverend Steenwyck, and Baltus Van Tassel are all killed (though only Van Tassel by the Horseman), Crane makes a false connection that leads him to believe Katrina Van Tassel is behind the murders in Sleepy Hollow. In many ways, this is the emotional low point of the film. It is the point at which the audience is closest to witnessing a re-enactment of the type of trauma that underlies the entire plot. When he sees the protective sigil (See Figures 2.1 and 2.2) — which he and Young Masbath have previously mistaken for “the evil eye” — drawn on the floor of the church at the same time that he sees the prostrate Katrina with the piece of chalk near her hand,
Constable Crane believes that his beloved Katrina is the witch who controls the Headless Horseman.

Figure 2.1: Katrina Van Tassel is responsible for drawing the magic seal

Figure: 2.2: The seal of protection against evil

“It was an evil spirit possessed you,” he says to her unconscious form later that night. He concludes that, for whatever reason, Katrina wanted her father and all the others dead. Here, Crane is “beaten down by [reason].” But this iron-clad chain of reasoning has seemingly destroyed the chance at love and family that seemed within reach for Ichabod and Katrina. Thus, an accusation of witchcraft, however unspoken, has dismembered another family in Sleepy Hollow, this time before the family even existed. Yet Crane cannot fulfill his duties as the investigating constable either. He burns his journal and
notes, because he cannot bring himself to openly accuse Katrina, regardless of the impossibility of prosecuting anyone, given the evidence. Crane prepares to leave Sleepy Hollow in professional and romantic defeat, and Katrina wakes to the most colorless world she has ever seen. We cannot help feeling that Katrina, unjustly accused of murderous witchcraft, may take to the black arts either to fulfill the accusations against her or to seek vengeance on those who made the accusations. It is not until Ichabod is leaving the village in a coach, and new evidence presents itself, that he realizes his mistake and concludes that Lady Van Tassel is the person at the core of the mystery.

Lady Van Tassel goes on her rampage because of what she sees as the betrayal of her family. She is memory made flesh as the human embodiment of revenge. In a departure from classic mystery conventions, Lady Van Tassel, and not Constable Crane, is the character who reveals the alternative history to Katrina and the audience simultaneously. As Katrina sulks over the recent losses of life and love, Lady Van Tassel appears. Katrina, believing her step-mother dead, faints. Lady Van Tassel takes the unconscious Katrina to a windmill where she begins the incantation that calls the Headless Horseman from his grave in the Tree of Death. As she does so, she explains to the now-conscious Katrina why she has commanded the Horseman to kill on her behalf. She was one of two daughters of the Archer family, poor farmers who rented a cottage and land from Peter Van Garrett. When her father died, Van Garrett evicted Mrs. Archer and her two daughters from the cottage and rented it to Baltus Van Tassel, his wife and “girl child” Katrina. Lady Van Tassel tells Katrina that the reason Van Garrett would not continue to rent to the Archers was that Mrs. Archer had been accused of witchcraft. Since the audience is given no other explanation, and since Lady Van Tassel and her
sister are manifestly talented in the arts of witchcraft, the audience can only assume that her assessment of Van Garrett’s motives is correct. In the film, we are to believe that the stain of the accusation of witchcraft in the 1760s or 1770s was significant enough to discourage Van Garrett’s compassion.

Lady Van Tassel continues her tale and relates how she and her sister happened upon the scene of the Hessian mercenary’s death in 1779. “When I saw him die I offered my soul to the devil if he would grant me my revenge.” However, simply killing Peter Van Garrett would not have satisfied her lust for revenge. Lady Van Tassel needed remuneration for her financial, filial, and personal losses. As she grows up and masters the arts of witchcraft so that she can control the Horseman’s ghost, she also ingratiates herself into the upper echelons of the Hollow’s society. She gains employment as a nurse for Baltus Van Tassel’s sick wife, and when the wife passes away, she marries Baltus and becomes Lady Van Tassel. She is now poised to reap the wealth that her own family could have enjoyed if they had been allowed to stay and prosper in the cottage on Van Garrett’s land. However, her plans are upset when the Widow Emily Winship manages to catch the eye of Peter Van Garrett, conceive a son by him, and affect a secret marriage to legitimize the baby. Now Van Garrett’s property would go to his new wife and their child upon his death, rather than to his closest living relative, Baltus Van Tassel. When Lady Van Tassel (Archer) learns of this secret marriage, she realizes that a double windfall is waiting for her. If she slaughters both the Van Garretts and the Van Tassels, she will not only get revenge for the perceived wrong done to her family by Peter Van
Garrett and the usurpation of her childhood home by the Van Tassels, but she will also legally inherit the fortunes of both families.10

The work of memory and trauma plays itself out in Katrina in different and far less traumatic terms. In fact, Katrina does not seem to be traumatized herself at all. Instead, she flirts with the traumas of romantic rejection and the accusation of witchcraft from Ichabod. However, she does have deeply buried memories that surface in ways that come closer to suggesting the uncanny if not trauma, and her memories form the crucial link, which will eventually help to save her from a life separated from and spurned by her new lover. Katrina’s memories are entirely bound up in the small and relatively passive part she plays in Lady Van Tassel’s multi-generational quest for revenge. After a brief conversation about books, magic, and the blood and marriage relations in Sleepy Hollow, Katrina invites Ichabod to see the ruins of the small cottage where she grew up. When they arrive at the ruins, we already know that the Van Tassels rented the cottage and land from Peter Van Garrett upon their arrival in Sleepy Hollow when Katrina was very small. This return to the past is a happy one for Katrina, since she is unaware that the current Lady Van Tassel, her step-mother, was once an Archer daughter, part of the family forced off this land when their father died and the mother was accused of witchcraft.

What Katrina does remember is that she received her first drawing lessons from her mother in front of the hearth of the cottage, one of the only remaining recognizable features in the ruins. As Katrina kneels does before the hearth, she grabs a stick and

10 This back story is similar to that of the 1944 film noir Double Indemnity (Dir. Billy Wilder), in which the audience is led to believe that Mrs. Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck) ingratiated herself to Mr. Dietrichson by serving as a nurse to his former wife, while actually administering the poison that would lead to the wife’s death. She then married Mr. Dietrichson and plotted – with insurance salesman Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) – her husband’s murder for his life insurance benefit.
begins to trace a spiral pattern in the ash. Ichabod sees this, connects it with the spirals his mother drew for him in his dream, and his “blood runs cold” (Walker/Stopard). This is a crucial moment in the film. Katrina blurs momentarily from eligible daughter into Ichabod’s mother while simultaneously reinforcing the perception that she is a witch. This sequence also emphasizes the matriarchal pedagogy of witchcraft. Ichabod’s mother introduced him to white magic, just as Katrina’s mother taught her, and just as the Archer daughters were presumably taught by their mother. Though this tradition gives women a certain amount of power, in as much as they maintain their own traditions and gain real power from the magic that they learn, it also marks them for later persecution by representatives of the patriarchy.

Unlike Katrina, Ichabod does have a trauma to face, and the “working-through” that he must endure is essential to his function as a supernatural detective in the film. Crane is able to solve this mystery only when he can address his own hysteria by seeing his dream through to its conclusion and confronting the horrible memory. Just as psychoanalysts, traditionally, must undergo psychotherapy before obtaining their license to practice, so too must Crane be both analyst and analysand before he can solve the mystery of who controls the Headless Horseman, save Katrina from murder, and prevent the continuation of the traumatic cycle of families torn asunder by the misguided accusation of witchcraft.

Ichabod’s trauma is revealed to both himself and the audience in a series of dream sequences inserted throughout the film. Each of these dreams occurs when the detective

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11 The spiral patterns are not merely a convenient visual device in Sleepy Hollow. Instead, they point beyond the film to Burton’s use of spirals in other his films, most notably in The Nightmare Before Christmas (1993) and Corpse Bride (2005).
faints. The dreams are similar, focusing on the relationships between Ichabod and his mother, as well as between his mother and father; each dream shows us more and more about what happened in Ichabod’s early childhood. They begin innocently enough, merely highlighting the playful and loving relationship between the young Ichabod (Sam Fior) and his mother (Lisa Marie) as they play and dance in their garden. In the second dream sequence, this dance in the garden culminates with Ichabod’s mother actually twirling into the air, high above his head. Ichabod now understands that his mother practiced witchcraft. However, in the context of the dream and of his repressed memory, it is also clear to Ichabod that his mother was a kind and loving woman, “an innocent, a child of nature.” Ichabod, the rational detective, realizes that he is, literally, the child of the supernatural.

The mother-son dyad is interrupted in each of the dreams by the arrival of Ichabod’s father (Peter Guinness), who is costumed as a dour, black-robed and powdered-wigged parson (See Figure 2.3). Ichabod’s father is always placed in a setting that emphasizes the stark moral contrast of black and white, whereas the scenes with Crane’s mother are usually rich in color (See Figure 2.9, for instance).

12 Crane does not dream every time he faints. Crane faints six times in the film vice three dreams.

13 Perhaps “innocently” is too strong a word. The first image we see of Ichabod’s mother has her playing Pickety Witch with him, just as Katrina did during Ichabod’s arrival in Sleepy Hollow, thus drawing a visual connection that helps to sexualize Ichabod’s memories of his mother.
In fact, despite the clear historical anachronism, Ichabod’s father and the mise-en-scene surrounding him are all designed to reference visually our notions of cold Puritan justice. Though the dream sequences in the film differ from the scenes written in the final Andrew Walker/Tom Stoppard shooting script, there are further indications in the screenplay that the audience is supposed to view Ichabod’s father as an exponent of the type of Puritanism responsible for the Salem witch trials. In the second dream sequence in the script, three men in dark clothes drag Ichabod’s mother away from their home as his father looks on impassively. Ichabod looks down from his bedroom window as his mother is shoved into a waiting coach. One of the men looks up at Ichabod, and the script describes this “Third Man” as “a Cotton Mather-ish man with a villainous face” (Walker/Stoppard). Walker, Stoppard, and Burton want the audience to understand that Ichabod’s father has turned his own wife over to the Courts of Oyer and Terminer. Far from the characterization of Cotton Mather in Irving’s original tale — the source of pleasurable tales complete with Gothic frissons — the Puritan fathers in this Sleepy Hollow are cause for horror and shame.
When Ichabod’s mother beckons the young boy to the hearth, where she burns fragrant flowers and begins to draw spirals in the ashes, Ichabod’s father catches the two of them. He is enraged that his wife would not only be practicing witchcraft, but also indoctrinating his son to it in the family home. We cannot help but think that only part of his indignation comes from his loathing of witchcraft, while the balance of it comes from a sense that learning witchcraft would likely feminize the boy. After throwing his wife to her knees and forcing her to pray for her soul, he drags her through the stark white chapel and through the red door. The red is a warning to Ichabod in his dream state, that blood lies beyond, but as a boy he obviously had no idea what was on the other side. In the third and final dream, Ichabod hears his mother’s voice beckoning to him from beyond the red door, and he ventures through it into his father’s torture chamber. Ichabod surveys the various devices uncomprehendingly until he spies the iron maiden and his mother’s dead wide eyes within. This revelation causes him to shrink back and onto a spiked chair, where the grid pattern of puncture wounds is impressed into his flesh (See Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4: Young Ichabod’s terror is literally imprinted on his flesh
This is Ichabod’s traumatic moment, in which he sees his mother’s corpse burst from the iron maiden on a wave of blood (See Figure 2.5). He was previously aware that his mother’s actions had angered his father, but now he is fully aware that his mother was, “murdered to save her soul! By a Bible-Black tyrant behind a mask of righteousness.” In the mechanics of hysteria as outlined by Freud and Breuer, an excess of emotion brought on by some traumatic event acts to repress the memory of that event while simultaneously transferring the excess emotional energy into a repetitive, hysterical behavior. This abreacted behavior becomes the evidence, for the psychoanalyst, that some hidden trauma exists as the root of the repetition. For Ichabod, the trauma was the discovery of his mother’s corpse within the confines of the iron maiden and the realization that his parson father was responsible for her death. The sheer horror of the discovery caused him to reel back and catch himself on a spiked chair in the torture chamber. This chair left a curious pattern of puncture scars on his hands, but the repression of the discovery made the origin of the marks a mystery to him. The scars, in effect, act as a constant visual reminder of the trauma he has forgotten as an adult, but
they do not constitute the main abreaction. Instead, Ichabod’s repetitive behavior comes in the form of empty rationalization.

When Ichabod awakes from his third dream, the curious scars on his hand are once again bleeding (See Figure 2.6). Certainly, the suggestion of stigmata is strong.

Figure 2.6: Remembering his trauma opens Crane’s old wounds

However, just as significant is the final stage of the psychoanalytic treatment for trauma. As the analyst helps the patient to uncover layers of repressed memories concerning the traumatic event, the goal is to encourage the patient to re-experience the event but from a sufficient distance to allow the patient to effectively dissipate what was originally an excessive amount of emotion. Confronting the original experience without the excess of emotion is supposed to allow the patient to incorporate the memory in a healthy way, ending the traumatic abreactive symptoms. Ichabod tells Katrina about the memories his dreams have brought back to him. He says of the realization that his father murdered his mother, “I was seven when I lost my faith.” We may be inclined to think that Ichabod is referencing the organized religion of his father, which led to the persecution and murder of his mother. However, it also seems clear that Ichabod repressed his connection to his mother’s “innocent” and “natural” faith in a kind of white magic. This separation from
both the patriarchal Puritan faith and the matriarchal magical practice left Ichabod alone with his thoughts as the only safe place to grow up. It is hardly surprising, then, that he grew up to be a detective constable, applying deduction and scientific techniques to the apprehension of criminals. But in the world of *Sleepy Hollow*, a world where the supernatural does exist but acts within the bounds of cause and effect, the detective who hopes to effectively confront the supernatural cannot do so with rationality alone. He must be able to recognize and accept the existence of the supernatural, the very thing that Ichabod’s hysterical abreaction has prevented him from confronting.

2.4 The rational and the irrational collide

As long as Ichabod fails to truly accept the possibility of the supernatural, the conduct of his investigation is filled with a series of empty rationalizations. Even before Crane comes to Sleepy Hollow, it is clear to the audience that he is unable to convince his superiors in New York of the efficacy of his techniques. Over his protests, the High Constable refuses to allow Crane to examine the corpse Crane has pulled from the river. The High Constable views Crane’s proposed methods as fit only for “heathens.” Similarly, the Magistrate has little patience for Crane’s ideas either. Though he is the one who gives Crane the assignment to go to Sleepy Hollow and use his scientific techniques to “detect the murderer,” the audience gets the sense that the Magistrate has no faith in Crane’s ability to complete the assignment and simply views it as a way of getting Crane out of the way.

Shortly after Crane arrives in Sleepy Hollow, he and a group of village men gather around the body of Jonathan Masbath, whom the Headless Horseman killed on the
edge of the Western Wood. Here, Crane is able to showcase his scientific techniques and the investigative tools of his own design. However, he is often unable to communicate the reasons behind his techniques. Crane arrives after the others have gathered and immediately tries to assume a professional demeanor, but he has nothing to back it up. Crane inspects the scene:

ICHABOD: In headless corpse cases of this sort...the head is removed to prevent identification of the body.
BALTUS: But we know this is Jonathan Masbath...
ICHABOD: Exactly! So, why was the head removed?
BALTUS: Why?
ICHABOD: Precisely.
BALTUS: Precisely what?
ICHABOD: Right!

Ichabod tries to display his deductive prowess, but Van Tassel’s simple questions expose the vacuity of his logic. He is going through the motions — talking the talk — but he has no substantive narrative or theory to back up his observations. When Crane notes that Masbath’s body has been moved prior to Crane’s arrival on the scene, he admonishes Dr. Lancaster, “You must never move the body!” When Lancaster asks, why? Ichabod is momentarily flummoxed and then replies, without further elaboration, “Because!” Crane knows that his only authority in this matter is his statutory authority from New York, and he tries to hide the fact that the deductive foundations of his investigation are less than solid.

Constable Crane is not an utter incompetent, however. At the scene of Masbath’s murder, he does use a variety of his scientific techniques, along with keen observation, to ferret out accurate pieces of information. His chemical treatment indicates that the head was severed by “a powerful singular thrust,” which left no blood behind (See Figure 2.7).
Figure 2.7: Constable Crane uses science at a crime scene

He is able to track the strides of the Hessian’s horse to reconstruct the movement of murderer and victim. Finally, he uses his magnifying goggles to see that the neck wound is cauterized but free from blistering or scorching (See Figure 2.8).

Figure 2.8: Crane uses technology as a means of seeing

However, he fails to draw the correct conclusions from these clues, because he refuses to believe what the residents are telling him about the Headless Horseman. When Magistrate Phillipse hints that there have actually been five victims so far — five victims in four graves — Crane has all of the victims exhumed. He discovers a curious abdominal wound on the widow Winship’s body and takes her corpse into the village to perform an autopsy. Again Crane uses his unique instruments to conduct his
investigation, and again he is correct in the details but incorrect in his broader conclusions. He correctly discovers that Winship was pregnant (and that the abdominal wound was how the Horseman decapitated her unborn child), but instead of concluding that the Horseman is responsible, he announces, “we are dealing with a madman.” In *Sleepy Hollow*, Ichabod’s investigative techniques simply will not yield any results against the Headless Horseman until he accepts the supernatural as possible and confronts his own demons.

Immediately after the autopsy, Crane has his first dream when Brom’s impersonation of the Headless Horseman causes him to faint. This dream, in which he is only just beginning to recollect his own personal trauma, does little to improve the results of his investigation. The main effect of the dream is to bring Ichabod’s mother and the young Katrina closer together in Crane’s mind. His mother first appears to him in the dream playing the “Pickety Witch” game blindfolded in the garden, just as Ichabod first encountered Katrina in her father’s house (See Figure 2.9).

![Figure 2.9: Crane dreams of his mother playing “Pickety Witch”](image)

His mother’s alluring appearance is equally explainable as an unresolved oedipal fascination as well as a displacement of his newfound attraction to Katrina. Crane’s
dream is a powerful reversal of the normal workings of the uncanny. For Freud, the uncanny is the seeming reconfirmation of either primitive beliefs or infantile fixations that until that point have been successfully repressed. When Crane first enters the Van Tassel home and sees Katrina playing “Pickety Witch” with the other youths, he is not taken aback by anything other than her beauty. In fact, he remains calm and collected until Katrina unknowingly grabs him and kisses him. Crane does not register this as an uncanny moment. Instead, the dream he has of his mother playing “Pickety Witch” with his younger self confuses the sources of the uncanny. Lisa Marie’s portrayal of Crane’s mother – her costume and her languid expressions – foreground the oedipal uncanny reading, but the dream also lays the foundation for connections that Ichabod will not make until later. In the dream, Ichabod’s mother uses a twig to draw spirals and strange patterns in the ashes of the hearth (See Figure 2.10). After the dream, when Katrina takes Ichabod to the ruins of her childhood cottage (also the old Archer cottage), Katrina makes these same patterns in the ashes of that fireplace (See Figure 2.11).

Figure 2.10: Crane’s mother drew spirals in the hearth ash
Figure 2.11: Katrina knows the spirals, too

Figure 2.12: Crane is struck by the connection between Katrina and his mother

It is clear from the brief reaction shot that follows the shot of Katrina making designs in the hearth ashes that Ichabod is surprised by the coincidence that links Katrina so forcefully to his mother (See Figure 2.12). Crane makes the connection between Katrina’s memories and his own – he fully experiences the uncanny quality of the moment – but he is unable to see the significance of it as yet. He is only aware that his dream life is connecting with his waking life in unexpected ways, mirroring the way in which the supernatural is connecting with the natural in *Sleepy Hollow*.

Since Crane cannot yet accept the reality of the supernatural in his life, he continues to draw hasty and baseless conclusions. When Crane sees Magistrate Phillipse
leave a meeting of the town elders in great haste, he confronts him about his knowledge of the widow Winship’s secret pregnancy. Crane asks, “How did you know the widow was expecting a child?” When the Magistrate replies, “She told me,” he concludes, “Then I deduce you are the father.”14 Phillipse is not the father, of course, merely part of the conspiracy being waged against Baltus Van Tassel, but Crane is not prepared to recognize the larger scheme playing out beyond the details that he does see.

Immediately after this exchange, when Crane witnesses Phillipse’s death at the hands of the Headless Horseman, he is forced to cross the first threshold to becoming an effective supernatural detective. He must accept the evidence of his own eyes or go mad. This event, and the inevitable fainting that ensues, prompts his second dream. In this dream, Ichabod is awakened to the memory that his own mother had magical abilities, that the spirals she drew in the hearth were part of some arcane body of knowledge that spoke to her power as a woman. He is also aware that his mother’s practice of witchcraft angered his orthodox father, but as yet he has not touched the root of his own trauma. He wakes from this dream with a renewed enthusiasm for the investigation. Though Crane claims to have “faced [his] fears,” he has not quite faced all of them. He is now willing to accept the existence of the supernatural, and he believes that he can utilize the tools of logic and deduction, in conjunction with the pieces of “spectral evidence” that he will now countenance, to solve the mystery of the “murdering ghost.”

Constable Crane is now a true supernatural detective, applying rational investigative methods to supernatural mysteries. He and Young Masbath venture into the

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14 In the theatrical release, Phillipse simply replies, “I’m not the father.” However, in the screenplay, he says, “I hope your deductions serve you better in your contest against the Hessian. I am not the father” (Walker/Stoppard my emphasis).
Western Woods to seek out the Headless Horseman on his own ground. They eventually find the Witch of the Western Woods’ cave, and Crane consults her about the Horseman. In this scene, Crane, though visibly terrified of the crone, views her as a viable source of information. She invites him to sit, while she chains herself to her seat and invokes “the Other,” a spirit for whom she acts as medium. When the Other comes, it provides clear information on the location of the Horseman. “You seek the warrior bathed in blood...the Headless Horseman...Follow the Indian trail to where the sun dies. Follow to the Tree of the Dead ...Climb down to the Horseman's resting place.” Though unnerved by the source of the information, Crane does not question its credibility; he readily accepts the Other’s information and acts on it. He hastily leaves the cave and tells Masbath what he learned. They follow the Indian trail and, after encountering Katrina on the way, arrive at the Tree of the Dead.

Crane’s deductive powers are already at work on the clues given by the Other. When Masbath tentatively interprets “Horseman’s resting place” to mean his camp, Crane suggests that it probably means his grave. When the three of them arrive at the tree, Crane is in full form as a detective at a crime scene (See Figure 2.13).

Figure 2.13: Ichabod, Katrina, and Young Masbath in front of the Tree of the Dead
He inspects the tree closely and finds that instead of sap, it oozes blood. He retrieves a hatchet from his horse, tells the others to stand back, and begins hacking away at the tree. The metonymic moment embodied here does not become clear until the mystery fully unfolds. Crane has come to the enchanted forest where he has uncovered a family tree (the Archers, the Van Garretts, the Van Tassels, etc.) twisted beyond recognition such that the tree itself has become bloody. Crane hacks away at that tree until he ultimately discovers the truth. In the scene, however, all that Crane discovers in the tree is the Horseman’s stash of severed heads. This discovery leads Ichabod to conclude that the tree itself is a portal to another world. This portal is very much the uncanny portal of the womb. It is the doorway through which the castrated father/double figure comes and goes on his nightly rides. It is the repository of all the secrets of the intertwined families in the village. Crane inspects a small rise of ground at the base of the tree and sees that the earth has been recently turned there. He gets his shovel and uncovers the Hessian’s grave, minus the head. These two discoveries are all Crane needs to develop a working theory of the Headless Horseman. The Horseman returns from the grave to take heads, but he does not take heads randomly. Whoever stole his skull from his grave has the power to control the Horseman until the skull is returned. Crane now feels as though he is back in recognizable territory; though the Horseman is real, the true root of the murders is a mortal criminal.

Before leaving the Tree of the Dead, Crane, Katrina, and Masbath witness the Horseman erupting from the base of the tree as it rides toward the village in search of more heads. Though the Horseman has been coded as Crane’s father in other scenes (most notably in the dream sequences), here the Hessian is more accurately seen as a
double for Crane himself (albeit a double very much like his father). In this scene, the Hessian is the outsider, who springs from the mysterious womb to go forth and enter into the bucolic confines of Sleepy Hollow, from one womb into another “lap.” Crane must get this murderous shadow self under control, or it may very well lead to Katrina’s death. Crane gives chase, but he is unable to prevent the murder of the Killian family and Brom Bones. In the fight between Brom and the Horseman, Ichabod is wounded. As he recovers in the Van Tassel house, Katrina brews a sleeping potion for him, and while he sleeps he has his third and final dream. In this dream, Ichabod finally becomes fully aware of the memories he has repressed for so long. He remembers that his father was not simply upset with his mother’s magical arts; he had her tortured and killed because of them. Crane’s experiences in Sleepy Hollow, and especially with Katrina and the Witch of the Western Woods, convince him that there is such a thing as White Magic. He realizes that his mother was an innocent, a practitioner of these benevolent rites. He also realizes, in reference to his father, that, “villainy wears many masks, none so dangerous as the mask of virtue,” though he will use these words in reference to Katrina instead.

When Crane confronts his memories and realizes that his mother was very much the victim of the trauma we witnessed, he is able to separately evaluate the “faiths” of his parents. While his father is a “Bible-black tyrant behind a mask of righteousness,” his mother is an “innocent.” His mother’s faith of white witchcraft is no longer lumped together with the persecuting (and prosecuting) faith of his Puritan father, and he is able to accept the reality of the supernatural, which he previously considered to be either mere fantasy or superstition, as part of his world. He has been a supernatural detective since his second dream, but there is no guarantee that he will be a successful one. His ability to
accurately solve the mystery and identify the person who controls the Horseman.

necessitates the full realization of his mother’s innocence and his father’s guilt. He is
now equipped with the understanding he will need in order to seek out the person who,
like the Puritans in Salem, is suspected of harboring evil intent beneath an innocent mask.

Though Crane has all of the evidence he needs, he lacks the body of knowledge
that would help him put it together. In an attempt to trace the conspiracy to its root,
Crane spreads his notes around the floor of his room. In this scene, Ichabod is literally
surrounded by the fragmentary details of the case. As he lays out what he knows to
Young Masbath, he notes short phrases in his ledger. These are also fragmentary — he
writes them down as a brainstorming exercise — but when he is finished they read, “5 to
4 the secret conspiracy points to Baltus.” Aside from the comic irony of the scene, it also
highlights a sort of return to a previous phase in the narrative. For the first part of the
film, Ichabod struggles with the mystery of the Headless Horseman, but after witnessing
the death of Magistrate Phillipse and visiting the Tree of the Dead, the Headless
Horseman is no longer the mystery. As an investigator, Ichabod must incorporate what
little he knows about the supernatural to discover who is using the Hessian to carry out
the crimes. Crane’s obliviousness to the gist of what he writes in his own journal
references the empty rationalizations he makes in the early parts of the film. “We must
proceed by the process of elimination,” he tells Masbath, “I feel we’re getting very
close.” Of course, for the entire duration of the narrative, Lady Van Tassel has also been
proceeding by a process of elimination, and she is far closer to achieving her ultimate
goal than Crane is of reaching his.
Constable Crane at first fails to make the connection between the Archers, Lady Van Tassel, and the conspiracy. When the bottom falls out of his theory that Baltus Van Tassel is behind the plot — and this occurs when the Horseman beheads Baltus — an unwelcome alternative offers itself. When Katrina witnesses the gruesome death of her father in the church, she faints. As Ichabod turns away from the grisly scene outside, he sees Katrina, the small piece of red chalk near her hand, and the same elaborate magical sigil that he and Masbath found scrawled beneath his bed. Masbath at first incorrectly identifies the symbol as the “evil eye,” indicating that someone is plotting against Crane and his investigation. When it becomes clear that Katrina is the one who drew the symbol, Crane incorrectly concludes that Katrina drew the symbol in the church to bring the Horseman there to kill her father. Crane’s investigation grinds to a halt; confronted with what he believes to be incontrovertible “evidence” that Katrina is the one responsible for all the deaths in Sleepy Hollow and simultaneously mindful of his love for her, he burns all of his notebooks and prepares to leave the village.

This is a crucial moment in the working through of Ichabod’s trauma. He has already confronted his memories, dealt with his own trauma, and become a supernatural detective. However, he has not healed the trauma that is destroying Sleepy Hollow. In fact, his silent accusation of Katrina is a moment in which he re-inscribes his father’s guilt, just as it re-inscribes the accusations of witchcraft that embittered Lady Van Tassel against the villagers two decades before. Not only has Ichabod failed to heal the village’s trauma, he has unwittingly reproduced it. By refusing to fulfill his duty as a constable (to arrest Katrina), he has spared Katrina his mother’s fate, but his mistake could embitter
her just as it did her stepmother. Katrina has clearly been schooled in the ways of magic, just as Lady Van Tassel was. The cycle of violence could easily continue.

Because Ichabod has virtually no real understanding of witchcraft — white or black — he is unable to read the writing on the floor correctly. This deficiency is particularly acute for the reluctant supernatural detective, the investigator who transitions from disbelief to knowledge during the course of the narrative. Hesselius, Van Helsing, Low, Silence, and de Grandin would never make such a mistake, because their occult education is the equivalent of Sherlock Holmes’s profound intimacy with the criminal underworld of Victorian London. Crane does have the knowledge he needs in book form, and when he is leaving the village by coach, he discovers two more details that shift everything he knows into sharp focus. The first is the headless body of a woman who is supposed to be Lady Van Tassel. While passing by the doctor’s office, Crane sees two men moving her corpse into the office. At first he doesn’t realize what he is seeing, but his mind works on it as the coach continues. The second discovery comes when he opens Katrina’s gift to him, a book entitled Spells, Charms, and Devices of the Spirit World. He quickly comes across a page that bears the “evil eye” symbol Katrina had twice drawn (See Figure 2.14),
Crane discovers his mistake, but the chapter title reads, “For The Protection of A Loved One Against Evil Spirits.” Crane immediately returns to the village to confirm his new conjecture. He examines Lady Van Tassel’s body and discovers that it is the body of an impostor, which finally points the wavering finger of suspicion directly at Lady Van Tassel herself.

Crane’s discovery, cross cut with the scene in which Lady Van Tassel offers Katrina the narrative of her motivations and plot, leads directly into the extended chase sequence that culminates at the Tree of the Dead. In a film in which whole families are destroyed and torn apart, this scene is remarkable in that the resolution of the village’s trauma creates two new (very different) families. On the one hand, when Crane returns the Headless Horseman’s skull, the dark marriage between Lady Van Tassel and the Hessian in finally consummated with a bloody kiss, much to her horror. On the other hand, Ichabod, Katrina, and Masbath are all that remains of the main Sleepy Hollow families presented in the film. “Process of elimination” does not automatically make a family, of course, but the love between Ichabod and Katrina, and the loyalty of Young

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15 This is the fulfillment of the Phyllis Dietrichson-Walter Neff dyad in the film; the nightmare steed Daredevil is the train that, “they've got to ride all the way to the end of the line, and it's a one-way trip, and the last stop is the cemetery.” (Double Indemnity)
Masbath (who we can easily see in a future Watsonian role), make it even less of a surprise that all three return to New York together.

This may seem in some ways like a happy ending, but David Arnold helps point out how the judgment that the audience comes to about the final state of affairs in the film may not be particularly progressive or millennial. In “Fearful Pleasures, or ‘I am Twice the Man’: The Re-Gendering of Ichabod Crane,” Arnold concludes that the Dutch matriarchy described in Irving’s original tale is a subtly revolutionary construct; the wives, effectively employing Brom Bones’ muscle, can protect the village against any outside schoolmaster/invader. However, Arnold further concludes that Burton’s film turns this into something of a counterrevolutionary tale. “Depp’s Crane, though much warmer and cuddlier [than Irving’s character], manages, probably unintentionally, to uproot the matriarchy and bring an end to the reign of legend and imagination in Sleepy Hollow” (38). This is true, to the extent that Arnold reads the events of the narrative within the village of Sleepy Hollow. However, as Ichabod, Katrina, and Masbath arrive in Manhattan, “just in time for a new century,” the film takes no position on the future course of Crane’s career. He may appear confident, but he certainly cannot come to the Burgomaster with the full details of his investigation. The millennial conflict presented at the beginning of the film — will justice continue in the medieval vein, or will it advance into the rational and scientific future? — is a false dilemma. It is not a question of one or the other in Sleepy Hollow but rather of the reconciliation between the two. To break utterly with the past is an act of repression; to continue unchanging is stagnation. Ichabod confronts his own traumatic memories in order to understand the roles that rationality and the supernatural play in his life. He is then able to use his abilities as a
supernatural detective to prevent Katrina from falling victim to that same trauma. Ichabod finally represents the balanced husband-father that his own father failed to be, while the white witch Katrina reaps the benefits of acceptance Crane’s mother never could.

2.5 “The millennium is upon us”

One can hardly miss the fact that Depp’s Constable Crane declares the impending millennium (of the nineteenth century) in 1799 at precisely the same time that Tim Burton’s theatrical audiences in 1999 are anticipating the coming third millennium. The broader argument I am making about supernatural detective film at the turn of the millennium is that these detectives are uncovering traumas that reference modern anxieties. *Sleepy Hollow* complicates this argument by presenting itself as a “period piece” set at the very end of the eighteenth century and the very beginning of the newly independent United States. Still, the anxieties that drive the events in *Sleepy Hollow* are reflective of wider anxieties in America in the 1990s. Specifically, the film foregrounds patriarchal fears about the power of feminine ways of knowing. Those concerns mirror reactions not only to the rise of powerful women in American society in the wake of second wave feminism, but also the rise of feminine alternatives to the traditionally masculine avenues of knowledge and influence.

Though many women did make inroads into the halls of patriarchal power throughout the 1980s and 1990s, women also began to branch out spiritually from the traditionally patriarchal judeo-christian faiths as another route to self-empowerment. One of the most influential of these new paths was Neo-paganism and more specifically
Witchcraft, or Wicca, a goddess-centered belief structure that emphasizes feminine agency and power in the form of the female practitioner, or witch. Neo-paganism does not have a particularly large body of practitioners in the United States compared to more traditional religions. Estimates place the number of adherents between 150,000 and 300,000 in 1999 (Berger 9). However, the geographically diffuse nature of the Neo-pagan community in the 1990s, in addition to its historical resonance within America, make it particularly well suited to achieving a cultural impact disproportionate to its numbers. According to Berger, the rise of new religions in the late-modern context is characterized by decreased reliance on geographically specific, face-to-face communities (67). Instead, new communications technologies like faxes, desktop publishing, and the internet make it possible for spatially distant imagined communities to flourish by claiming points of commonality in their identities rather than making themselves subservient to an orthodox hierarchical structure. The Neo-pagan community solidified itself and strove to flourish through the publication of newsletters, journals, and books, which could be shared and recommended using other modes of electronic communication. Much of this communicative material, in particular the books, are offered for commercial sale and wind up transiting the public sphere outside of the specific pathways between members of the “chosen community” of Neo-pagans. Throughout the 1990s, then, the “New Age” and “Alternative Religion” shelves in large-scale commercial book sellers like Barnes & Noble, Borders, and Waldenbooks gradually filled with more and more books dedicated to the subject of Wicca, witchcraft (both modern and historical), and feminist spiritual practice.

16 According to Helen Berger, roughly 20% - 30% of Neo-pagan practitioners are male (10).
In addition to the histories of witchcraft and the spiritual self-help books, witches found their way more and more into popular culture. Though witches have always been one of the mainstays of supernatural villainy, the 1990s witnessed a pronounced growth in the portrayal of young women coded as powerful both for their sexuality and for their magical gifts, in precisely the same way that Crane’s mother, Lady Van Tassel, and Katrina are. Films like *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987), *Practical Magic* (1998) and *The Coven* (1996) raised awareness of the (sometimes dangerously) empowered woman, while television seconded the characterization with series like *Charmed* (1998 – 2006) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997 – 2003). These public images of Neo-paganism have been fueled even more by the emergence of the Harry Potter phenomena in 1997. Far from the green-skinned, hook-nosed, cackling witch of fairy tales and Disney cartoons, the witch of the 1990s is young, attractive, and equally if not more powerful than the men around her.

The portrayal of women in *Sleepy Hollow* and their facility with Neo-pagan versions of feminine ways of knowing presents the context in which American anxieties about powerful women could play out. The film presents these anxieties in the way that it contrasts Lady Van Tassel’s murderous rise to power, as she seeks to eliminate all those men and women who stand between her and what she believes to be her rightful inheritance of wealth and property, with Katrina’s (and Crane’s mother’s) more peaceful and nurturing application of natural magic. Ichabod is taken aback by the manifestations of witchcraft that he witnesses, but this is a symptom of his own divided self that is eventually remedied by the end of the film. However, the film does not judge Lady Van Tassel because she uses witchcraft; that is not why she is a villain. Magic is simply the
means of her power, not its end, and it is the ends of characters in *Sleepy Hollow* that ultimately prove their undoing. Lady Van Tassel is a villain not because she is a witch, but because of the immoral tactics (murder, deception, seduction, etc.) she uses to satisfy her essentially corporate (and corporeal) greed. Constable Crane does not come to Sleepy Hollow to put an end to the matriarchy, as Arnold suggests in “Fearful Pleasures,” but rather by coming to Sleepy Hollow he brings an end to a stagnant and incestuous conception of feminine community and then opens the door to the wider community. Crane’s transformation into someone who bridges the worlds of masculine scientific progress and feminine natural magic allows him to carry out his duty to protect and to serve Katrina, though, in the end, part of that protection is to remove her from the village, since his protection comes at such a catastrophic cost to the insular community of Sleepy Hollow that remaining there becomes impossible.

As the title of Burton’s film suggests, the sense of place is an important part of both mysteries and ghost stories. Detectives like Constable Crane routinely move into, within, and out of spaces that have witnessed various kinds of traumas. In *Sleepy Hollow*, the entire village was such a place. As Diedrich Nickerbocker writes of it originally:

A drowsy, dreamy influence seems to hang over the land, and to pervade the very atmosphere. Some say that the place was bewitched by a high German doctor during the early days of the settlement; others, that an old Indian chief, the prophet or wizard of his tribe, held his powwows there before the country was discovered by Master Hendrick Hudson. Certain it is, the place still continues under the sway of some witching power that holds a spell over the minds of the good people, causing them to walk in a continual reverie. They are given to all kinds of marvelous beliefs, are subject to trances and visions, and frequently see strange sights, and hear music and voices in the air. The whole neighborhood abounds with local tales, haunted spots, and twilight superstitions; stars shoot and meteors
glare oftener across the valley than in any other part of the country, and
the nightmare, with her whole ninefold, seems to make it the favorite
scene of her gambols. (294)

Sleepy Hollow has either been bewitched by a German doctor, or it has attained its
supernatural quality from the gatherings of Native Americans on the soil before the
coming of the Dutch settlers. And Knickerbocker makes a special note of the fact that it
is the space that carries this power and not simply the people in it:

It is remarkable that the visionary propensity I have mentioned is not
confined to the native inhabitants of the valley, but is unconsciously
imbibed by everyone who resides there for a time. However wide awake
they may have been before they entered that sleepy region, they are sure,
in a little time, to inhale the witching influence of the air, and begin to
grow imaginative — to dream dreams and see apparitions. (295)

The fantastical influence in Sleepy Hollow is something in the very “atmosphere,” which
can be “imbibed” by any visitor who spends some amount of time there. Something from
Sleepy Hollow’s past remains in the place, not apparent but definitely there, to influence
those who live there in the present in strange ways.

In many mysteries, the narrative space in question is often referred to as the
“crime scene.” Though this term literally refers to the setting of the crime, we can also
fruitfully interpret “scene” in its dramatic and narrative sense as both the place and the
events that take place within it through time (i.e., scene in the dramatic sense). This
merging of time and space is at the core of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theoretical construct of the
chronotope (i.e., narrative time-space), and in the next chapter I show how places can be
traumatized and then depicted as the quintessential space of the supernatural genre, the
haunted house.
CHAPTER 3

THE CHRONOTOPE OF THE TRAUMATIZED SPACE

3.1 Scarred spaces

In America, we have all seen it, either on television, in films, or perhaps in real life: the plastic yellow tape with black letters that read: **POLICE LINE: DO NOT CROSS**. Whether sealing doorways or strung between posts outside, police tape indicates to us that crime scenes are potentially ubiquitous. It can spring up anywhere, but when it does, we regard the location in a new way. Instead of simply being part of the fluid space of our surroundings as we move through our day, the cordoned area becomes a space in which something happened, and the tape, quite literally, becomes the boundary between that place of trauma and the outside world. The danger is past, the tape implies, and the bad place, the place marked or haunted in some way by the events that took place there, is clearly delineated and set apart; it is contained.

The cringing curiosity that often impels us to look at a crime scene is similar to the reaction we have when confronted in fiction with a haunted house. The bad place seems to look back at us from across the unkempt lawn, its sagging porch and boarded up windows telling us to keep out, even if there are no signs posted to that effect. The haunted house needs no bright yellow barrier to indicate its boundaries; urban legend and
neighborhood gossip set it apart as easily as any physical marker. And yet we tend to be just as curious about what has happened behind those boarded up windows as we are about what prompted the police to set up their tape.

The classic detective, either conventional or supernatural, quite often focuses his or her attention on the physical clues available in a discrete space. In this chapter, I look at the processes of traumatic and hysterical abreaction beyond the individual but still in a localized space, specifically the domestic space of the home. Settings or locations can also be traumatized, and therefore analyzed, in ways that are analogous to individual characters. Locations in narratives can display the effects of trauma in many different ways; that is, many kinds of events can spur the mechanisms of trauma. They are, in fact, the same kinds of events that are apt to invoke traumatic responses in people. Three spaces that often seem to be traumatized in narrative are battlefields, crime scenes, and houses where the dead do not rest in peace. In each of these spaces, events that seem to be in the past repeatedly and insistently make themselves known in obscure ways to people or characters that come to inhabit them long after the traumatic events.17

However, rather than ascribing a specific psychology to physical spaces, I posit that the complex intersections of time and space in narrative — intersections that Mikhail Bakhtin called chronotopes — function in ways similar to character psychology. Bakhtin did not address crime scenes or haunted houses in his work on the chronotope, so I am proposing a new one, the chronotope of the traumatized space, to account for them. The

17 I will not deal at great length with specific battlefields in the present project, though the battlefields of the American Revolution and the Civil War (and arguably the sites associated with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, especially the World Trade Center in New York City) offer enticing examples of traumatized American ground. In Chapter 4, I spend more time discussing how the continental United States might be seen as haunted by the trauma of the displacement and decimation of Native Americans.
crime scene or the haunted house is a space which has “witnessed” some traumatic event (usually a murder or disappearance). This event becomes obscured or repressed from the known or accepted narrative of history (whether familial or local or even national), but the event is so intense that it cannot be completely obscured; it must out. The somatic symptoms of hysteria or traumatic neuroses are here analogized evidence or clues in the case of the mystery and as supernatural manifestations in the case of the haunted house story. Ghostly apparitions, disembodied voices, objects moving on their own — these are all indications of the event that has been too terrible to speak or to know. However, just as analysts can use various techniques in attempts to uncover the repressed memories of traumatic experience, so too can characters attempt to discover the unremembered stories of tragedies that happen in the drawing rooms and haunted houses of print and screen.

In what follows, I will illustrate the concept of the traumatized space using Shirley Jackson’s 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House*, as well as the several films adapted directly from it or inspired by it: *The Haunting* (Robert Wise 1963), *The Haunting* (Jan de Bont 1999), and Stephen King’s *Rose Red* (Craig R. Baxley 2002). *Hill House* is arguably the single most influential haunted house narrative of the past fifty years. However, most critical attention and exegesis focuses on Eleanor Vance as the protagonist of the novel, and rightly so, since her perspective is the only one to which the narrative gives us consistent access. But as a haunted house story, the novel is also about one investigator, who gathers together three assistants to aid him in his investigation of a genuinely haunted house. Dr. Montague is a critically neglected main character, and it is on him and on his role as a supernatural detective that I will focus.
I argue that Dr. Montague (and the variously named versions of his character in the film adaptations), as a supernatural detective, repeatedly attempts to uncover the hidden explanation within Hill House. His failure to do so, at the cost of Eleanor Vance’s life, is an illustration of the obscuring power of a traumatic event. That is, when Eleanor dies at the end of the novel, the narrator leaves no indication that Eleanor remains behind to haunt the house; Eleanor’s death is simply absorbed into the legend of Hill House. I will also argue that Montague’s investigation of Hill House, the fictional house with its fictional history, repeatedly references two actual (allegedly) haunted houses: Borley Rectory in England and Ballechin House in Scotland. These houses, both fictional and real, are bound up in the scientific arguments over whether or not the hauntings are/were real and whether or not they are/were the proper subject of scientific inquiry. At the turn of the twentieth century, science was split over whether or not ghosts and haunted houses were the proper subject of scientific research. In the early twenty-first century, we claim to be relatively certain that the discourse of haunting (whether couched in Gothic or scientific terms) belongs solely to the province of entertainment. Whereas the turn of the century house was haunted by the repressed traumas of family secrets (murder, adultery, madness, etc.), the turn of the millennium house is also haunted by repressed traumas in the form of threats to mainstream science. What haunts turn-of-the-millennium haunted house tales, therefore, is not the ghost but the researcher. I argue that Shirley Jackson’s novel effectively obscured the psychical researcher from public esteem and set the course for haunted house tales that would come after it, but that few of these stories ever stray very far from where they began in public accounts of scientific investigations into actual haunted houses. These haunted house stories carry with them a documentary impulse
that continually seeks to reveal itself, an attempt to return to the recording and cataloging of paranormal phenomena. Most studies of *The Haunting of Hill House* focus on the gender politics inherent in Eleanor’s situation, desires, and actions. This focus on Eleanor obscures an equally allegorical relationship in the novel, that between the psychical investigator Dr. Montague and his spiritualist wife. This marriage mirrors the historical relationship between psychical researchers and the psychic mediums, whose connection to the Society for Psychical Research always proved to be a double-edged sword. The trauma at the core of this legacy is the threat to the scientific establishment posed by what, for decades, many considered a highly credible challenge in the form of psychical research. It is not merely hidden crimes that are uncovered in the course of these tales, but the forgotten possibility that our confidence in accepted scientific discourse is misguided.

3.2 Crime scenes and haunted houses

Whether the story we watch or read is a mystery or a haunted house tale, the traumatic events that start everything in motion are quite often criminal in nature. The crime scene, then, and its associated generic form, the mystery, are where we begin. For the patterns of mystery fiction, we can look at least as far back as Oedipus, and the disembodied spirits of the dead appear in scripture and epics from even earlier periods. Yet while the roots of these genres extend well into the past, mystery fiction and ghost stories, as we have come to know them, both originate in the mid-1800s. Edgar Allan Poe published “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” in 1841, inaugurating the sub-genre that would be refined into the classic locked room mystery. In 1869, Edward Bulwer-Lytton
published “The Haunted and the Haunters,” which has come to be recognized as the first haunted house tale. Both of these tales and their numerous progeny focus considerable attention on the issue of space and on the resonance these spaces have for those who inhabit them, though the mystery story and the ghost story deal with these spaces in different ways. In the detective story, and particularly in the locked room mystery, the discrete space acts as the arena of analysis, bounding the unknown so that the consulting detective can arrange what appear to be incongruous facts and details into a coherent and surprising explanation of what has occurred within the space. The ghost story has the opposite effect. The walls of the haunted house form the boundary outside of which the rational and mundane world still operate much as we believe they ought, while inside the accepted laws of science, nature, and time are suspended. Since the time when Poe worked so hard to separate the thematic concerns of these sub-genres, ghost stories and detective stories have more or less maintained their separation in these terms in Anglo-American fiction. Rational explanations for hauntings tend to disappoint ghost story audiences, and supernatural solutions are generally anathema to the detective story.

The broad outlines of the detective or mystery genre are very familiar to us all. In the classic mystery story, the most fundamental thing that must happen in the beginning of the narrative is the presentation of the mystery. This is the component that is absolutely necessary for a number of reasons. First, the presentation of the mystery is one of the structural elements of the detective genre that advertises the narrative’s genre to the audience. A given set of characters may arrange themselves in any number of generic relationships, even though they may suggest a much narrower selection of generic possibilities. An actual detective character (whether a consulting detective, like
Sherlock Holmes, or a police detective) certainly suggests the possibility of the mystery genre, but sometimes, we might say, a detective is just a detective. In order for a narrative to fit into the detective or mystery genre, one of the characters (regardless of nominal occupation) must fulfill the diegetic narrative functions of a detective. However, in order for anyone to fulfill those functions, they must first be presented with a mystery to be solved. It is the presentation of this mystery that signals beyond doubt that the audience is being asked to employ their understanding of the genre. The appearance of the body (classically, in the drawing room) offers up a cryptic answer to the question, what happened? but simultaneously poses the question, who done it? This, of course, is the question that comes to define the mystery story for popular audiences. There are variations over the years and over the course of any number of different mystery sub-genres. *How* was it done? *Where* was it done? *When* was it done? *Why* was it done? Was anything done at all? All of these questions have been the central question of fictional mysteries at one time or another.

Mystery narratives are often cited as the most rationalist and linear of fictional narratives. The plots most often progress from the discovery of the mystery, through the conduct of the investigation, to the ultimate solution of the mystery. This standard plot structure lays out an easily identifiable beginning, middle, and end to the classic mystery story, but it is a deceptively simple description of what happens in such a narrative. The progression from beginning to middle to end is indeed necessary for the unfolding of the suspense component of the detective story, but that standard progression hides more complicated temporal work.
Imagine a standard detective narrative. There is a murder victim (a corpse), a detective, and everyone else (and in some cases, everyone) are suspects in the crime. Some living character discovers the corpse and reports this discovery to others (usually the police, but not always). The detective arrives on the scene shortly thereafter (unless the detective was the discoverer of the body) and agrees to undertake the investigation. What we have in this situation is the eruption of the incongruous into the normal flow of everyday life. One should not find corpses in drawing rooms, and so the discovery of one seems to halt the flow of normal everyday time and imposes mystery time, which as we will see is largely recursive. In a very real sense, the “suspension” inferred by the term suspense is the halting of the normal flow of everyday time until the paramount question (who done it?) has been answered by the detective. Eventually, the detective will have found enough clues to determine who caused the corpse to be in the drawing room in the first place, thus allowing justice to take its course, leading the way for the resumption of everyday time.

However, the collection of clues, a process that is essentially done sequentially in the narrative, does not simply result in the appearance of the guilty person’s name. Material clues are incongruous physical manifestations in the flow of normal everyday time within a given space. The corpse is one such manifestation, though we should also understand that the corpse is actually a vast complex of individual, interrelated manifestations, all of which are available to be read by the trained observer (detective/reader). But material clues can be everywhere: furniture, footprints, personal belongings, sounds, odors, virtually anything an author can imagine. What each of these components does is to provide one piece in the construction of an alternate historical
The discovery of a corpse in the drawing room is a surprise, because the socially accepted historical timeline does not include either a murder or a murderer. Because the murderer is covert, the discovery of the body is a clear indication that the socially constructed historical timeline is incorrect or at least incomplete. Someone must offer a new historical timeline, one that preferably adheres to the demands of logic and realism, to explain the interruption in the heretofore accepted narrative. It is understood that the new timeline will include the finger of blame, but it is also understood that this finger of blame will likely only point to one or two individuals, who must in any case be excised from society in order for society to continue in safety. It is crucial that this alternate historical timeline is in itself a narrative, or it is the same narrative with slightly different components. In fact, one could even say that, after the murder and prior to the discovery of the guilty party, the accepted timeline is a narrative dominated by red herrings. Most everyone has accepted, without question, the innocence of the murderer, and this will ultimately turn out to be the incorrect interpretation of the available facts. This is the compulsion of the mystery genre. The discovery of the corpse in the drawing room has made it abundantly clear that the surviving members of the social circle are not safe. A murder has been committed where none was expected; there is no logical reason

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18 Except, of course, in the case of red herrings or false leads. Red herrings seem to reveal the historical flow of time, but they are ultimately incorrect — or the interpretation of them is incorrect. That is, red herrings are clues that lead nowhere in terms of the ultimate resolution of the mystery.

19 Note that the adversarial system of justice in the United States does essentially the same thing when it attempts to assign blame. Two opposing sides (i.e. prosecution and defense) use more or less the same set of evidence to construct two different narratives. In the prosecution’s narrative, the evidence is constructed in such a way that the defendant is clearly guilty. In the defense’s narrative, using a very similar set of evidence or a different set by discrediting the state’s evidence, the accused is guilty of nothing (or perhaps a crime of far lesser severity). A judge and/or jury sits as audience to these competing narratives and uses a variety of evaluative criteria to determine which narrative is more plausible. The most plausible narrative is then recorded as legal truth (pending appeal). For the ritual and social benefits of the detective genre, see Thomas Schatz, etc.
to believe that the murderer will stop. At the very least, as long as the murder remains at large, everyone will know that there is someone out there who has proven her- or himself capable of killing. The very underpinnings of civil society are compromised by this knowledge.

In order to find the correct interpretation of the available facts and thereby offer the murderer up to civil authorities, the detective must go back in narrative time. Tzvetan Todorov, in “The Typology of Detective Fiction,” explains, “At the base of the whodunit we find a duality, and it is this duality which will guide our description. This novel contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. In their purest form, these two stories have no point in common” (44). The story of the crime is the alternate history that must come to replace the commonly sanctioned narrative. However, Todorov also explains that the structuring of the detective story is also able to stand in for the structuring of all narrative:

But these definitions concern not only the two stories in detective fiction, but also two aspects of every literary work which the Russian Formalists isolated forty years ago. They distinguished, in fact, the fable (story [fabula]) from the subject (plot [szujet]) of a narrative: the story is what has happened in life, the plot is the way the author presents it to us. The first notion corresponds to the reality evoked, to events similar to those which take place in our lives; the second, to the book itself, to the narrative, to the literary devices the author employs. In the story, there is no inversion in time, actions follow their natural order; in the plot, the author can present results before their causes, the end before the beginning. (45)

In the detective story, clues, in their manifold forms, are individual examples of results presented “before their causes.” This process of uncovering the series of events that led up to the discovery of the crime is analogous to analyzing a patient suffering from hysteria or trauma. The detective stands in for the psychoanalyst, while the crime scene
and surrounding locales represent the analysand. Using a variety of techniques, the analyst/storyteller/detective collects and catalogs the symptoms of the neurosis (i.e., the clues). These clues make little sense as they are; they must be placed in the correct context, both spatially and temporally. Through deduction, induction, trial and error, and sometimes through intuition, the analyst/storyteller/detective arranges these details into the one narrative pattern that will bring the analysand/mystery face to face with the event it has been unable to represent to itself or anyone else, save for the investigator and the perpetrator.

A strikingly similar puzzle pattern is on display in the ghost story. The circumstances of the unsolved mystery story provide the context for the rise of the ghost story, not in terms of the development of sub-genres historically, but rather in terms of the *fabula* of these stories. A murder that goes unsolved leaves the survivors uneasy, and some might be inclined to say that the dead would not rest easy. If the living are unable to produce justice for those killed, then some stories posit that the spirits of the deceased may manifest in a quest for that justice. Long after the physical evidence and clues associated with a crime scene seem to have vanished, those clues may find themselves transformed into supernatural manifestations that are just as likely to point back into the past. When protagonists survive a ghost story, their survival is most often coincident with their “solution” to the mystery of what began the haunting in the first place.

Interpersonal trauma manifesting as the supernatural in fictional narratives can be seen as most often related to the particular genre of the ghost story, and especially the ghost story of the English variety by the likes of Edith Wharton and Henry James. However, an equally powerful and closely related genre is that of the haunted house
story. Not all stories containing ghosts are haunted house stories, just as not all haunted house stories feature ghosts. In the classic ghost story, the ghost as it appears in the tale is not strictly speaking tied to any particular space. It may haunt a particular area, or at least it will be said only to appear in that area, but it actually remains quite mobile. The appearance of the ghost is more strongly tied to other characters than it is to narrative space. This sort of haunting is best exemplified by Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw*. In this famous tale, the ghosts of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel appear to particular characters in the story, but the frame narratives are too convoluted to support a claim that the ghosts exist at Bly independent of the governess’s perception. Peter Quint and Miss Jessel do not occupy space in *The Turn of the Screw*; they occupy perspective. There is no third-person narrative claim that the ghosts exist or act within the space of Bly independent of the governess as perceiver. This uncertainty gives rise to the classic question of whether there are ghosts at Bly or whether it is simply a matter of the governess’ psychosis.

In *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction*, Dale Bailey argues persuasively that Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* is the co-ur-text for the American haunted house tale. Though Poe and Hawthorne embark upon their projects in markedly different ways, Bailey sees both canonical American authors as doing the same thing with the supernatural in their fiction, “Poe and Hawthorne displace the supernatural focus of the text from the figure of the ghost — the revenant spirit of a human being — to the house” (21). This displacement is crucial, as it completes the move away from the castle at the center of eighteenth century gothic fiction and so also completes the move away from the chronotope of the castle as
the primary constitutive or explanatory model for the genre of the ghost story or haunted house tale. The old gothic tales include haunted castles and the supernatural, but these things are not always explicitly linked. In fact, they are rarely linked. Bailey goes on to explain how *Seven Gables* further breaks the gothic tale from the European mode by eliminating the more exotic locales and confining the immediate setting to a single residential house rather than the more politically and militarily inflected European castle (23). The more obvious elements remain in these tales as they evolve. Though the castle is gone, there is still a need for a discrete space in which to carry out the plot of the narrative, and as Bailey suggests, the space is more than simply a stage; it also carries thematic value. This thematic value, in its broadest sense, is no longer concerned with the political and military connotations of the gothic castle. Instead, the new haunted house tales are concerned with the thematic resonance of the domestic space, the space of the nuclear family (23).

The haunted house tale can also be fruitfully read in terms of the psychoanalytic concepts of trauma and hysteria. The same mechanics that we see at work in *Sleepy Hollow* with regard to the collision of rationality and irrationality can be applied in the absence of human characters that we might identify as sufferers or carriers of the traumatic effect. In the haunted house narrative, as Bailey points out, it is not the ghosts that inhabit the house that have suffered the trauma (4); it is, in effect, the house itself that has born witness to the violent act. It is the house that suffers. It is the house that abreacts the excess emotional energy from witnessing the events within its walls. And the abreaction brings on the compulsion to repeat, the seriality of ghostly visitation, or the architectural-psycho-somatic behavior of a house like Hill House. Despite the fact that
critics readily identify the origins of both the detective and the haunted house story in the
gothic of the eighteenth century, few critics have written in depth on the profound
structural similarities in the way both genres utilize time and space in their narratives.
Though employed toward different ends, we shall see that the haunted house tale has
virtually the same treatment of narrative time-space as the detective mystery.

Bailey describes the differences between the American haunted house tale and
historically previous stories out of England by the likes of Henry James and Edith
Wharton:

The contemporary haunted house formula dispenses not only with ghosts, but with the ontological uncertainty — did anything spectral really happen? — at the heart of late-nineteenth century gothic fiction in the mode of James and Wharton. Instead, the formula opts for a flatly prosaic description of the supernatural in which the house itself is sentient and malign, independent of any ghosts which may be present (and very frequently none are). (4-5)

American authors generally do not indulge in the question of whether or not the
supernatural actually exists; instead, the irrational is given a “flatly prosaic” description.

Bailey’s outline of the characteristics (within the categories of setting, characters, plot,
and theme) of the American haunted house tale begins to get at the strong links with the
classic tale of detection. This formula focuses on, “a house…with an unsavory
history…an aristocratic name…” and which is “disturbed by supernatural events usually
related to human ghosts” (56). The people within the story include, “a middle-class
family or family surrogate, skeptical of the supernatural, who move into the
house…knowledgeable helpers who believe in the supernatural…” and “an oracular
observer who warns of danger” (56). The plot of the haunted house story follows a “dual
structure,” which includes, “an escalating series of supernatural events which isolates the
family physically and psychologically” and “the discovery of the provenance for those events.” This dual plot generally leads to one of two climaxes: “the escape of the family and the destruction of the house” or “the escape of the family and the continued existence of the house” followed by “a twist ending which establishes the recurring nature of evil” (56). Bailey’s list of common haunted house themes includes: “class and gender conflict… economic hardship…consequences of the past (especially unpunished crimes)...Manichean clash of good and evil...clash of scientific and supernatural world views...cyclical nature of evil” (56).

Bailey rightly acknowledges the dual structure of the haunted house narrative. The first part of that structure, “an escalating series of supernatural events which isolates the family physically and psychologically,” serves the same narrative purpose as an escalating series of investigative encounters, which isolates characters in a mystery by pointing Northrop Frye’s “wavering finger of suspicion” at anyone and everyone. In the haunted house tale, the family is physically isolated within the house. They are also psychologically isolated, because they are forced to countenance the events in their lives, even though no one else will. They are forced to believe, and this separates them from the rest of society. The thing that isolates characters in the mystery is whether or not they believe that seemingly incoherent data points (i.e. clues) can be used to re-impose a rational order and explain the heretofore unexplainable. The second part of the dual plot structure, “the discovery of the provenance for those [supernatural] events,” corresponds exactly with the discovery of the provenance of the various clues that appear during the investigation. In both cases, “provenance,” or origins become the most significant factor
in re-establishing rationality, and re-establishing rationality is the only chance the group has for responding to the eruption of irrationality in an effectively positive way.

It should be noted that my discussion of locked room mysteries and haunted house tales takes up only a portion of the genres we normally refer to as mysteries or ghost stories. There are a host of other sub-genres that pay less attention to the setting as a discrete space. For instance, the ghost stories of Edith Wharton and Henry James are much more concerned with the psychological aspects of haunting, and as such tend to feature portable or mobile hauntings. One cannot solve the problem by leaving the haunted house in such stories; the haunting will simply follow the character who attempts to leave. This is an example of characters being haunted by past events, and since the pattern of trauma I am using is actually developed for the psychology of humans, it should be no surprise that humans are more readily haunted than the houses they inhabit.

Likewise mysteries are not all of the locked room variety, especially in the late-twentieth century and into the twenty-first.\textsuperscript{20} Hardboiled detective stories and other kinds of mysteries are still structured around attempts (successful or not) to see rationality triumph over the irrational and the unknown, and it is normally the eruption of some kind of trauma that is at the heart of the mystery at the start of the narrative. The point with both mysteries and horror stories is that even in the absence of a discrete space, trauma still defines how and why the genres function the way they do; however, a finite space

\textsuperscript{20} Though rise in popularity of the television series \textit{CSI: Crime Scene Investigators} has rejuvenated the locked room mystery for an entirely new generation of television mystery viewers. The actual crime scenes are rarely in locked rooms, but the difficulty of determining what actually happened, and the total reliance on forensic evidence to determine what actually happened, acts as a reinstatement of the rational with a vengeance.
dramatically accentuates the ways in which these genres can function as a narrative hermeneutics of trauma.

3.3 The chronotope of the traumatized space

When we ask questions concerning the intersection of time and space in fiction, we ought to keep in mind Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope (or literally time-space) in the novel. In “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” Bakhtin begins to define the chronotope as, “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (84). Time, he writes, “takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible” while “space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history” (84). For Bakhtin, time in this formulation becomes indistinguishable from narrative movement, and we are able to describe a chronotope — though admittedly in somewhat crude terms — as constituting narratives that are largely inextricable from the spaces in which they occur. In fact, he writes, “It is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions” (85). The chronotope of the road, for instance, does not simply determine the narrative patterns of individual stories that take place along roads; by expanding from particular instances of road encounters to the general collection of all such narratives, it also defines the entire genre of road stories.

Bakhtin does not write explicitly about the sub-genre of mystery fiction, and though he does discuss the chronotope in Gothic fiction, his formulation is not applicable to the sub-genres under discussion here. He points out that the Gothic is dominated by the chronotope of the Castle, which represents the continuing eruption of history into the
present (245-46). However, this history is narrowly focused on the feudal history that
produced the space and its various emblematic furnishings. To be sure, Bakhtin is only
really concerned with the appearance of the castle as a narrative space in literature
beginning at the end of the seventeenth century and continuing into and beyond the
classic Gothic period in literature. The chronotope of the Castle becomes problematic
after Poe, since the narrowly defined historical time is abstracted in mystery and
supernatural fiction to mean “the past” more generally. Poe’s Dupin stories were set in
contemporary Paris, and the second-story crime scene located in the Rue Morgue is
certainly no castle. The significance of the past in those rooms extends no farther back
than the moments of the Orangutan’s deadly rampage. The story of the construction and
original use of the building and its rooms has no relevance to Poe’s tale of deduction.
Once the Gothic splits into mystery fiction, supernatural fiction, and possibly other
genres, the Castle no longer dominates the narrative time-space. When gothic heroines
are thrust into dilapidated castles by their captors, they are literally thrust inside a
metaphor for a kind of reactionary politics. Though the issue of politics is no less
important in America, the New World is historically devoid of structures that we could
rightly call castles. Even after four centuries of American development, the outlandishly
opulent mansions and estates of robber barons, oil magnates and Hollywood stars are still
only outsized family homes. The castle will always retain a significant political and
military valence, while the American house probably never will.

Most critics who use the chronotope in their work apply one of Bakhtin’s original
formulations to works of literature or film. However, a few have also attempted to
expand upon the original chronotopes to add new ones to our understanding of time-
space in narrative. Vivian Sobchak, for example, surveys the hotels, bars, and diners that are so ubiquitous in *film noir* to establish the chronotope of the transient space and its resonance for post-WWII Americans, who lived and worked amid an acute housing shortage. Michael Montgomery analyzes films marketed to teenagers in the 1980s and 1990s in the last chapter of his book, *Carnivals and Commonplaces: Bakhtin’s Chronotope, Cultural Studies, and Film*, and outlines the new chronotope of the shopping mall, where American adolescents learn to mediate the socio-economic demands placed on them at home and at school. These chronotopes serve cultural and narrative functions for which Bakhtin’s original chronotopes do not account.

I argue that the crime scene and the haunted house serve a related chronotopic function. I call this new chronotope the traumatized space. Though it is relatively easy to see that a crime scene and a haunted house are sites where a trauma has taken place, I also want to capture the sense in which trauma can be treated through directed analysis, that the space can, in effect, be healed. When a traumatic event occurs in a given space, the space has no memory of the event per se, but evidence of the event does remain. This evidence can come in the form of physical evidence — what is now more commonly referred to as forensic evidence — and it can come in the form of spectral evidence, or ghostly manifestations. Both types of evidence are analogs for the seemingly irrational symptoms reported in cases of hysterical and traumatic neuroses. A murdered corpse in a room locked from the inside and the apparition of a ghost in an abandoned house are signs of past events against which the rational mind rebels. The causal chains that explain their existences are obscure.
From here, we can begin to trace a general definition of the chronotope of the traumatized space. First, it is characterized by a discrete location, in which a traumatic event (usually a murder or disappearance) has occurred under mysterious circumstances. These traumatized spaces, though seemingly infused with irrational events and evidence, exist within a world that is ultimately logical in its adherence to causal relations, though causal relations may or may not follow widely accepted scientific laws. The narratives that contain this chronotope center on this location and describe a dual movement in time. On the one hand, there is a more or less linear movement from the discovery of the mystery, through the investigation, to the final resolution of the mystery. However, at the same time, the progress of the investigation will reveal a preceding chain of events that led up to the instigating murder or disappearance. This dual temporal movement — which, in keeping with Bakhtin’s description of other chronotopes, I call trauma time — is a generally recognized narratological characteristic of the larger sub-genre of detective stories, but this dual movement also informs the ghost story.

We can see the chronotope of the traumatized space working in just about any detective story we choose. In Poe’s “Rue Morgue,” the physical location of the room where the bodies are found, the condition of the various items in that room, and the fact that the only imaginable mode of human ingress and egress was locked all combine to make it virtually impossible to understand how the killings took place. The traumatic event has come and gone (i.e., been repressed due to the fact the no human witnesses of the event are left alive), leaving behind only the most obscure and unintelligible signs in its wake. Of course, Dupin makes short work of the seeming impossibility of the mystery by examining all of the clues present in the room (the money left behind, the orange tuft
of coarse hair, the body of a fully grown woman stuffed up a chimney, another nearly
decapitated with one cut from a sharp blade), the clues regarding the room itself (the
inaccessibility of the window from the courtyard, the locked door), and the clues present
in the experiences of those “witnesses” who were nearby but not actually present in the
room (the famous collection of witnesses, who all agree that there was someone speaking
a foreign language in the room during the altercation, though none could agree on which
language it was). Though the auditory witnesses all claim that it was a “foreigner” that
murdered the two women, Dupin’s arrangement of the evidence leads inescapably to the
conclusion that it was only an ourang-outang that could have scaled the courtyard wall to
the window, brutally slaughtered the women (leaving behind a tuft of its own hair in the
melee), and then escaped back out the window. Dupin has catalogued the evidence
remaining in and around the traumatized space, just as a psychoanalyst would gather
information about the analysand. Through a series of analytical probes, he peels away
the layers of mystery, discarding red herrings along the way to arrive at the event that
marked the locked room in such a peculiar and gruesome fashion. This trauma is an
example of one where not even the perpetrator can speak the crime. The deaths of the
victims and the non-lingual nature of the killer mean that the event is absolutely
unrepresentable by those who experienced it. However, Dupin is able to adequately
reconstruct the past event that took place within that space, and that reconstruction gives
voice where otherwise there would be none.

The traumatized space is just as easy to find in the haunted house tale. In
America, the haunted house is a house that has witnessed some kind of trauma in its past.
Quite often, this trauma is a murder that has gone unsolved and unpunished since it was
committed. In *The Changeling* (1980), a wealthy industrialist drowns his feeble son in the bathtub and then disposes of his body in a well on another property; in this case, both the site of the murder and the house built atop the former well are haunted. In *Stir of Echoes* (1999), a pair of boys sexually assault and murder a developmentally disabled girl in the living room of a house undergoing renovation and then brick her body into the basement wall. In some cases, the trauma concerns the creation of the house itself. One such case is Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables*, in which the eponymous house is built upon land that was stolen from its rightful owner. In the later sequels to *The Amityville Horror*, the house is haunted because they are built upon sacred Native American land. This is a particularly popular back story during the 1970s in America, and, as Renée L. Berglund points out when writing about Stephen King’s *Pet Sematary*, this is likely because of the rising profile of the American Indian Movement during that decade (165-66). Not only do these back stories gesture toward the physical displacement of Native Americans from the lands that would eventually be claimed by white settlers, but they also implicitly remind us that the Native Americans were slaughtered by the onward push of Manifest Destiny. It is racial decimation rather than an individual murder that underlines the haunted house stories and films with sacred Indian burial grounds. In this way, Stephen King and others are compensating for the short-sightedness of Hawthorne’s critique. Whereas Hawthorne saw the problem in aristocratic Pyncheons stealing land from the working-class Mauls, King reminds us that all of the settlers were stealing land from the Native Americans. In a similar way, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is not only the story of a specific ghost — the spirit of the baby girl Sethe was forced to murder lest she and her family again be enslaved following her
escape from slavery — the novel is also the story of how the ghost of abducted Africans brought to North America as slaves haunts the descendants of those Africans down through the ages. Modern America, then, is not simply haunted by the tens or hundreds of thousands of people who have met violent ends within her borders; it is also haunted by the millions who have met their ends during the historical process of establishing those borders. One can be forgiven for beginning to imagine America as a haunted house writ large, a continental crime scene.

What happens when that place, however large or small, outlasts the human witnesses within it? If a husband is murdered in a house, and the surviving family members are later haunted by his ghost (or memory, or what have you), we can easily see that our notions of supernatural haunting are more than likely metaphors for the kind of psychological processes that the family is going through. However, how do we explain it — even in fiction — when the surviving family moves out, takes their pain and their story with them, and leaves the house empty? Some time later, the house is sold or rented to a new family, which remains unaware of the events that have taken place in the house. They move in and attempt to make the place their own, but their comfort is troubled by the first flickerings of a haunting. They have no sense of what might be behind these phenomena, and not until they seek out information about the history of the house do they begin to draw any kind of connections, however tentative, with the murder of the husband. If this new family did not suffer from the initial trauma of the murder of the husband, how can it rightly be said to be acting out the psychological symptoms of that trauma?
If the trauma of the murder is to survive from one set of inhabitants to the next, we must vest the trauma in the space itself (in addition to the psyches of the first family and any additional inhabitants that will eventually experience the symptoms) rather than solely in the psyches of the humans who have lived there. In this way, houses and other buildings or spaces can be said to suffer from trauma and to exhibit the same symptoms associated with hysterical abreaction and/or post-traumatic stress. For instance, abreaction and post-traumatic stress both feature repetition prominently in their processes/effects. Repetition of this sort is the central quality associated with haunting. The central idea of a haunting is that something that should be over is not. That thing which is supposed to be absent is still present, and it is present through repetition. In hysterical abreaction, the excess emotional energy derived from some upsetting experience manifests itself as seemingly unrelated psycho-somatic symptoms (e.g. paralysis, facial tics, etc.). In a haunting, the unsettling experiences associated with ghosts and poltergeists are the “seemingly unrelated psycho-somatic symptoms” that derive from the initial traumatic or violent event. If the initial event is dealt with in a sufficient way (and there is no way to tell what is sufficient at the time), then there will be no need of an abreaction. But if the event is inassimilable when it occurs, then the significance of the event will be concealed with its memory. When the real story is not told — and a classic example would be when one person murders another but is never brought to account for that murder — then the force of that original, true, and obscured narrative creates the energy necessary to manifest itself as seemingly unrelated psycho-somatic activity. The appearance of ghostly apparitions, objects moving on their own, the infiltration of inhabitants’ dreams by outside personalities, the possession of current
inhabitants by the spirits of former occupants, and the perception of what should be absent sensory stimuli (sounds, voices, feelings, smells, etc.) are all examples of energy relating to obscured narrative energy trying its best to reach the surface of public understanding.

This model also speaks to what can and must be done as a result of witnessing the haunting. As Cathy Caruth points out in *Unclaimed Experience*, the voice that cries out at the repeated wounding is a voice that must be heeded (3). We have an ethical obligation to listen to the obscured narrative and try to set things right. Our ghosts are the ones who are trying to disabuse us of the misconceptions we have about our world. *Beloved* (both novel and ghost) is trying to remind us of the truth of African-American experience, even or especially in the North after slavery. The haunted houses built on Native-American burial grounds are trying to remind us of all the pain heaped on the American aboriginal peoples so that white settlers could build their new life of political freedom and material prosperity. Ghost stories often attempt to tell us the truth about ourselves, but just as often that truth is unwelcome.

3.4 The haunting of *The Haunting of Hill House*

The American haunted house films of the second half of the twentieth century are also trying to convey certain truths to their audiences, but some of those truths have been buried beneath decades of generic convention. Films like *The Haunting* (1963 and 1999), *The Amityville Horror* and its sequels, *The Changeling*, *Poltergeist*, *The Legend of Hell House*, *The Haunted*, *The Others*, and the ABC mini-series *Rose Red* exist as part of a long line of post-WWII haunted house films. The ghosts that haunt these films are not
only the ghosts of Hugh Crane or displaced Native Americans or murdered children.
Instead, these haunted house stories are haunted by the psychical researchers of the past, who believed these buildings to be a proper object of scientific study. These stories not only contain chronotopes of traumatized space within their *fabula*; the sub-genre itself contains elements symptomatic of the “demise” of previous inhabitants. In effect, the generic space of the haunted house tale has witnessed the trauma of the demise of psychical research as an accepted science. However, just as in the haunted house tale itself, the sub-genre is unable to keep its ghosts quiet.

*The Haunting of Hill House* is easily the best known of Shirley Jackson’s longer works. Published in 1959, it is the story of four people who come together to participate in an investigation of the allegedly haunted house of the title. The group is lead by Professor John Montague, an anthropologist whose ambition is to scientifically prove the existence of supernatural phenomena. Montague is joined by Theodora (or just Theo), a powerful psychic empath whose ambiguous sexuality helps to fuel the inevitable confrontations between the four. There is also Luke, the streetwise and ne’er-do-well nephew of the current owners of the house, who is included in the group as a kind of chaperone for the property. But the novel is really about Eleanor “Nell” Vance, a timid woman who has spent most of her adult life caring for her invalid mother who has recently passed away. In her youth, Eleanor witnessed and perhaps caused a three-day rain of stones upon her childhood home. Montague hopes that infusing Theo’s and Nell’s latent psychic abilities into Hill House will “wake” it up, giving them the opportunity to witness and record some of the phenomena for which the house has become so famous. Instead, he has not sufficiently prepared himself for how emotionally needy Eleanor is
after the death of her mother. The majority of the novel is a brilliant and chilling study of how Hill House, or Eleanor’s own death drive — her desire to submit to the patriarchal — gradually consumes Eleanor’s sanity until she apparently kills herself at the very moment the rest of the group is sending her away from the house for her own safety.

If the reader looks for an explanation for Hill House’s haunting within the story itself, he or she will probably be disappointed. Unlike nineteenth-century ghost and haunted house stories, the history of Hill House and its builder Hugh Crane seems only included in the novel for atmosphere. In “‘Whose Hand Was I Holding?’: Familial and Sexual Politics in Shirley Jackson’s The Haunting of Hill House,” Tricia Lootens sifts through the drafts of the novel that are kept in the Library of Congress to get a better understanding of the story Jackson finally presented to the public. She finds that, “at the very earliest stage of her work on Hill House, Jackson seems to have created a series of sketches that briefly explore a possible past for her haunted house” (168). Hill House might have contained a classic traumatized space, if Jackson had followed her initial impulse to tell a simple ghost story. However, these early versions were eventually reworked over succeeding drafts into, “a horror story about the ways in which people, especially women, are destroyed by the nuclear family, sexual repression, and romantic notions of feminine self-sacrifice” (168). The long history of family dysfunction associated with Hill House might accentuate the dysfunctional pseudo-family formed by Montague and his assistants, but that history is not presented as a causal chain that would in some way explain the supernatural manifestations that the main characters experience. On the surface, then, The Haunting of Hill House seems to refute, or at least act as an exception to, the traumatized space. However, the trauma that haunts Hill House is not
an event that happened in the house itself, but rather it is a trauma that happened to the haunted house narrative as a sub-genre. In other words, the repressed rupture that is repeatedly alluded to in the novel is actually a rupture within all haunted houses as a site of rational and scientific investigation.

Let us look at *The Haunting of Hill House* as though it was a crime scene, filled with clues about the strange event obscured in its past. If the chronotope of the traumatized space is operative in this haunted house story as with others, then the manifestations of the supernatural should point back to an obscured historical narrative. An overview of the supernatural events that are reported in the novel does not appear promising at first. Aside from minor atmospheric points like doors that swing shut by themselves when no one is looking (64-65, 97) and an overwhelming accumulation of angles that are all a bit “wrong” (105), there are only a few major supernatural events: 1) the cold spot outside the nursery (118-19, 150), 2) the “dog” that Montague and Luke chase outside (127-35), 3) the banging sound on Nell and Theo’s door (127-35, 199-205), 4) the wall writings (145-49, 155), 5) the phantom hand that Nell holds in her sleep (161-63), 6) the “blood” on Theo’s clothes (154-58), the apparition of a family picnic in the garden that appears to Nell and Theo (176-78), 7) the séance conducted by Mrs. Montague and Arthur (188-95), and 8) the physical warping of the door during the final set of thunderous banging near the end of the novel.

In the simplest of instances, each of these manifestations would refer back to some part of the history of Hill House, perhaps from the time of Hugh Crane himself or from the later era of Crane’s daughters and the companion, who seems such a good placeholder for Eleanor. These individual references would eventually connect to one
another and form a second plot, one that would reveal a shocking trauma committed in
the past on the premises of Hill House and simultaneously act as a decoding mechanism
to make sense out of the various manifestations experienced within the house. The novel
seems to resist these readings. There is no story of Hugh Crane’s dog scampering about
the halls of the house, nor is there any story of a family murder after a weekend picnic
that ended in the murderer scrawling messages on the wall in his or her victims’ blood.
Jackson does not allow her readers the satisfaction of having these supernatural events
coming to make a kind of sense by the end of the novel.

It is worth noting here that the various film adaptations of *The Haunting of Hill
House* display the chronotope of the traumatized space in different ways, some more fully
than others. The original 1963 adaptation, *The Haunting* (Robert Wise), widely
recognized as the most effective adaptation of the novel, is relatively faithful to Jackson’s
vision.21 Jackson’s novel is written in a limited, third-person style of narration that
primarily focalizes through the character of Eleanor Vance, while *The Haunting* similarly
focalizes on Nell (Julie Harris) and uses her voice, and only her voice, for internal
diegetic voice-over narration. As a result, the audience is let into the world of Nell’s
thoughts enough to be able to judge her state of mind. The explicit depiction of
supernatural events is relatively spare. Wise used special effects to create the visible
vapor from Luke’s breath in the cold spot in front of the nursery, as well as the bulging
door to Nell and Theo’s room. Wise also included the wall writing in his film. However,

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21 Steven Jay Schneider offers a thorough comparison and contrast of Jackson’s novel with the 1963 and
1999 films, though he does not address *Rose Red.*
like the novel, none of these things are able to reveal the key to the haunting, the explanation that would resolve the mystery of Hill House.

Jan De Bont’s 1999 remake, *The Haunting*, appears similar in many respects, but ultimately is a very different story. In this most recent direct adaptation, Dr. Montague has become Dr. Marrow (Liam Neeson), who lures Eleanor (Lilly Taylor), Theo (Catherine Zeta-Jones), and Luke (Owen Wilson) to Hill House under false pretenses with the intent of forcing them to be his guinea pigs in a psychological experiment to test fear responses. Dr. Marrow does not believe in the supernatural, and has not come to Hill House to prove its existence. However, he is forced to recognize its existence throughout the course of the movie. This film does not stint at all on the explicit depiction of the supernatural, displaying hundreds of individual special effects shots, most achieved through expensive CGI technology. Among these phenomena are a four-poster bed, the decorative spires of which become articulated and pin Nell to the mattress; various carved reliefs of children and cherubim that become animate and take on voices; a sheer window curtain that flutters in the breeze and seems to pick out the form of an invisible child; and even one point where the stained glass and ceiling moldings move and take on the clear features of a face. De Bont does preserve some of what he considers the important events from the novel. For instance, he does include the wall writing addressed to Nell, though the writing is always in blood, and the writing always appears on the massive oil painting of Hugh Crane in the great hall.

However, it is not merely the details of the supernatural events, or the names of some of the characters and their motivations, that have changed. The most recent *The Haunting* displays the functions of the traumatized space in its most obvious form. Most
if not all of the CGI supernatural phenomena in the film do in fact act as clues that eventually reveal an obscured history. In this remake, it turns out that Hugh Crane never had children of his own, but he did use a shocking number of child laborers as workers in his sweatshops, though to the outside world he appeared to be a benevolent philanthropist. Nell and the other members of the experiment eventually find Crane’s secret study beneath the house, where there is documentary evidence in the form of business ledgers that indicate scores of children died in the house under Crane’s mistreatment. When Nell and the others discover this fact, all of the various manifestations of children and things relating to children begin to make some sense to them, and they are able to devise motivations for the ghosts they are meeting. In the end, it allows Nell to understand how to confront the evil spirit of Hugh Crane that has inhabited the very structure of the house and free the souls of the murdered children, who are merely trapped within it. In fact, it comes out that Nell is the great-great-great grand daughter of Crane’s second wife (who looks strangely like Theo), and so Nell’s bond to the house is a priori familial, as opposed to the more symbolically familial relationship in the novel and the original adaptation. De Bont’s version of The Haunting is much more redemptive, then, though Nell must sacrifice her life to save the rest of the children.

Despite even more radical cosmetic surgery than De Bont’s film, Stephen King’s Rose Red (2002 Craig R. Baxley) is also a clear retelling of Jackson’s The Haunting of Hill House. In Rose Red, Professor Joyce Reardon (Nancy Travis), scholar of

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22 In the 1990s, when Stephen King and Steven Spielberg attempted to team up and create “the scariest haunted house film of all time,” both of them pointed to the 1963 The Haunting, the first and arguably the best adaptation of the novel, as their benchmark (Rose Red, DVD commentary). Their collaboration fell through, but both went on to make their own homages to the original adaptation: King developed the Rose Red mini-series for ABC (a miniseries that was not simply King’s take on the haunted house tale — for that we must look to The Shining — but rather his take on The Haunting of Hill House specifically), while
parapsychology, has finally secured access to the infamously haunted mansion of the title. Her goal is to gather scientific proof of the existence of the paranormal. In this film, the viewer is inundated with paranormal investigation. Dr. Joyce Reardon has the credentials, the professional passion, and the expertise to bring parapsychologists center stage once more; and she and her equipment get an amazing amount of screen time.

Reardon believes that Rose Red is a “dead cell,” since no activity has been reported there for some time. In order to “charge” the dead cell and therefore power more phenomena, Dr. Reardon brings with her a collection of some of the most powerful psychics alive.

This is the augmented version of Dr. Montague selecting assistants who have all been involved in some way with the paranormal during their lives (i.e., Theo’s ESP and Eleanor’s possibly psychokinetic incident with the stones falling on the roof of her house when she was young). In Rose Red, the Eleanor character is regressed back to her pre-adolescent self, a small girl named Annie (Kimberly J. Brown), who does not speak, but who destroys her neighbors’ house with a rain of boulders instead of the shower of small stones in the novel. Instead of a single Theo character, Rose Red presents no less than six men and women who have various psychic talents to help charge the dead cell of the house and interpret whatever clues that they find there. Finally, Joyce Reardon gains access to the mansion because she is romantically linked to Steve Rimbauer (Matt Keesla), the last surviving descendant of the original builder, John Rimbauer (John Procaccino). Steve Rimbauer is clearly the Luke Sanderson character.

Spielberg tapped Jan de Bont to direct The Haunting (1999). Both of these films fall far short of their goal to be the scariest haunted house film of all time, but both add to the long tail of Shirley Jackson’s continuing influence on the formula.
Though the character names have changed, and the number of main characters has proliferated, *Rose Red* resembles Jan De Bont’s adaptation in terms of the liberal use of CGI special effects to depict explicit supernatural events. The total 254-minute running time of the television mini-series offers a much larger canvas on which to spread out spectacles than a standard feature film. In addition to an army of undead victims roaming the rooms and halls of Rose Red, there is a library with a mirrored ceiling and floor, where the floor becomes liquid like mercury. There is a huge, fanged monster that prowls the darkened hallways. At the end, when Annie uses her psychokinetic powers to destroy Rose Red in what looks like a meteor shower, she simultaneously manages to destroy a dollhouse version of the mansion inside Rose Red with a collection of dominoes.

King’s mini-series diverges from De Bont’s *The Haunting* in its much more extensive use of period scenes, but these scenes are integral to the work of the traumatized space in *Rose Red*. From the very beginning of the film, when Dr. Reardon is briefing her students on her plan to investigate Rose Red, character discussion of the history of the house prompts “flashbacks” a century into the past, when John Rimbauer, wealthy Omnicron Oil magnate, built the mansion for his bride, Ellen Rimbauer. These variously motivated flashbacks explain much about the house and its traumatic past. Echoing *The Haunting of Hill House*, Reardon claims that Rose Red “was born bad.” A carpenter shot and killed one of the construction foremen while the house was under construction. Since then, a staggering number of women have disappeared and men have been killed within the house and its grounds. It is through these interludes that the audience learns how Ellen Rimbauer suffered her husband’s sexual promiscuity (she
almost died from a sexually transmitted disease during their honeymoon in Africa); how she found solace and an ally in Sukeena, an African woman Ellen brought back to Seattle; and how Ellen was driven to continue construction of Rose Red after a séance with a Madame Stravinsky, who claimed the spirits had given her a vision of a vast mansion. The power behind Rose Red is the power of Ellen Rimbauer’s rage.

Despite the significant differences between Jackson’s novel and these three film adaptations, all four narratives feature prominent female characters who are finally absorbed into the house itself. This is the interpretation most often pursued by scholars, who look at *The Haunting of Hill House* and its ancillary texts, and it is clearly the reading that the novel itself foregrounds. Much of Jackson’s work, as a writer of both fiction and non-fiction, focuses on women’s roles in the domestic space and is deeply influenced by her ambivalence toward those roles. I do not wish to argue that these interpretations are misguided or unimportant. On the contrary, the tendency for haunted house tales to emphasize the personal and the familial and even the gendered space of the home is completely compatible with my own argument regarding the repression of the role of psychical research in the American haunted house story. In so many of these stories, the rational investigator is present, trying to understand the phenomena people call supernatural. Dr. Montague in *The Haunting of Hill House*, Dr. Markway in Robert Wise’s *The Haunting*, Dr. Reardon in *Rose Red* all put their careers on the line in pursuit of answers to what they believe to be some of the most fundamental questions about mortality and possibility of the survival of the human personality after death. In these tales, the supernatural detectives are always misguided in terms of their judgment. On the other hand, they almost always turn out to be correct in their professional and
personal belief that the supernatural is real. However, they are equally likely to learn too late that being correct does not confer control over the object of study. Most often, an investigator’s desire to confirm the truth about the supernatural results in one or more investigators and/or bystanders getting killed. In *Rose Red*, the climax of the film is the moment when Dr. Joyce Reardon is surrounded by all the apparitions in house, who swirl around her menacingly until she realizes their lethal intent just before they kill her and absorb her spirit into the house. Eleanor Vance in the novel wants to be part of Hill House so that she can finally belong somewhere, though she realizes (or begins to) in the final instant the insanity of her choice. In *Rose Red*, Reardon welcomes the apparitions as proof of her theories and as reassurance that the spirits will not let anyone harm the house. Her last moments are full of horror at the full revelation of what her alliance with Ellen Rimbauer really means for her. In none of these instances are the paranormal researchers portrayed as having triumphed in their investigation, despite what must be in most cases the robust evidence. In the one-paragraph denouement to *The Haunting of Hill House*, Jackson dispenses with her supernatural detective in this manner, “Dr. Montague finally retired from active scholarly pursuits after the cool, almost contemptuous reception of his preliminary article analyzing the psychic phenomena of Hill House” (246). It is not the weakness of Montague’s article that prompts his retirement. It is rather its reception from an academic establishment that refuses to consider his claims at all. As readers, we can only assume that Dr. Montague has extensive notes of his own as well as those from Theo, Luke, and Eleanor. With Montague’s quiet retirement, Jackson effectively pushes the psychical researcher off the stage and leaves us with nothing to mitigate Eleanor’s tragedy.
The instances of the supernatural in the novel and its adaptations do not point to an obscured history in the house itself; instead, they point to an obscured history of other haunted houses and their own supernatural detectives both within and without the diegetic world. The repressed pasts of Hill House and Rose Red are really the repressed stories of turn-of-the-twentieth-century psychical research and several specific investigations of supposedly haunted houses. There is ample evidence to suggest that the initial idea for the novel came from the account of the famously controversial investigation of Ballechin House, “the most haunted house in Scotland.” Very early in Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*, the narrator is describing Dr. Montague’s idea for his investigation of Hill House:

Dr. Montague’s intentions with regard to Hill House derived from the methods of the intrepid nineteenth-century ghost hunters; he was going to live in Hill House and see what happened there. It was his intention, at first, to follow the example of the anonymous Lady who went to stay at Ballechin House and ran a summer-long house part for skeptics and believers, with croquet and ghost-watching as the outstanding attractions. (4)

The goings on at Ballechin House in Pertfordshire, Scotland in the 1890s attracted an enormous amount of attention in no small part because of a series of very public arguments regarding the veracity of the observed phenomena in a number of newspapers and journals of the day. The anonymous Lady mentioned in the quote was actually Lady Adela Goodrich-Freer, who, along with the Marquess Bute and Colonel Lemesurier Taylor, published *The Alleged Haunting of B—— House* in 1899. Though the vast majority of the supposed supernatural occurrences involved unexplained sounds such as whispered voices, banging on doors, and muffled detonations, there were also extensive and repeated reports of the apparitions of two women — one in the habit of a nun, and
one a tall lady in gray — a monk, and a black dog (thought to be the reincarnation of Major Stuart, one of the former owners of the manor). The apparition of the nun was reported to appear virtually on demand, whenever guests visited a small copse, or “burn,” some distance from the house.

Of the many supernatural events that take place in Jackson’s novel, virtually all of them have corresponding incidents from *The Alleged Haunting of B—— House*, rather than corresponding events in the diegetic past of Hill House itself. At several points near the end of the novel, Eleanor in particular seems to hear voices of several kinds, in some cases indistinct but unmistakable (161-62), and in other cases quite clear (215). The banging on doors, which constitutes the most consistent and insistent manifestation within Hill House, and the one which all of the characters report experiencing, is very much like the reports of “muffled detonations” that are repeatedly mentioned by multiple guests to Ballechin House. Though none of the principle characters in *The Haunting of Hill House* report seeing an apparition of a nun in the house or on the grounds, as guests claimed they did at Ballechin, Mrs. Montague is adamant that her automatic writing séance with “planchette” revealed just such a presence within Hill House (188). None of these manifestations are in any way tied to the history of Hill House. The closest that Hill House comes to unveiling some kind of secret history of its own is the tenuous link between the dog that Professor Montague and Luke chase through the house (134) and the puppy that Eleanor and Theo see playing with the equally phantasmal family in the garden (176-77).

The rented house, the eager investigators, the arguments, the noises, the dog, and the nun were all elements that would make their way from Ballechin into Hill House.
Jackson admitted as much in a 1968 essay entitled “Experience and Fiction” printed in the magazine *The Writer*:

I was [working] on a novel about a haunted house because I happened, by chance, to read a book about a group of people, nineteenth-century psychic researchers, who rented a haunted house and recorded their impressions of the things they saw and heard and felt in order to contribute a learned paper to the Society for Psychical Research. They thought that they were being terribly scientific and proving all kinds of things, and yet the story that kept coming through their dry reports was not at all the story of a haunted house, it was the story of several earnest, I believe misguided, certainly determined people, with their differing motivations and backgrounds. (12-13)

The story that keeps coming through *The Alleged Haunting of B—— House* is also the story that keeps coming through *The Haunting of Hill House*. It is clear from this passage that Jackson dismisses the scientific intent behind the investigation into Ballechin House. She believes that, for all their earnestness and determination, the members of the Society for Psychical Research were ultimately “misguided.” This is the story that comes through not only Jackson’s work, but it also comes through virtually all of the haunted house stories of the next fifty years. Haunted houses are like magnets for psychical investigators, because they seem to offer their own sort of laboratory conditions; that is, a finite space in which seemingly supernatural things are reported to occur with some frequency and possibly even some regularity. However, no matter what Jackson says in “Experience and Fiction,” it was not simply the account of the investigations at Ballechin that helped form Jackson’s opinion, because Ballechin is not the only inspiration for *The Haunting of Hill House*.

Jackson also explicitly mentions the haunting of Borley Rectory, which had its own apparitions of nuns and monks. Though Borley Rectory was locally famous in
England’s Essex County, it achieved international celebrity along with its most famous investigator, Harry Price. A newspaper editor asked Price, already publicly known as an investigator of hauntings and psychic mediums, to investigate the rectory in 1929 as part of a story one of his reporters was doing. That initial experience convinced Price to keep in touch with the various families that came to live there, returning to continue the investigation at various points for over ten years. In 1937, Price was able to rent the house for an entire year. During those twelve months, he and a succession of investigators (hired by means of a newspaper advertisement) lived in the house and meticulously recorded their observations. Price first brought his own story of Borley Rectory to the world in 1940 with the publication of *The Most Haunted House in England*. This would be followed six years later by *The End of Borley Rectory*, in which Price recounted the main details of the investigation, adding some more recent forensic discoveries on the grounds of the rectory that had since been destroyed by fire, the results of further investigations by other groups, as well as a “grand theory” for the haunting that focused on the abduction from France of a young nun, her betrayal and murder at the hands of a man named Waldegrave, and the haunting that eventually revealed her remains. Jackson makes reference to Borley Rectory far more often than she does to Ballechin. Borley is named several times as an exemplary forerunner of Montague’s investigations (138, 140, and 150). It is also referenced more subtly when Mrs. Montague arrives on the scene and, along with her companion Arthur, conducts an automatic writing session with a planchette (188-95). In October of 1937, Miss Helen Glanville, the daughter of one of Price’s co-investigators, held a planchette session in her
home in Streatham. The transcripts of these sessions are very similar to the one Mrs. Montague recounts to her husband and the others (159-62).

The marriage between Professor and Mrs. Montague is worth noting as its own reference to the historical roots of the psychical researcher. Since the Society for Psychical Research began its work in Britain in the 1880s, many of its investigators maintained an uneasy relationship with the techniques and practitioners of spiritualism. On the one hand, psychic mediums provided exciting opportunities for researchers to test the claims of alleged psychics under laboratory conditions, and many psychical researchers confined their work to experiments of this sort. Many investigators, Harry Price among them, spent most of their time attempting to prove the psychic abilities of famed psychics, while exposing the frauds of scores of charlatans in the process. On the other hand, many psychical investigators devoting their time and energy to investigations of supposedly haunted houses would occasionally use the séance as a means of information gathering. Opinions on the efficacy of the séance in psychical research were certainly mixed, but Harry Price and his assistants held séances in the Blue Room of Borley Rectory\textsuperscript{23} as a means of determining whether any spirits remained in the house, and if they did, what their identities were. However, due to the near constant stream of fakes exposed to public ridicule through the efforts of the debunkers, the marriage of psychical research and spiritualism was an uneasy one at best. Shirley Jackson captures this uneasy marriage perfectly and literally in the marriage of the Montagues. Mrs. Montague is arrogant and self-righteous in her opinion of her husband’s work and perfectly self-confident in the efficacy of her approach to Hill House (181-82). At the

\textsuperscript{23} Eleanor’s room in Hill House is also called “the blue room” (38).
same time, Professor Montague is utterly dismissive of his wife’s spiritualist beliefs, though he is concerned that her actions will cause harm to someone in the house, since he believes his wife clearly underestimates the power of the house (183, 198). This very rift between the believers and debunkers is the same rift that caused such controversy in the public arguments over Ballechin House and Borley Rectory.

The references to Borley in Jackson’s novel might simply have been references to a popular touchstone for the audience, a kind of icon that said “haunted house” in a way that the Ballechin account was too old or exotic for American readers to conjure, except that Hill House does something that no other haunted house but Borley had done to that point in England or America: it writes. One of the most famous and controversial manifestations recorded at Borley Rectory was a series of wall writings that appeared to be directed at the rector’s wife, Mrs. Marianne Foyster. Among these writings were short phrases like, “Marianne Please help get,” and “Marianne light mass prayers.” The messages on the walls of Borley made their way onto the walls of Hill House, with their imperative tone and ambiguous syntax intact. After Dr. Montague, Luke, Theo, and Eleanor have been in Hill House for some time, Hill House sends its first message, written in chalk on the wall of a hallway:

The writing was large and straggling and ought to have looked, Eleanor thought, as though it had been scribbled by bad boys on a fence. Instead, it was incredibly real, going in broken lines over the thick paneling of the hallway. From one end of the hallway to the other the letters went, almost too large to read, even when she stood back against the opposite wall.

24 The only exception to this claim is an account of a haunting in India in 1920 in which one manifestation of the haunting was the spontaneous appearance of writing on scraps of paper. Though this is the first recorded instance of a haunting or poltergeist involving writing as a manifestation, the writing did not take place on the actual walls of the house as it did in Borley Rectory (Thurston 61-79).
“Can you read it?” Luke asked softly, and the doctor, moving his flashlight, read slowly: HELP ELEANOR COME HOME. (145-146)

Later, the message is also found written in red (possibly in blood) on the wall above Theo’s bed, except the message now reads, HELP ELEANOR COME HOME ELEANOR (155). These messages, or at least the first of them, proved irresistible to filmmakers like Robert Wise and Jan de Bont, even though their inscription in the novel and then again in the films, ultimately works to remake and obscure their origins in the well-known accounts of Borley wall writing. It might have been much more difficult to obscure those origins, if Harry Price and the American journalist Upton Sinclair had had their way. Their collaboration is relevant here not as an opportunity missed but also for the ways in which bears out my analysis of the chronotope in the haunted house film of the second half of the twentieth century.

It is odd that the Borley story is not well known today, especially given how intensely popular it was in the first half of the twentieth century. *The Most Haunted House in England* was one of the most circulated books in English lending libraries during World War II. The Borley story was famous enough that, by the end of World War II, Harry Price was actively seeking a way to have it further immortalized on film. In June of 1947, Harry Price entered into an agreement with Sinclair. The terms of this agreement called for Sinclair to write a film scenario based on Price’s two books about Borley and then to shop the scenario around Hollywood for a studio interested in producing it. The story of the Borley film, titled *Most Haunted House* in Sinclair’s scenario, is murky save for two very important points. First, Sinclair did complete a full draft of the scenario, including an explanatory introduction and notes; and second, the
very next year Harry Price died. It is tempting to conclude that Harry Price himself was
the real property behind the Borley story and that his death also marked the premature
death of any possible film. It may simply be instead that, by the time Sinclair finished
the scenario and was able to shop it around to Hollywood studios, the post-war American
swing from supernatural ghost stories to Cold War science-fiction horror was already in
full effect. If the scenario had come ten years earlier or later, it very well may have been
produced. At any rate, the scenario was never filmed, and Borley became a footnote in
the annals of twentieth-century paranormal popular culture. *Most Haunted House* is a
narrative that passed into obscurity before its time, but its presence is felt relentlessly
long after. In its very title, *Most Haunted House* refers not only to Borley Rectory as the
most haunted house in England, but also by extension to Ballechin House as the most
haunted house in Scotland. This one story folds the other previous stories into itself.
However, in doing so it tends to obscure salient features of the previous accounts, and
since the publication of *The Haunting of Hill House*, the features most often obscured
have been the details of paranormal investigation, the very details that Harry Price and
Upton Sinclair were most intent on including in their film scenario.

It is these details that separate *Most Haunted House* from any other haunted house
film scenario before or since. *Most Haunted House* reveals the documentary impulse at
the heart of the haunted house tale, and it is this impulse that has been repressed in the
haunted house films and television shows that followed. In writing the screenplay,
Sinclair hewed very closely to both of Price’s books about Borley Rectory. His one
major change was to add two American characters — Ted Burton, a stand-in for the
reporter who first met Price at the rectory, and Janet Parker, an attractive young woman
from New York — for the dual purpose of providing a familiar focalizing agent for
American audiences and for providing the obligatory romantic subplot. Burton is an
uninitiated reporter who makes a name for himself with the Borley story, and Parker is
woman who discovers her latent abilities as a psychic medium. There are more than a
few echoes of Upton Sinclair and his second wife, Mary Craig Sinclair, in the characters
of Burton and Parker. Almost two decades prior to the writing of *Most Haunted House*,
the Sinclairs published *Mental Radio* (1930) in which they described their own
experiments with telepathy. It comes as no surprise, then, that Upton Sinclair was
interested in foregrounding the work of Harry Price at the same time he was presenting a
classic haunted house tale.

Sinclair chose to foreground Harry Price’s work by subverting Hollywood
screenwriting conventions. The classic Hollywood screenplay, whether of today or of
sixty years ago, contains an absolute minimum of description. Screenwriters have always
been aware that they are only one member of the creative team that brings any given film
to the screen. Though screenplays are often called blueprints for films, the truth is that
many of their descriptions of characters, settings, and other components of mise-en-scene
are merely suggestions for the director and the production designer, who will determine
the ultimate look of the film. Though produced from three different screenplays, *The
Hauntings* from 1963 and 1999 and *Rose Red* are all, at their cores, films about the same
house, but the look and design of the sets is very different from film to film. Upton
Sinclair chose to circumvent this process by introducing a series of over a dozen notes
into the text of his screenplay. Early in the scenario, Price shows off his investigatory
equipment to Ted Burton:
I will show you what I call my ghost-hunter’s kit. (Goes to bag) You see that it’s a tight fit — everything has to be in its place, or we have an overflow. (NOTE: A photograph of this outfit is to be found in Confessions of a Ghost-Hunter, by Harry Price, London, 1936, p. 32.). (17-18).

When Price and his assistants arrive at Borley and begin exploring the house, they eventually enter the cellars beneath the rectory. As they descend, Sinclair notes, “(They proceed through the complex of cellars — See Plan on p. 234, “The End of Borley Rectory”)”(35). Later, in Scene 12, Price and Burton sit on their first stakeout of the small gazebo or summer-house by which the phantom nun is reputed to walk regularly. The scene heading for Scene 12 reads, “SCENE 12. THE OCTAGONAL SUMMER-HOUSE, p. 74, “End of Borley Rectory” (38-9). Sinclair does not leave the design of these sets up to the studio production designers; he directs them to the historical documents.

In these notes, Sinclair does not merely suggest that the director or production designer refer to the source material for inspiration. Instead, most of the notes begin with the words, “Screen shows.” When the Reverend Foyster is showing Price the famous wall writings, Sinclair notes, “(Screen shows the script enlarged from page 180, “The End of Borley Rectory”, the writing in the upper right hand corner of Plate IX.)” and moments later, “(Screen shows the upper left drawing)” (78-9). When the Foysters discover the wall writings, Sinclair wants the audience to see those writings. He does not want the film to feature buildings inspired by Borley Rectory and Borley Church; he wants the audience to see Borley Rectory and Borley Church. The screenplay also captures the London Times ad for Price’s investigators (101), the burned shell of the rectory (146), and it even shows the book jacket for Price’s own account of the
investigation, *The Most Haunted House in England* (142)! All of these images, along with the faithfulness of Sinclair’s script to Price’s two books about Borley are an attempt to fix the real-world figure of the paranormal investigator squarely in the cinematic haunted house story. Sinclair is using the documentary evidence from Price’s own investigation as a set of anchors for his lightly fictionalized version of the events. Sinclair knew that he was writing a Hollywood film scenario, but he wanted Hollywood audiences to see the closest thing to a news reel about a haunted house as he could manage. In the end, though, the film was never produced. Within the decade, Shirley Jackson’s version of the haunted house — and even more importantly of the paranormal researcher — would overtake Harry Price’s and Upton Sinclair’s version to become the image with which American audiences would be familiar for the rest of the twentieth century. From then on, paranormal researchers would be Jackson’s “misguided” scholars, who were never able to prove their theories about the existence of ghosts or the supernatural, but who were liable to get innocent people killed in the quest for knowledge of life after death. This may reflect a specific distrust on the part of Jackson, or perhaps a more general distrust toward scientists as somehow all-knowing, especially in the years following the atomic bomb detonations in Japan in 1945. In any case, paranormal investigators continue to be given very little credit in film.

3.5 The return of the paranormal researcher?

In recent years, the paranormal investigator has become a staple of reality television, so much so that one might believe that the psychical researcher is no longer being repressed from the public consciousness. It almost seems like, in the chronotopic
reading, the ghost is finally able to effectively communicate to the living. However, 
these programs actually manage to obscure the paranormal researcher even further by 
offering a misrepresentation as a form of entertainment. On shows like *Ghost Hunters* 
(Sci-Fi Channel), *Paranormal State* (A&E) and *Most Haunted* (Travel Channel) viewers 
are treated to the choicest cuts of grainy pale green Nightshot™ videography that purport 
to be actual footage of paranormal events: chairs moving seemingly of their own accord — 
frustratingly indiscernible “apparitions” stealing down the long-disused corridors of 
moldy state penitentiaries — hopelessly garbled and electronically manipulated 
recordings of paranormal voices (electronic voice phenomena, or EVPs). But most of the 
time, we are treated to the suppositions, the petty dramas, and the genuine excitement of 
the investigators themselves captured in reaction shots and talking-head interview clips 
filmed after the fact. Most of these shows feature psychics of one kind or another in 
various levels of prominence. Some shows foreground the use of sensitive mediums, 
while some employ them only as occasional color commentary.

*Ghost Hunters, Paranormal State, and Most Haunted* offer themselves as reality 
television — weekly documentary efforts to uncover the paranormal and present it as 
non-fiction — though the presentation is geared far more toward entertainment than 
education or scientific inquiry. Actual parapsychologists and paranormal investigators, 
much like the real-world counterparts of police procedurals, spend most of their time in 
tedious and often fruitless fieldwork, laboratory experiments, and archival research. 
None of these activities films well, and so they are most often left out of the reality shows 
in favor of the more dramatic (if decontextualized) results of those long hours of research 
and waiting. It may seem from all these shows that the paranormal researcher so long
obscured and derided after Jackson’s novel has finally made a roaring comeback, but this is not the case at all. Instead, today’s television occult detectives hew as close as they can to dramatic necessity, while eschewing the scientific method in everything but their use of the non-fiction codes and conventions of direct-cinema-style reality television.

One of the most recent additions to the lineup of paranormal investigators on television is the Arts & Entertainment (A&E) channel’s *Paranormal State*. As described on the A&E web site, *Paranormal State* is, “a half-hour docu-drama that chronicles PRS [Paranormal Research Society] and their investigations into the paranormal” ("Meet the Investigators"). PRS is a Penn State University student organization founded by Ryan Buell in the fall of 2001, and like other amateur paranormal research groups, its purpose is to investigate reports of hauntings and other paranormal phenomena. Modern paranormal research groups may have a number of motivations, including the desire to explain or (dis)prove the (non-)existence of paranormal phenomena, the desire to help people who believe they are afflicted by paranormal phenomena, and the desire to have fun or seek thrills. The PRS as a group seems to be driven by the desire to explain/prove the existence of the paranormal and the desire to help its “clients,” but the purpose of the series *Paranormal State* is clearly to thrill and to entertain.

*Paranormal State* makes a concerted attempt to foreground its documentary impulse as a way of enhancing its credibility. Much of the camerawork used in the show is hand-held, evoking a direct-cinema style reminiscent of not only late-twentieth century documentary film, but also of earlier reality television programs like MTV’s *Real World*. Since the half-hour episode format requires the compression of a significant amount of footage (from investigations that often span two or three days), scenes normally begin
with a subtitle displayed in courier font, giving the time and location or activity underway. In the series’ first episode, “Sixth Sense,” the episode begins with a time stamp, “CASE BRIEFING 12:07 PM” over shots of undergraduates playing sports on the campus green. Just like the scene subtitles in *The X-Files*, these stamps are meant to evoke the sense of an “official case log” of the sort one finds in police reports.

Additionally, throughout each episode, the soundtrack is punctuated by Ryan Buell’s voice-overs, or “Director’s Logs.” These Director’s Logs begin and end with an electronic “beep” and are sonically “dirtier” than the rest of the show’s soundtrack, as though viewers are supposed to believe they are listening to the PRS director’s personal audio journal.

While the camera work, on-screen graphics, and voice-overs work to position the series as nonfiction, the content and narrative structure of the series are worked in such a way to deliver the fun and thrills of its entertainment impulse. In “Sixth Sense,” PRS investigates the case of Matthew Seighman, an eight-year old boy who claims to see dead people. The reference to the blockbuster 1999 M. Night Shyamalan film *The Sixth Sense* is clear. In the film, Bruce Willis plays a child psychologist who is attempting to help a young boy (Haley Joel Osment) who sees dead people. The film takes a traditionally American approach to ghosts, which is to say that the film declares emphatically that ghosts are real, even if only some people can see them. *Paranormal State* also employs a psychologist on its first television investigation, and like Willis’s character, Adam Blai takes a professionally skeptical attitude toward Matthew Seighman’s alleged abilities. During the case briefing, Blai warns, “We need to be cautious about how much of this he’s kind of like weaving a fantasy to get some attention. We need to look at whether
this stuff is just being made up, or it’s overactive imagination and kind of lack of education” (“Sixth Sense”). At the briefing, Buell responds to Blai’s warning by saying that, “The bottom line is this family needs help. They’ve been to counselors and doctors; nobody can figure out what’s wrong. They are desperate. Whether it’s paranormal or not, they’re asking for our help. We need to go in there” (“Sixth Sense”). Buell invokes the PRS’s mission to help its clients and in doing so sidelines questions about whether or not anything paranormal is happening in the Seighmans’ home at all. However, in the middle of Buell’s statement, the camera cuts away from him to get reaction shots from the other team members. In fact, it is clear from the audio that Buell did not speak the words, “They’ve been to counselors and doctors; nobody can figure out what’s wrong. They are desperate,” during the meeting; they were added in post-production. The addition of these sentences pushes Buell’s retort beyond simply the desire to help the family. The complete sequence suggests that mainstream medicine and psychology have failed to help the Seighmans, and now the Paranormal Research Society “need” to intervene.

After the case briefing, a Director’s Log increases the viewer’s suspense. “Shelly [Seighman]’s reporting an increase in activity since she originally contacted us. I have a feeling that time is of the essence here” (“Sixth Sense”). When the team arrives at the Seighman’s house, they split up. Adam Blai interviews Matthew about his experiences; two members interview neighbors about Timmy, a former resident who died near the property; another member sets up the surveillance equipment and a monitoring station in the basement; and Buell interviews Shelly Seighman, Matthew’s mother. According to Blai, it seems that Matthew is regularly visited by Timmy’s ghost. Buell manages to
obtain a photograph of a large wedding party of which Timmy was a member. “We’re confident that Matthew’s never seen a photo of Timothy before,” Buell claims. “So, if he makes a positive ID, this will be compelling evidence that this boy is truly being visited from the beyond” (“Sixth Sense”). Buell has deftly set up the criteria for Matthew’s authenticity within the episode (i.e., for the benefit of the audience), but without providing any corroboration for his claim that Matthew has never seen a photograph of Timmy. Of course, when shown the photograph, Matthew points directly to Timmy without hesitation. Buell finds this evidence convincing.

With each hour that passes I feel it’s more likely that this kid is the real deal. It’s really rare for any psychic to be able to see the spirit so clearly that they’re able to make a positive ID. This could mean Matthew could be a very powerful clairvoyant. It also means he’s going to attract both the good and the bad, and that’s a lot for a kid to handle. (“Sixth Sense”)

The transition in Buell’s characterization is subtle. The second to last sentence in this Director’s Log is heavily conditional; it could mean that Matthew could be a very powerful clairvoyant. However, the final sentence switches into a boldly assertive tense, and the phrase “it also means” retroactively eliminates the conditionals from the previous sentence. The final sentence also asserts a Manichean pantheon of spirit entities, while simultaneously emphasizing the pathos of the young boy’s situation. In this sequence, there is no discussion of any alternative hypotheses. For instance, a major strain of paranormal research claims that what many believe to be ghosts are probably the stray thoughts and memories of other people picked up unwittingly and telepathically. The so-
called “phantasms of the living” are not even considered in this episode; the choices are mental delusion\textsuperscript{25} or demonic ghosts.

Following the interviews, the team prepares for what it calls “dead time.” Dead time is the hour between 3:00am and 4:00am, when the team attempts to contact any spirits that may inhabit the space they are investigating. Prior to dead time at the Seighman house, Adam Blai, the team’s psychologist makes some startling claims. He says that based on his interview of Matthew, he is inclined to believe Matthew’s claims, because, “his knowledge of the supernatural is phenomenal and consistent” (“Sixth Sense”). Blai goes on to say, “There are bad things here. One’s a big one that’s human in size. They come at nighttime. They are angry that we’re here.” The focus is effectively taken off of Matthew with this claim, and the ghosts or demonic entities are established as the antagonists in the episode. Dead time will be the opportunity for PRS and Matthew’s parents to confront whatever it is that is tormenting Matthew.

During dead time, nothing appears to happen in the house, though the footage does show Buell and Blai reacting to what they claim are heavy breathing sounds. They think they hear heavy breathing from the basement stairs, and Blai goes to investigate, but Buell stops him. “It’s trying to show itself. It may be trying to separate us.” After the dead time vigil is over, one of the team members says she wants to determine whether any of the digital audio recorders picked up the sounds they thought they heard.

Our EVPs confirmed breathing and other noises during dead time, but we are unable to connect the sounds to any unexplainable source. But whether there are spirits here or not, we need to perform a house cleansing so that we can give this family some room for peace. They need to feel

\textsuperscript{25} Though mentioned as a possibility in the case briefing, this option is not discussed at all after the team arrives at the Seighman household.
empowered, and I think that a spiritual cleansing can help start this process. (“Sixth Sense”)

Buell quickly dispenses with the evidence that he claims they were unable to corroborate, but uses the opportunity to immediately suggest a cleansing ritual. This proactive stance toward paranormal research is foreshadowed in the main theme montage of the series in which Buell says of PRS, “We are students. We are seekers. And sometimes we’re warriors.” Since Buell and Blai have already established the antagonists of the program, he and the others can take steps against them. After Blai and Buell perform the cleansing ritual, which consists of the entire PRS team and Seighman family walking from room to room with Blai reading a blessing from the Bible while Buell traces crosses on the lintels of thresholds in holy water, Buell returns for a follow-up visit two weeks later. Matthew is now a smiling little boy, and the Seighman’s are happy to have their son back. In the episode’s final Director’s Log, Buell says, “The family has chosen to accept Matthew’s gifts, and that’s the best thing they can do for him. No one can stop Matthew from seeing dead people; we can only help him to understand and be there to protect him if we have to.” This investigation is not at all about answering the questions, do these things actually happen, and if so, what are they? This investigation is about establishing a conflict that can be identified and overcome in a single 22-minute episode.

Ghost hunters and paranormal investigators have not confined themselves to the reality-television phenomenon. Fictional shows like Supernatural (WB, later CW), Medium (NBC), and Ghost Whisperer (CBS) are just the better known of a string of television series in which main characters confront supernatural mysteries. In these shows, it is far more likely that the investigator will actually possess and regularly use
some kind of psychic or magical ability in order to solve episodic mysteries. Shows like these also very often construct elaborate and consistent laws that dictate the limits of action for the ghosts and other paranormal entities. Of course, it is precisely these frameworks of “supernatural law” that are missing from the reality shows and that have continually eluded psychical researchers for over a century. The actual psychical investigators, who have been conducting their research and publishing their findings since the 1880s, are merely reflected in the surface of these fictions and ersatz realities, the primary purpose of which is to entertain.

Paranormal investigators have also been familiar figures in movies of the past several decades. They make appearances in The Legend of Hell House (1973), in The Changeling in Poltergeist (1982), in Amityville II: The Possession (1982), and in Haunted (1996). And, of course, they star, hilariously and repeatedly, in the Ghostbusters franchise (1984, 1989, and two animated TV series 1986-91 and 1997). Arguably, all of these television shows and feature films have extended the influence of Shirley Jackson’s The Haunting of Hill House. At the same time, they have carried with them the unseen influence of the real-life paranormal investigations on which Jackson’s novel is extensively based. Buried beneath these haunted house tales are the bodies of a rational, scientific, and documentary impulse to record verifiable evidence of ghosts and explain the phenomenon of haunting.

The presence of the paranormal investigator in a haunted house narrative is evidence of the human drive to understand, to make sense of the senseless, and to come

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26 Psychical researchers are exceedingly rare in narrative fiction films prior to 1963. Even in Bob Hope’s The Ghostbreakers (1940), there are no actual paranormal investigators.
to terms with the ubiquity and finality of death. Without this figure, ghosts appear as malevolent beings, sources of fright that prove the existence of an afterlife while simultaneously withholding any sense of comfort in that knowledge. To be sure, paranormal researchers in fact and fiction most often fail to understand completely; they find it virtually impossible to master the supernatural laws and bend the apparitions to their will in the way that science eventually allows humans to harness nature. However, their search for knowledge does offer intangible—one might even say incorporeal—rewards. Instead of feeling at the mercy of powers beyond their ken, the survivors in these films have a sense that they managed to avoid death at the hands of a powerful but ultimately knowable adversary. Human knowledge and inquiry thus retain their power to assist mankind. The survivors of haunted house tales like *The Shining* and *Below*\(^{27}\), tales without the logocentric assistance of psychical investigators, simply feel like they were spared destruction by a vicious but largely arbitrary and unknowable force of fate.

At its height, psychical research attracted the attention of some of Europe and America’s leading intellectuals such as William James, Sigmund Freud, and Carl Jung. This is not to say that the mainstream scientific community ever fully accepted psychical research, but that the questions associated with it were considered of such weight that the leading lights of the day were intent upon examining them. This drive has fallen off, especially in the aftermath of World War II, despite the continuing existence of the SPR and the Parapsychology Lab at Duke University. The curiosity is still there, as evidenced by the continuing presence of the paranormal investigator in popular culture, but it has

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\(^{27}\) David Twohy’s excellent film *Below* (2002), from a screenplay by Darren Aronofsky and Lucas Sussman, takes place on an American submarine during WWII, but it is without question a haunted house narrative (and one of the best in decades).
largely been relegated to the field of entertainment. Ballechin House and Borley Rectory live on through the influence of Shirley Jackson’s novel and the films and TV mini-series adapted from it or inspired by it. But the paranormal researchers that brought us these tales have been eclipsed, obscured by a culture that is entertained by and simultaneously suspicious of their claims.

This process of obscuring the scientific work of psychical researchers while turning them into the comedians and performers of *Ghostbusters* or Sci-Fi Channel’s *Ghost Hunters* is similar to one of the clinical approaches to treating sufferers from traumatic neuroses discussed by Ruth Leys in *Trauma: A Genealogy*. In *Trauma*, Leys discusses an alternative to the conception of trauma and its treatment laid out by Freud and Breuer, who used hypnosis to prompt patients to remember and re-experience the obscured memories of their traumas. This alternative, forwarded by Sandor Ferenczi, is fabrication or simulation of an experience that can be “recalled” in place of the memory of the traumatic event (123-24). This treatment takes as its central tenet the idea that traumatic experiences are so intense that they are never actually encoded as accessible memory in the first place (9). Therefore, in order to “heal” or abreact the traumatic neurosis, a fabricated memory must be used since no original exists to be recalled. Of course, the fabricated memory must be “true” in as much as it must conform to the patient’s general understanding of the course of events during which the trauma was experienced. Metaphorically, then, we might view the haunted house films of the later twentieth century, as well as the reality TV shows featuring ghost hunters at the beginning of the twenty-first century, as offering a fabricated memory in place of the intense scientific debate that generated the original split between psychical researchers
and mainstream scientists. Instead of countenancing this debate (and perhaps
foregrounding it on the Discovery Channel or PBS), American pop culture has recast the
story of psychical research into an entertainment. Psychical research in the early part of
the twentieth century asked the questions, “What happens to the human personality after
bodily death?” and “How can we know the answer to that question?” Psychical research
in contemporary popular culture asks the question, “If you saw a ghost on television,
would you pay to see it again?”

And yet, so many of the entertainments involving modern-day ghost hunters
betray the documentary impulse that in other ways they work so hard to conceal. The
most obvious of these are the reality shows, where the sleight of hand employed to create
entertainment is that the use of documentary codes and conventions in the creation of an
entertainment series actually serves to gloss over the more tedious and more serious work
of research and evidence review that makes up the bulk of the time these investigators
actually spend during a case. However, the documentary impulse is also present in the
fictional shows. In *Supernatural*, the Winchester brothers, who investigate all of the
mysteries on the show, make use of slightly fictionalized versions of the technological
gadgets employed by actual paranormal researchers (i.e., what are usually referred to as
“natural tri-field meters”). Their use of this technology ties them to the broader use of
scientific means to isolate, record, and understand phenomena that remain otherwise
elusive to mainstream science. This documentary impulse and its relationship to
traumatic narrative is explored in greater depth in Chapter 5, where I look at the ways in
which a number of fake documentaries from the end of the millennium seem to be about
the traumatization of narrative, but first I will closely examine a seminal example of the
nation-state as traumatized space by looking at Chris Carter’s wildly popular Fox Television series *The X-Files* and its iconic supernatural detective, Special Agent Fox Mulder.
CHAPTER 4

VANISHING AMERICANS: ABDUCTION AND INVASION IN THE X-FILES

ALBERT: There was a tribe of Indians who lived here more than 600 years ago. Their name was Anasazi; it means ancient aliens. No evidence of their fate exists. Historians say they disappeared without a trace. They say that because they will not sacrifice themselves to the truth.

MULDER: And what is the truth?

ALBERT: Nothing disappears without a trace. (“Anasazi” 2x25)

4.1 Disappearance as trauma

The traumatized space of the crime scene or haunted house is a way of understanding unexpected appearances. An image or apparition of something from the past refuses to remain in the past and subsequently appears, out of its original or natural context, in the flow of everyday time. Another way to look at the mechanics of the traumatized space is to think about it in terms of disappearance. A disappearance is, in many ways, simply a chronotopic disjunction, a break with expectations. Given our perception of time as linear and continuous, we expect a person or an object to continue existing in the same place unless it moves or is moved to another location through

perceptible means. For a person to be standing in front of us one moment and then be
gone the next violates our expectations concerning how objects exist and move through
three dimensions. This violation can occur in a relatively brief period of time; that is, the
fantastical event of someone apparently disappearing before our eyes (as in a magic act)
is a time-space disjunction from one moment to the next. However, we also perceive
these disjunctions based on habit and extended over longer periods of time; for instance,
when someone close to us dies, we are so used to their physical presence in our daily
lives that it is a shock each time the realization comes that the deceased person is not
where we expect he or she to be. The same is true for appearances, of course, as we have
seen in Chapter 2; in fact, sudden appearances can be even more shocking than sudden
disappearances, since the sudden unexpected appearance of something often elicits an
instinctual fear reaction to an external menace. Entering a room where you expect your
friend to be, only to find the room empty, is disturbing, but probably only in as much as
you are liable to question your own faculties. Entering a room where you expect no one
to be, only to encounter a friend you know to be dead, is another event entirely, even
though it is similarly a time-space disjunction.

*The X-Files* ran on Fox Television for nine seasons from 1993 to 2002 (including
two feature films: *The X-Files: Fight the Future* from 1998 and *The X-Files: I Want to
Believe* released in the summer of 2008), and it declared itself to be thoroughly concerned
with the problems of time-space disjunctions from its very first episode. The series
follows two Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation: Fox Mulder (David
Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson). Mulder is an expert in abnormal

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29 In the following chapter, I will cite episodes of *The X-Files* in the following manner: (“Title”
psychology, and he has made the strange and unusual cases that come across the
Bureau’s path his life’s work. As the UFO poster in his office declares, Mulder wants to
believe in the authenticity of the paranormal. Scully, on the other hand, is a medical
doctor whose scientific skepticism is on full display for the majority of the series. The
FBI partners Scully with Mulder as part of a plan to discredit Mulder’s wild theories
concerning the existence of the supernatural and the truth about aliens. As the series
progresses, Mulder tends to be the believer in any given situations, while Scully provides
the rational point of view. Each episode of the series generally covers one investigation,
though some of the episodes are part of a continuous arc narrative (termed the “mytharc”
by fans) concerning the government’s conspiracy to conceal the truth about the existence
of extra-terrestrial life. The other episodes are the so-called “monster-of-the-week”
episodes, which can theoretically be viewed in almost any order.

The pilot episode of the series (simply called “Pilot” 1x00) introduces both the
characters and the very beginnings of the mytharc, and it also immediately involves the
viewer with questions of disappearance both in terms of time and space. The agents
tavel to Bellefleur, Orgeon to investigate the death of a local high school student named
Karen Swenson. Agent Mulder identifies red marks on the victim’s body as similar to
those found on alleged victims of alien abduction all over the United States. Mulder and
Scully also interview Billy Miles, one of Karen’s classmates, who corroborates Mulder’s
suspicions concerning the abductions. Teenagers are disappearing from Bellefleur, and
then they reappear, dead. Though not all such disappearances that come up in the rest of

[season][episode], e.g., (“Anasazi” 2x25).
the series will be similarly connected to extra-terrestrials, the series makes a clear connection between these things in its first episode.

But bodies are not the only things that disappear in “Pilot” or in Bellfleur; time disappears, too. As Mulder and Scully drive away from a crime scene, their car is engulfed in a bright white light, and then they find themselves rolling to stop; the car has lost all power. Most disturbingly, Mulder is aware that they have also “lost” nine minutes. He had looked at his watch just before the light and it read 9:03pm. When the light ends and the car rolls to a stop, his watch has just turned 9:13pm. Mulder immediately links the disappearance of this time to aliens:

MULDER: Oh-ho, yes! Abductees ... people who have made UFO sightings, they've reported unexplained time loss.  
SCULLY: Come on.  
MULDER: Gone! Just like that.  
SCULLY: No, what a minute. You're saying that, that time disappeared. Time can't just disappear, it's, it's, it's a universal invariant!  
MULDER: Not in this zipcode. (“Pilot” 1x00)

It is not made clear in “Pilot” the exact nature of the time loss. Is the time actually lost in some absolute fashion (for everyone, everywhere), or is it simply the perception of linear and continuous time that is breached? That is, does nine minutes disappear in the story, or do Mulder and Scully simply fail to remember what happened to them during those nine minutes? For the rest of the series, Mulder and Scully make hundreds of hours disappear in their quest to find the answers to these and other similar questions.

_The X-Files_ is filled with episodes about people and things disappearing and appearing in various ways. Viewers are most familiar with the motif of abduction by
aliens, which figures directly in no less than twenty-two episodes.\(^{30}\) Many of these episodes center on the believability of the those people who claim to be abductees (and in some cases multiple abductees), such as the recurring character of Max Fenig in “Fallen Angel” (1x09), “Tempus Fugit” (4x17), and “Max” (4x18). Another set of almost a dozen episodes focuses on the abduction story that defines Special Agent Fox Mulder as a character, the childhood abduction of his younger sister, Samantha, and his life-long attempts to discover what happened to her. Information about Samantha, and encounters with various kinds of alien-human hybrid clones bred from her genetic material, are two of the most pressing kinds of leads offered to Mulder (and viewers) about the existence and character of extra-terrestrial life in the series. A dozen more episodes focus specifically on various human acts of kidnapping. Given the revelations about the conspiracy between extra-terrestrial invaders and the shadow government or “syndicate,” the series occasionally blurs the line between alien abduction and simple kidnapping (especially in the cases of Scully’s and Mulder’s own disappearances). Twenty more episodes feature myriad styles of disappearance (usually fatal) from such disparate causes as disintegration, e.g., “Soft Light” (2x23); consumption by various creatures, e.g., “Darkness Falls” (1x19), “Our Town” (2x24), and “Quagmire” (3x22); faster-than-sight travel, e.g., “Rush” (7x06); and Bermuda Triangle-like regions, e.g., “Dod Kalm” (2x19) and “Triangle” (6x03).

\(^{30}\)The exact number of episodes featuring alien abduction or kidnapping or other kinds of disappearance or vanishing is susceptible to a certain level of interpretation, especially considering what Jodi Dean calls the “fugitivity of postmodern truth” in episodes like “Jose Chung’s From Outer Space” and others. In short, the series occasionally refuses to say with certainty what has occurred and at other times has no scruples about “taking back” narrative assertions made in previous episodes.
In all, almost half of the episodes that make up all nine seasons of *The X-Files* feature vanishing, disappearance, or invisibility in some fashion. To the extent that FBI Special Agents are tasked with investigating kidnappings that cross state lines, we might expect that the prevalence of these themes are an attempt to lend some authenticity to Mulder’s and Scully’s investigations (there are, by contrast, only two or three episodes featuring bank robberies). However, it seems fairly clear that *The X-Files* is not overly concerned with whether or not the episodes reflect any real level of procedural accuracy. The FBI is not tasked with investigating reports of missing persons, unless there is reason to believe that the missing person has been abducted and transported across state lines.

*The X-Files* is continually interested in people who vanish: alien abductedees, alien-human clones who dissolve into toxic green ooze when killed, even the Anasazi. The show is filled with these vanishing Americans, and their prevalence begs several questions. For example, why is the series so pre-occupied with people disappearing? Why are the forces of the shadow government in the show so eager to conceal the truth about these disappearances? Albert Hosteen’s oral history quoted in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter links Native Americans and “ancient aliens,” and in the same breath claims that these ancient aliens have disappeared but have also left behind traces of themselves. The Anasazi, by virtue of their representation as Native Americans and of their wholesale disappearance, are “vanishing Americans” twice over.

Just like the paranormal investigators at the heart of *The Haunting of Hill House* and many other stories with the traumatized space, Special Agents Mulder and Scully are analogous to psychoanalysts attempting to uncover pathologies. Because Mulder and Scully are agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, their mandate or jurisdiction
extends across the United States — and in some instances even beyond those borders. Through a series of over two hundred episodes (or sessions, if you will) these analysts uncover the trauma lurking at the heart of the American experiment. *The X-Files* is concerned with people who vanish or disappear in various ways, and, just as with a haunted house or a traumatized analysand, they must look to the past in order to make sense of the nation’s anxieties about its own future. In *The X-Files*, this probing of the past is three-fold. First, the vanishing that the show seems most concerned with is the genocide of Native Americans at the hands of Anglo-European settlers. Second, this connection with a previous set of “vanishing Americans” highlights an alternate origin for the detective as character in the pathfinders of James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking* novels. Third, the traditional investigative techniques Mulder and Scully use are augmented by regression hypnosis, which is very similar to some of the original therapies used in treating hysteria and traumatic neuroses. All of these threads ultimately coalesce into the conclusion that though the Native Americans have in many ways disappeared, traces of their existence live on in the form of our conception of the detective. Through the depiction of investigative techniques both conscious and unconscious, *The X-Files* suggests that national anxieties or neuroses concerning the displacement and decimation of Native Americans is manifesting itself in the television series as anxieties about the coming human extinction at the hands of extra-terrestrials.

4.2 *The X-Files* and James Fenimore Cooper’s pathfinders

How do the people who disappear in *The X-Files* relate to the better-known vanishing Americans — the Native Americans and white frontiersmen (the pathfinders)
of James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales? The answer to this question lies in aspects of *The X-Files* that are genealogically related to the classic detective genre.

Among the many antecedents of the detective as character type, James Fenimore Cooper’s “pathfinder” — and specifically the character of Nathaniel “Natty” Bumppo — defines a clear if distant link between the Native Americans as represented in Cooper’s novels and FBI Special Agent Fox Mulder. The equation of Cooper’s pathfinders with the character of the detective is not as strange as it may at first appear. In her 1928 “Introduction” to *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror*, Dorothy L. Sayers observes,

> Cooper revealed to the delighted youth of two hemispheres the Red Indian’s patient skill in tracking his quarry by footprints, in interrogating a broken twig, a mossy trunk, a fallen leaf. In the [eighteen] ‘sixties, the generation who had read Fenimore Cooper in boyhood turned, as novelists and readers, to tracing the spoor of the criminal on their own native heath.

(21-2)

Since then, few critics have taken up this line of thought, preferring instead to focus on the clearer ancestral bloodlines for the detective to be drawn from the Gothic sensation novels of the eighteenth century, through Edgar Allan Poe’s C. Auguste Dupin stories, and on to Sherlock Holmes and the detectives of the “Golden Age.” J. K. Van Dover argues that, though, “Natty Bumppo, with his eye for the broken twig, has sometimes been cited as a precursor of the detective hero,” the difference between the pathfinder and the detective is clearly laid out in their relationship to the investigative space (171n6).

While the pathfinder can always retreat to the wilderness in order to escape corruption (or romance), the detective has nowhere analogous to turn; the urban environment, especially in the twentieth century after the end of westward expansion, offers no solace from vice,
crime, or distraction. Van Dover argues against a strict identity between the pathfinder and the detective as genre characters, but I believe a simple equivalence is not the object here; a “precursor” may only contain a partial complement of the characteristics found in one of its literary “descendants.” Without a doubt, the genres in which these two character types flourish perform different cultural work by virtue of the ways in which the pathfinder and the detective determine, are determined by, and interact with the narrative patterns of the western story and the mystery story. However, the fact that The X-Files is such a curious amalgamation of television genres — science-fiction, classic detective, police procedural, and horror to name just a few — works to invite examination of such recursive and cross-genre influences.

Sayers’s observation offers an intriguing line of inquiry into the recursive relationship between the figure of the detective in fiction, Native Americans, and the shadowy extra-terrestrial menace in The X-Files. The X-Files highlights the roots of the detective within Cooper’s portrayal of the pathfinders. By calling up the ghost of the pathfinder on the verge of the millennium — a temporal threshold that naturally seems to prompt recollection and anticipation — The X-Files (however inadvertently) acts to analyze the American guilt and fear surrounding the decimation of the indigenous peoples of North America.

The practice of accumulating clues offers the most direct point of comparison between the character of the pathfinder (as exemplified by Natty Bumppo) and common depictions of the detective in mystery fiction. In virtually every kind of plot circumstance in the Leatherstocking Tales, Hawkeye uses his tremendous powers of observation to solve the problems set before him and his friends. The provenance of
these powers is primarily linked to the pathfinder’s skills in tracking, hunting, and the various forms of scouting necessary to such a life on the American frontier (they are, after all, path-finders), but a pathfinder is equally capable of using these skills in other quarters, too. There are numerous examples of deductive prowess in the Leatherstocking Tales, but I will highlight only two here, two which have clear echoes in Edgar Allan Poe’s C. Auguste Dupin as well as perhaps the most famous detective character of all time, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes.

In Chapter 21 of The Last of the Mohicans; A Narrative of 1757 (1827), Hawkeye, Chingachcook and his son Uncas, Major Duncan Heyward, and Lieutenant Colonel Munro are in pursuit of a band of Hurons led by Magua, who has again abducted Munro’s daughters, Alice and Cora, as well as the music teacher, David Gamut. The party of would-be rescuers is not within sight of the Hurons and their captives, so they must rely on their tracking skills. As they come upon a stream, they recognize that the Hurons must have stopped in the place:

> Extinguished brands were lying around a spring, the offals of a deer were scattered about the place, and the trees bore evident marks of having been browsed by the horses...But while the earth was trodden, and the footsteps of both men and beasts were so plainly visible around the place, the trail appeared to have suddenly ended. (243-44)

The pursuers are presented with the wilderness version of a locked room mystery. They find clear indications that a large group of people and animals had been present not long before, and Uncas even finds the two horses on which the Munro daughters were thought to be riding; however, despite the fact that none of the Hurons or their captives seem to be present, there is also no indication of the means by which they could have left. The party seems simply to have vanished.
In this case, it is Chingachcook’s son, Uncas, who discovers the lost trail using his skills at wilderness deduction. The whole group divides the immediate area into sections and examines it minutely, but they find no more evidence than they had on their initial search. Hawkeye suggests that the group redouble its efforts and specifically search for evidence that the Hurons were taking care to conceal their trail. Speaking of Magua, he says, “The Huron shall never brag in his tribe that he has a foot which leaves no print” (245) Uncas discovers a footprint in the soft bed of the stream by first diverting the water’s course. The others examine the discovery, congratulating Uncas on his skill, and Hawkeye weighs in with his own deductions:

“Yet that is not the footstep of an Indian! the weight is too much on the heel, and the toes are squared, as though one of the French dancers had been in, pigeon-winging his tribe! Run back, Uncas, and bring me the size of the singer's foot. You will find a beautiful print of it just opposite yon rock, agin the hillside.” (245)

The footprint turns out to be an exact match for David Gamut’s, and suddenly the chain of reasoning falls into place for him. “I can now read the whole of it, as plainly as if I had seen the arts of Le Subtil,” he added; ‘the singer being a man whose gifts lay chiefly in his throat and feet, was made to go first, and the others have trod in his steps, imitating their formation” (245-46).

The second example of pathfinders as detectives occurs early in The Deerslayer (1841), chronologically speaking the first of the Leatherstocking Tales — it tells the story of Natty Bumppo’s and Chingachcook’s first war-path together in their youth — but the last in order of composition. \(^3\) Natty and his traveling companion, Henry March, meet up

\(^3\) A “war-path” in Cooper’s novels refers to a number of different possible sorties, from small raiding parties to actual military missions to rescue parties. The war-path in this instance is an attempt to rescue Chingachcook’s betrothed, Wah-to-Wah! from her Huron captors. The fact that Deerslayer and
with Tom Hutter and his two daughters, Judith and Hetty, on Lake Glimmerglass (commonly thought to be Otsego Lake near Cooperstown, New York); Natty is on his way to meet Chingachcook, so they can go rescue Chingachcook’s beloved, and March is courting the renowned beauty Judith. Hutter is alarmed by the news that a Huron raiding party is moving into the area. He believes they may have designs of storming the “floating castle” that he has built for himself and his daughters in the middle of the lake, and this threat turns out to be real. After a few violent altercations with the Hurons, Hutter and March decide to descend upon the Huron camp at night to slaughter their foes while most of them are asleep (and not incidentally to take as many Huron scalps as possible for the bounty they will bring). Hutter and March fail in their mission and are captured, but Natty (who rows the pair to shore in a canoe but does not accompany them into the camp) returns to the castle where he, Chingachcook and Judith agree to ransom the two men with whatever of value they can find in the castle. The castle has little of sufficient value for the ransom except for a curious locked trunk in Hutter’s chamber. Judith knows that there must be a key, but Hutter always scrupulously avoids opening the chest in her presence, though her “feeble-minded” sister Hetty claims to have seen him open it many times. Natty turns to Chingachcook in this instance, “Sarpent, you’ve eyes like a fly, and a judgment that’s seldom out; can you help us in calculating where Floating Tom would be apt to keep the key of a chest that he holds to be as private as this” (157)? All three look in the obvious and less-obvious places throughout Tom’s chamber with no success until they enter the daughters’ room. Both Deerslayer and Chingachcook are struck by the contrast in the possessions of Judith, which are extremely

Chingachcook are going on their first war-path means that this mission is also a rite de passage for both of

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fine quality for the wilderness, and those of Hetty, which are all coarse and homely. This contrast clinches a train of thought for the Mohican:

‘And the “Feeble-Mind” has seen the chest opened?’ inquired Chingachcook, with curiosity in his glance.
‘Sartain; that much I’ve heard from her own lips; and for that matter so have you. It seems her father doesn’t misgive her discretion, though he does that of his eldest darter.’
‘Then the key is hid only from the Wild Rose?’—for so Chingachcook had begun gallantly to term Judith in his private discourse with his friend.
‘That’s it! That’s just it! One he trusts, and the other he doesn’t. There’s red and white in that, Sarpent; all tribes and nations agreeing in trusting some, and refusing to trust other some. It depends on character and judgment.’
‘Where could a key be put so little likely to be found by the Wild Rose, as among coarse clothes?’ (158)

Chingachcook is correct, of course, and the key is found immediately and with no difficulty in a coarse pocket hanging from a peg. Chingachcook’s deduction in this scene reveals a curiously carved chess set, only a few pieces of which is sufficient to ransom Hutter and March. However, the discovery of the key also eventually reveals the family secret hidden at the very bottom of the chest: that Judith is not Hutter’s daughter at all, but her mother’s daughter by a previous marriage; only Hetty is actually the offspring of Hutter and their long-dead mother.

There are more to the affinities between the pathfinder and the detective than simply the accumulation of clues. As Michael Carroll points out, Natty Bumppo is credited with a clear moral superiority among his fellows (289). This moral superiority is directly related to the heightened faculty of judgment that allows the pathfinder accurately to size up other people’s characters, as Chingachcook does in The Deerslayer. When living amid the moral degeneracy represented by the criminal culture in mystery
fiction and by the so-called “evil savages” of Cooper’s novels (which include figures like Henry March and Tom Hutter as they embark on their own scalping expedition), the pathfinder and detective must have a clear sense of right and wrong in order to maintain their own liminal identity between the various cultures (based on race, wealth, belief, etc.) they must often mediate. However, this is not to say that the pathfinder and the detective are untouched by their sojourns among other cultures. Both the detective and the pathfinder must undergo an extensive and various education in order to build the professional awareness of the people, practices, things, and places that most often fall beneath the investigative gaze. The pathfinder must move among the people and places of the frontier if he is to survive and thrive in such a harsh environment, particularly during the bloody periods of war depicted in Cooper’s novels. Likewise, detectives must understand the people and places around them, including criminals and criminal methods, if they are to accurately interpret the clues they find. In both cases, this transculturation is often viewed with suspicion by members of one or another culture. Police are often dubious when considering how adept consulting detectives tend to be at various skills with criminal uses like disguise or lock picking, and Natty Bumppo endures all manner of insults from both whites and Native Americans due to his status as a white who was raised as a Delaware.

Finally, the moral superiority and the transculturation of the pathfinder and the detective tend to combine and express their intersection in the form of divided loyalties to the patriarchal authorities of civilization and the seemingly more natural and honest people of the frontier. Natty Bumppo is a man apart precisely because he is influenced by both Christian morality and by the teachings of the Delawares, as well as by the
peculiar and natural justice of the wilderness. He often works on the side of Anglo-
American interests and against those of the Huron and French-Canadians, but his true
bonds of friendship are found more often among the frontiersman, whether Anglo-
American or Native-American. Detectives like Sherlock Holmes express this
ambivalence most strongly in their status as consulting detectives, rather than
credentialed detectives of the state. They take orders from no one, preferring instead to
take only those cases they believe to be the most interesting or those that present the most
opportunity for doing what they believe to be right.

4.3 Pathfinder detectives in Twin Peaks

Equating pathfinders with detectives is a less common critical road precisely
because few detectives evince characteristics clearly attributable to Copper’s
frontiersman. However, several years prior to the premiere of The X-Files and Agent
Mulder on American television, audiences were introduced to another pathfinder-
influenced prime-time detective, whose first investigation also took him to the Pacific
Northwest. Before I show how pathfinder-detectives interact with the extra-terrestrial
menace in The X-Files, I want to touch on how these issues are expressed in Twin Peaks,
David Lynch’s and Mark Frost’s television series that ran on ABC from 1990 to 1991.
Twin Peaks is a pivotal television program in this argument both because it contains a
clearly pathfinder-influenced detective in the character of FBI Special Agent Dale
Cooper, and because it anticipates the Native-American and extra-terrestrial themes of
The X-Files. As an immediate predecessor, Lynch’s and Frost’s innovative prime-time
drama acted as a proximal influence on The X-Files. Twin Peaks introduces its viewers
to many of the same concepts found in *The X-Files*, but it does so in a fragmentary and frustrating way, since its abrupt cancellation prevented further development of several nascent subplots. In “Agent Cooper’s Errand in the Wilderness: *Twin Peaks* and American Mythology,” while not drawing explicit links between pathfinders and detectives as character types in fiction, Michael Carroll does see direct connections between James Fenimore Cooper’s Natty Bumppo and FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper. According to Carroll, Hawkeye and Dale Cooper share several qualities, including superlative “hunting” abilities (with special emphasis on almost superhuman eyesight), divided loyalties to the patriarchal authorities of civilization and the seemingly more natural and honest people of the frontier, a clear moral superiority, an ambivalent stance toward romantic entanglements, the use of strangely “formalized diction,” a love of nature, and a tendency toward philosophical mysticism derived from that love of nature (288-90). Carroll also points out a number of narrative similarities between the Cooper’s tales and *Twin Peaks*. He draws analogies between BOB, the spirit of evil that flits from one host body to another throughout the series and the figure of the “evil Indian” in the Leatherstocking Tales (and the Huron Magua in particular). Just as there is an “evil” Indian, so must there be a “noble savage” like Chingachcook or Uncas. In *Twin Peaks*, Deputy Tommy Hawk fills this role (291). Carroll also identifies two captivity narratives within the series: Laura Palmer’s and Ronette Pulaski’s night in the train car just prior to Laura’s murder and Audrey Horn’s drug-induced captivity at One-Eyed Jack’s (291-92).

Carroll does an excellent job of connecting Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales to *Twin Peaks*, but the timing of his essay prevented him from extending his observation to
include *The X-Files*. However, the connections between the two series are clear on several levels. In some ways, the most obvious connections between the shows are found in their casting choices. David Duchovny, Agent Fox Mulder on *The X-Files*, plays the cross-dressing DEA agent Dennis/Denise Bryson in *Twin Peaks*. Bryson’s arrival in on the scene is coincident with Major Garland Briggs’ sudden and mysterious disappearance during a night fishing expedition. Don Davis, who plays Major Briggs, went on to a recurring role in *The X-Files* as Agent Scully’s father, Captain William Scully. A number of *Twin Peaks* cast members have also played small parts in “monster of the week” episodes of *The X-Files*. Michael Horse, who plays Sheriff’s Deputy Tommy Hawk in *Twin Peaks*, is promoted to Sheriff Charles Tskany of the Trego Indian Reservation in “Shapes” (1X18, of which more later). The Man from Another Place, played by Michael J. Anderson, who features prominently in Agent Cooper’s dreams, appears in “Humbug” (2X20) as the proprietor of a trailer park catering to sideshow performers in Gibsonton, Florida. Though these two television shows do not share significant executive production personnel, which might then account for the significant cross-over in casting, a handful of familiar faces prepare viewers to seek further narrative and thematic connections between the series.

It is hard to miss the fact that both shows feature FBI Special Agents investigating the supernatural and the paranormal. Occult or supernatural detectives are hardly unique to these two shows, but “ghost-hunting” FBI Agents are not the most common form of occult detective. However, while the subjects of Cooper’s and Mulder’s investigations are strange, their investigative techniques are unorthodox, too. Both agents make use of

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32 Since Carroll’s article is published in *Film Quarterly* in 1993 — and was presumably written some time
the unconscious as a vital deductive tool. In *Twin Peaks*, Cooper engages in his famous rock-throwing exercise as a “deductive technique involving mind-body coordination operating hand in hand with the deepest levels of intuition” (“Episode 3”). In *The X-Files*, Mulder is willing to accept regression hypnotherapy (whether of himself or others) as a valid investigative tool, whereas others view the technique as suspect.

*Twin Peaks*, like *The X-Files*, also posits a connection between Native Americans, extra-terrestrials, and the U.S. government. *Twin Peaks’* abrupt cancellation prevented the series writers from developing these connections to any great extent, but the basic elements are there in the show. After the resolution of the Laura Palmer murder mystery in the show’s first half-season, one of the mysteries Cooper pursues is the significance of a place known as the White Lodge. Major Garland Briggs is the first character to name this place, while the two of them are on their night fishing trip. Later conversations with Sheriff Truman and Deputy Hawk reveal that the White Lodge is a spiritual place where the forces that direct this world and the next reside. Hawk also mentions the Black Lodge, “the shadow-self of the White Lodge,” through which souls transitioning from one world to another must pass and undergo a test of their courage or face annihilation. All of these discussions place the White and Black Lodges firmly within the context of (fictional) Native-American legends. However, the fact that Major Briggs is concerned professionally with the White Lodge triangulates the legends with UFO lore and government involvement in that lore. In “Episode 10,” Major Briggs reveals to Cooper and Truman that his work with the Air Force is a part of Operation Bluebook. The real Operation Bluebook was the U.S. government’s official program for the investigation of
alleged UFO sightings; the question at the heart of the program was whether or not the increase in UFO sightings after World War II indicated a threat to national security. The U.S. Air Force project ran from 1952 until it was officially closed in 1969, though investigations continued into 1970.

Bluebook is first mentioned in *Twin Peaks* when Major Briggs brings a message to Agent Cooper. The message has come across the radio telescopes the Air Force uses to scan interstellar radio waves for evidence of extra-terrestrial life. The project receives these phrases in the midst of strings of gibberish, “The owls are not what they seem,” and “Dale Cooper Dale Cooper Dale Cooper” (“Episode 10”). The connection between project Bluebook and Native Americans remains latent for several episodes, until Major Briggs invites Agent Cooper out for a night fishing expedition. It is on this trip that Briggs first mentions the White Lodge to Cooper, and immediately after mentioning it, Briggs disappears mysteriously from the camp. His disappearance is coincident with an intense white light emanating from the other side of a ridge in the forest. The mise-en-scene of the intense white light in the darkened forest is reminiscent of a number of UFO films, including the final spaceship launch scene in Steven Spielberg’s *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) (“Episode 18”). Later in the series, when Colonel Riley questions Agent Cooper concerning Briggs’ disappearance, we learn that the message to Cooper originated in the woods outside Twin Peaks and that Briggs has purposely shifted his professional focus from the heavens to the woods as part of his investigation of the White Lodge. Riley expresses his belief that the bigger picture regarding Project Bluebook and Major Briggs’ disappearance is of such gravity that it would “make the Cold War look like a case of the sniffles” (“Episode 20”). Though it is never stated explicitly, the clear
implication from Riley’s military uniform, the reference to the Cold War, and the stated purpose of Project Bluebook is that the government is deeply concerned about an extra-terrestrial threat to national security. The connections between Project Bluebook and Native American legends remain elusive in Twin Peaks, but these same connections are explored in much greater detail in The X-Files. In fact, Major Briggs’ “abduction scene” is not only reminiscent of previous abduction scenes in film and television, it also presages the alien abduction scenes aired (several years later) in the pilot episode of the The X-Files.  

4.4 Native Americans in The X-Files

A number of scholars have noted that The X-Files is less of a classic epistemological detective story (i.e., concerned primarily with the means by which we can come to know the truth of the world) and more of an ontological detective story that focuses on the nature of the world under investigation. The central question is not “who done it?” but rather “what is it?” Over the course of nine television seasons and two feature films, the show engages in fitful revelations about the truth of paranormal phenomena, especially the existence, nature, and intentions of extra-terrestrials. The show contains both episodic, monster-of-the-week installments that generally strive for more narrative closure, as well as cumulative mytharc episodes that tolerate more open-endedness as they build a larger story of alien conspiracy over the course of all nine seasons. This larger mytharc has its own act structure. Seasons 1 and 2 form Act I, which generally introduces the audience to the main characters (Mulder, Scully, 

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33 Michele Malach makes the same connection.
Cigarette Smoking Man, etc.) and their professional dynamics; the nature of the X-Files investigations, i.e., their status as unusual and the diegetic reality of the paranormal/supernatural; as well as shadow government or syndicate conspiracy to hide the truth, particularly about extra-terrestrials, from the public. Act II, which includes seasons 3 through 6 and the first feature film, forms the middle of the story, in which Mulder and Scully must push beyond the truth about the existence of aliens into the truth about the government complicity with extra-terrestrial invaders. Finally, Act III encompasses seasons 7 through 9, and deals primarily with attempts to thwart the coming apocalypse in the form of an alien plague. Each of these acts includes both mytharc episodes and monster-of-the-week episodes. Each act also tends to deal with a particular cluster of themes, and chief among these in Act I is a tendency to look into the past, specifically in terms of Native-American history and culture.

In “Shapes,” Special Agents Mulder and Scully travel to Northwest Montana to investigate what turns out to be a werewolf attack, the latest in a long line of similar attacks in the region since World War II. In the show’s version of American history, J. Edgar Hoover created the first X-File by quietly suppressing the results of the mid-1940s investigation. Presumably, Hoover was not at all inclined to believe in the Native American explanation, and his action was only one in a long history of betrayals that encouraged the Tregos not to believe in the U.S. government and its representatives. Jim Parker, owner of the Two Medicine Ranch, believes he shot and killed an animal attacking his livestock as well as his son, Lyle. However, when the smoke clears, there is no animal in sight, only the naked body of Joseph Goodensnake, a Native American from the nearby Trego Indian Reservation. Though the FBI could have assigned the
investigation to any agent, Mulder specifically requests the assignment because of its similarity to the very first X-File. However, Mulder and Scully have more to deal with than local tensions or even a werewolf; they must also contend with the long history of distrust between the Native Americans and the U.S. government.

This distrust first manifests when Mulder and Scully first visit the Trego Indian Reservation. In a bar, no one will offer anything other than silence or thinly veiled hostility to their inquiries after the local sheriff, Charles Tskany. When a Trego elder named Ish asks the pair what they are doing on the reservation, Scully offers a professional and no-nonsense FBI opening line, “We're looking for any individuals who might be able to provide information on the homicide of Joe Goodensnake...” With this line, Scully fulfills the Tregos’ expectations concerning the FBI. She is seeking witnesses and/or informants who can further the homicide investigation. However, Mulder quickly interrupts her with, “We're looking for anything that can create human tracks in one step and animal tracks in the next.” Mulder blocks the discourse of the police procedural in favor of the discourse of the hunt. “Individuals” *per se* are a waste of time in Mulder’s conception of the investigation; he is on the trail of some “thing” that will account for the evidence he has already witnessed at Two Medicine Ranch, a strange and deadly animal-man, a Native-American spiritual figure, straight out of the accounts from Lewis and Clark’s expedition almost two centuries before. Though Ish is willing to go so far as to ask Mulder what he and Scully are looking for, Joe Goodensnake’s sister, Gwen, is not, declaring that she, “hate[s] suits who are always here when they need

[^34]: Mulder asserts that a journal from one of the members of Lewis and Clark’s expedition contains a description of Native-American medicine men who can change shape into wolves. The reference is not specifically to the journals of Lewis and Clark.
something from us, but when we need help, they’re nowhere to be found.” Gwen does not believe in the Native American legends, so Mulder and Scully are simply two more “suits” to her. However, Ish takes note of Mulder’s reference to shape-shifting, and it allows him to delay making a judgment that would lump Mulder together with those FBI agents Ish has already encountered.

After their preliminary investigation, Mulder and Scully attend Joe Goodensnake’s funeral on the reservation. As they walk up to the funeral platform, Ish and Gwen once again play up the differences between the FBI agents. The Trego elder turns at their approach and nods silently to Mulder, who nods in return. In this moment, Ish offers a silent acknowledgment of the respect that Mulder and Scully show by attending the funeral. However, the exchange of nods is pointedly only shared between Ish and Mulder. We get the sense that Mulder and Ish have connected in a way that Ish and Scully have not. Scully meanwhile is approaching Gwen, who stands staring at the funeral platform in grief. Without even looking at Scully, Gwen tells her, “You don’t belong here,” and, “You’re only around to wrap up your investigation.” Again, Gwen is just short of openly hostile to the FBI agent, and though she gives Scully one of Joe’s possessions in keeping with Trego custom, she makes it clear that the gesture has no meaning for her and should have little more for Scully; it is simply customary.

It is only after the investigation into Joe Goodensnake’s death has proceeded in some depth that Ish and Sheriff Charles Tskany (Michael Horse) come to see Mulder’s respect for and interest in Native-American beliefs as genuine.
ISH: I sense you are different, FBI. You're more open to Native American belief than some Native Americans. You even have an Indian name — Fox. You should be "Running Fox," or "Sneaky Fox."

MULDER: Just as long as it's not "Spooky Fox."

Whether or not “Sneaky Fox” is an allusion to James Fenimore Cooper’s Huron character, Magua — whom the French-Canadians have dubbed Le Reynard Subtil, or “The Cunning Fox” — Mulder’s rejoinder indicates he would rather be given a sobriquet by someone who “believes” in him than by those who ridicule and scoff. With his characteristic self-deprecating humor, Mulder accepts the Trego elder’s observation while at the same time retaining a modicum of authority with regard to his potential Native-American name. Like Natty Bumppo, Mulder positions himself as a man who has the ability to straddle the white and Native-American worlds, which are delineated not only by history and conceptions of race and culture, as they are in Cooper’s works, but also by the physical space of the Trego Indian Reservation and the labyrinth of laws by which it exists and is maintained. Federal laws give Mulder and Scully the power to conduct their investigation on the reservation, but they do not guarantee that the agents will be welcomed into that space either personally or professionally. Ish instantly identifies Mulder as an FBI Agent, and therefore as an outsider, and so Mulder must work to convince the Tregos that his intention is not to re-enact the arrogant and ignorant persona of J. Edgar Hoover. Mulder has no intention of sneering at the beliefs of the Tregos and the explanation those beliefs might offer. Instead, he comes as an open-minded investigator, a detective of the state bent on uncovering what the federal government worked so hard to suppress half a century (and perhaps even longer) ago.
“Shapes” is a “monster-of-the-week” episode, but its concerns are those of the larger alien-conspiracy mytharc. The resistance to cooperate with the FBI displayed throughout the episode points to the barely concealed tensions between the Tregos of the reservation and the federal government. As Ish says upon first meeting Mulder in the reservation bar:

ISH: I was at Wounded Knee in 1973. What I learned fighting the FBI is you don't believe in us and we don't believe in you.

MULDER: I want to believe.

Though Mulder delivers this response as an offer of respect, the sincere olive branch of the truth seeker, his reply also links the Trego with the grainy image of the UFO on the wall of his Washington, D.C. office. This reference complicates the diplomatic tone of the scene, setting up a three-point relationship — Native American to Anglo American to Extra Terrestrial — rather than preserving the one-to-one dialogue between Mulder and Ish, or even FBI and Trego. This triumvirate is the same one laid out in the pivotal “Anasazi” mini-arc, as well as the two-part series finale “The Truth.”

The transculuration of Trego and FBI in “Shapes” is not the only way in which The X-Files and Mulder as a character refer back to the pathfinder. The mytharc itself displays thematic concerns very similar to those at the root of the Leatherstocking Tales. The most prevalent of these themes is abduction or captivity. From the pilot episode, in which a group of recent high school graduates suffer from repeated alien abductions, all the way to the series finale, in which Mulder is held captive by the shadow government and brainwashed in an attempt to transculturate him into a non-questioning failure, the show is built upon various permutations of abduction and captivity. Major plotlines also
trace the abductions of Agent Scully and Max Fennig, and as I have already mentioned, Samantha Mulder’s abduction is the single event that drives Fox’s life-long quest for the truth. In “Aliens and Indians: A Comparison of Abduction and Captivity Narratives,” Michael Sturma draws explicit connections between early-American captivity narratives and late-twentieth-century alien abduction narratives. Though Sturma focuses on personal eyewitness narratives rather than popular fiction, his conclusions have clear implications for the connections between Cooper’s novels and *The X-Files*. One of his observations is that both abductees and former captives report undergoing a kind of forced transculturation to the ways of the aliens and the Native Americans, respectively (321). He also notes a certain change in the social status of the abductee/captive (329). Regardless of their feelings toward their former captors, those who tell these narratives are often marginalized by their society; they are considered tainted in some way by such a close association with the alien, whether literal or figurative. This is the same transformation that virtually all abducted characters undergo in *The X-Files*. Since the mere existence of extra-terrestrials poses an ontological quandary for the mass of society, those who “know” or believe and attempt to express their knowledge/belief are marginalized (and sometimes killed). In this case, the transculturation cannot be countenanced by the abductee’s society, because to do so would threaten the boundaries on which that society’s very existence is based.

In the nine seasons of *The X-Files*, the alien abduction/colonization/government conspiracy plot forms the primary narrative arc of the show’s mythology. At a crucial juncture in the mytharc, on the threshold between Seasons 2 and 3, the mytharc is tied directly to Native Americans in ways that have a profound resonance for the rest of the
series. This relationship is again emphasized and further clarified in a three-episode arc at the end of season 6 and the beginning of season 7. This pair of triptychs marks off the transitions between the three “acts” of the entire series. Just like the beginning and ending of a narrative, the events or scenarios that mark the boundaries between significant dramatic or narrative movements are points of special attention for an audience. The episodes containing Native-American characters, locales, and cultural references form only a small portion of the total mytharc in terms of numbers, and so I am not claiming that the mytharc is explicitly referential to Native American history and themes throughout. However, the events of these few episodes set up conditions of plot and theme for the rest of the series that are difficult to ignore.

In “Anasazi” (2x25), an earthquake on a Navajo reservation in New Mexico uncovers a boxcar containing the remains of alien-human hybrids, each with a small pox vaccination scar. At the same time, Mulder comes into possession of a digital tape containing documentary proof of the government’s knowledge of extra-terrestrials and their conspiracy to hide the information, but the tape is encoded in Navajo. The theft of the digital files ripples through the shadow government and results in the murder of Bill Mulder and attempts to kill or frame Scully and Mulder. Albert Hosteen — a Navajo elder and grandfather to Eric, who found the boxcar — helps them translate the files. The files confirm the decades-old conspiracy of silence, and Scully finds her own name in the latest file entries referring to some kind of tests. Albert tells Mulder about the ancient tribe that used to live on the land, the Anasazi, who disappeared centuries ago apparently

35 Native American characters, history, or culture figures prominently in at least 7 episodes out of 75 mytharc episodes, in addition to at least two “monster-of-the-week episodes, in a total of 202 series episodes (not counting the feature films).
mass victims of alien abduction. The episode ends with Mulder examining the contents of the boxcar just before Smoking Man and a black ops unit arrive to fire bomb it with Mulder apparently still inside.

In “The Blessing Way” (3x01), The Smoking Man and his soldiers search the reservation for Mulder and the digital tape but are only able to confiscate Scully’s hard copy of Hosteen’s translation. The next day, Albert and a group of Navajo men find Mulder near death. They take Mulder back to a ceremonial hut called a hogan where Albert and others perform the Blessing Way Chant in an attempt to heal him. While Mulder undergoes the ritual, he holds conversations with “Deep Throat” and his own father, who hint vaguely at the truth to which he is so close and urge him to return the world where he still has so much work to do. Scully inadvertently discovers a small computer chip that had been implanted at the base of her neck. Scully’s sister, Melissa, convinces Dana to undergo regression hypnosis in an attempt to discover what happened to her when she was abducted. Dana reluctantly undergoes the therapy, but is unable to discover anything new. Fox, having returned home after the healing ritual, asks his mother about his father’s work at the State Department and about a photo he finds in the closet — a photo featuring Bill Mulder, Smoking Man, Deep Throat, Well-Manicured Man, and others — but she tells him nothing. The episode ends in a tense stand-off between Skinner and Scully, who believes Skinner was sent to kill her. Skinner tries to convince her that his intentions are good, but Scully’s paranoia gets the better of her, and they wind up pointing their guns at one another.

As “Paper Clip” (3x02) opens, the outcome of the cliffhanger remains in doubt as Albert Hosteen narrates the legend of the Gila monster, “who symbolizes the healing
powers of the medicine man,” as well as recounting the news of a great omen from a
group of Plains Indians that a white buffalo had been born. Mulder rushes into his own
apartment to defuse the stand-off between Scully and Skinner, who reveals that he is in
possession of the digital tape with the MJ files. Mulder and Scully learn that one of the
men in Mulder’s photograph is Victor Klemper, a former Nazi scientist who came to
work for the U.S. government after World War II. While the shadow government
frantically conducts damage control, Mulder and Scully visit Klemper, who tells them
very little beyond pointing them toward a seemingly abandoned mine in rural West
Virginia. At the mine, Mulder and Scully uncover a vast collection of small pox
vaccination records dating back to the 1950s. They find files on Scully and Mulder’s
sister (Samantha’s file was apparently Fox’s file originally). Mulder witnesses an alien
spaceship lifting off and flying over the mine just after Scully catches frustrating
glimpses of extra-terrestrials scurrying past her out of the mine’s back door. A plain-
clothes black ops team arrives and attempts to kill Mulder and Scully, but they escape
through the same back door the aliens used. The next day Mulder and Scully finally
agree to allow Skinner to make his deal with Smoking Man. Alex Krycek and his
partners waylay Skinner as he visits the hospital, and they steal the digital tape from him.
When Scully and Mulder return to Klemper’s house, they meet the Well-Manicured Man,
who briefly describes certain aspects of Klemper’s “work” that leads Mulder to believe
that the files in the mine contain genetic samples from alien abductees who were
unknowingly part of a massive program to develop alien-human genetic hybrids like the
ones Mulder found in the boxcar. Well-Manicured Man also reveals that Samantha was
taken as insurance to ensure Bill Mulder’s silence after he discovered the real purpose of
the program. When Smoking Man returns to Skinner’s office for the final “deal,” he is confident that Skinner has no tape with which to bargain. However, Skinner trumps this assumption by producing Albert Hosteen, who translated and memorized the contents of the files for Scully and then passed the knowledge on to twenty other Navajo men. Smoking Man, in a silent retreat, seems to acquiesce to Skinner’s terms. This three-episode mini-arc highlights many of the thematic and narrative concerns that connect The X-Files with Cooper’s Leatherstocking tales. The three most important of these, which I will elaborate at greater length later in this essay, are the transculturation of the pathfinder/detective character, the prevalence of the abduction/captivity narrative in the overall mytharc, and the deep fear and guilt associated with the themes of colonization, miscegenation, and extermination.

The significance of the “Anasazi” story arc is now apparent in ways that it simply could not have been to the majority of scholars who published the first wave of X-Files criticism in the mid- to late-1990s. Whereas the authors of previous critical works (like Eleanor Hersey’s article, “Word-Healers and Code-Talkers,” and the Deny All Knowledge contributions) wrote from within the ongoing narrative games of revelation and recantation, and therefore were unable to predict where the series would go and how their arguments might be affected, we have both the luxury and responsibility to treat our subject within its full and appropriate context. Now that the series is, for all intents and purposes, over, and the cumulative narrative of the mytharc has come to a close, scholars and other viewers can approach individual episodes or the entire series with some sense of proportion. At least in terms of the television show and probably also in terms of rumored feature-film sequels, there are no more answers “out there.” And yet, as Mulder
tells Scully at the beginning of the third season, “the truth is in there.” When he says “in there.” Mulder is referring to the X-Files as a body of investigative work, but he could just as easily be referring to the series itself. At the very end of “Paper Clip,” Mulder and Scully have this exchange:

MULDER: Skinner told me that he talked to you, that you were insistent about coming back to work. Now, if Melissa's death is...
SCULLY: I need something to put my back up against.
MULDER: I feel the same way. We've both lost so much... but I believe that what we're looking for is in the X-Files. I'm more certain than ever that the truth is in there.
SCULLY: I've heard the truth, Mulder. Now what I want are the answers.

Eleanor Hersey reads Scully's claim that she has heard the truth as “cynical” (111). However, when we take the full perspective of the series into consideration, we can see that Scully has in essence heard the truth. She is the one who reports to Mulder the gist of what Albert translates from the MJ files. Certainly the audience hears little of this information, but Scully has presumably heard enough of it to characterize the contents to Mulder, and the broad strokes of it prove to be remarkably accurate over the course of the series. The international conspiracy of silence regarding the existence of extra-terrestrials and shadow government complicity in alien abduction and alien-human hybrid experimentation, together with the “colonization” mini-arc that began in season one with “The Erlenmeyer Flask” (1x23), form the framework upon which the entire alien conspiracy mytharc is built. To be sure, the details along the way remain as slippery as ever, and Scully will be just as frustrated in her search for “answers” as fans and some critics have been in their search for truth, but the truth that Scully has heard by the end of “Paper Clip” is not re-written significantly. As a result, the “Anasazi” mini-arc forms a
kind of threshold for the series. Before it, Mulder and Scully are trying to determine what the truth is; after it, they are searching for the reasons behind the truth they have already discovered.

4.5 Regression and American trauma in *The X-Files*

For both Mulder and Scully, an important part of their processes of coming to know the truth is regression hypnosis. Long before the events of *The X-Files* “Pilot,” Mulder undergoes regression hypnotherapy and discovers that he has repressed the memories of his sister’s abduction by aliens when he was twelve and she eight. Though less successful, Scully undergoes hypnosis in an attempt to recover her memories of what happened to her when she was abducted during the “Duane Barry” case (2x05-06). Like all psychoanalysts, who must themselves undergo analysis as part of their professional training, Special Agents Mulder and Scully are in a sense uniquely qualified to investigate the specific details of the X-Files mytharc. Each of them has experienced an abduction-related trauma, repressed memories associated with that trauma, and finally used hypnotic regression as a way to uncover (with varying degrees of success) those repressed memories. Inasmuch as each of them has a very personal stake in uncovering the truth, they are involved in an extended course of largely self-directed psychotherapy. However, neither Mulder nor Scully primarily focus on the benefits that learning the truth will accrue to them personally. Instead, each of them has a dedication to determining and freely disseminating the truth, as both private citizens and public servants, particularly as it thwarts those who feel that they can hide and manipulate that truth from the American public. Their dedication to uncovering these secrets resonates with Freud’s and Breuer’s
desire to uncover the root traumas plaguing their patients suffering from hysteria. For Mulder and Scully, the state is their patient. In *The X-Files*, those secrets directly related to the mytharc are created and kept by the small “consortium” whose membership is most often represented to the audience as Smoking Man. As the keeper of secrets, Smoking Man acts as the unconscious of the state, harboring the knowledge that would be dangerous if revealed to the conscious mind (i.e. the public), and burying that knowledge beneath layers of lies and obfuscations.\(^\text{36}\)

In “The Field Where I Died,” Mulder undergoes regression hypnotherapy in an attempt to confirm that one of his past lives is in fact Sullivan Biddle, the Confederate soldier whom Melissa Riedal-Ephesian seems to know on sight as her husband. During his regression, Mulder actually recalls a number of his own past lives, one of which is a Jewish woman in Poland during the rise of the Third Reich:

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THERAPIST: I want you to go into your past, beyond your life as Fox Mulder. What do you see?
MULDER: Ghetto streets ... shattered glass ... bodies of the dead ... I'm a woman ... a Jewish woman ... Poland. My son is with me. He is Samantha.
THERAPIST: Samantha? I thought Samantha was your sister.
MULDER: In this life, she is my son. I see my father. He's dead in the street. He is Scully ... But now ... he's gone on now ... waiting for us. The souls... come back together ... different ... but always together ... again and again ... to learn. I can't go to my father. Gestapo is standing next to him. An officer ... he's Cancer Man ... evil returns as evil ... But love ... love ... souls mate eternal ... my... husband ... is taken away from me. To the camps. He is Melissa. We're always taken away. (“The Field Where I Died” 4x05)
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Though souls seem to “come back together,” they often appear to each other in different forms, sexes, or races. However, Mulder realizes that “evil returns as evil,” just as it is

\[^{36}\text{Appropriately enough, Mulder refers to Smoking Man as “A Keeper of the Truth” in the final episode of the series, though at the time, he is unaware of the wise man’s true identity.}\]
clear that good returns as good. What is most important is the repetition. This is a literal example of the drive to repeat as it is characterized in traumatic neuroses. Because of some event inaccessible to current consciousness, repetitive behaviors manifest in the subject. In allegorical terms, Cigarette Smoking Man repeatedly attempts to undermine the freedom and security of the American people, whether as a Nazi or as a member of the shadow government.

Indeed, evil does return as evil two seasons later in “Triangle.” When Mulder manages to get on board the Queen Anne, a British-flagged ocean liner that disappeared in the Bermuda Triangle in 1939, he finds that Cigarette Smoking Man is an SS officer (See Figure 4.1) looking for a nuclear scientist, and Scully is an American OSS agent assigned to protect that scientist.

Figure 4.1: Cigarette Smoking Man (center) and Agent Spender (right) as SS Officers

Though no regression hypnosis occurs in “Triangle,” a geographic space in the Atlantic Ocean serves a similar narrative function. When Mulder sails out into the Atlantic in the hopes of finding the Queen Anne, which recently appeared on satellite imagery, he is quite literally searching for the past, though he is unaware that the past he will encounter will in some way be connected to his own past lives. Instead of
delving into the “space” of his subconscious mind, Mulder is delving into the actual space of the Bermuda Triangle. When he is hauled aboard the ship, he is hauled aboard by sailors who firmly believe they are still in 1939. Mulder firmly believes that they are, too. His original goal was simply to find the ship, but once he is on board, he is embroiled in a Nazi plot to kidnap “Thor’s Hammer,” a nuclear scientist traveling aboard the ship. Mulder’s actions at this point are based on his conviction that any change that occurs on the ship will actually occur in history, if the ship is allowed to reach port. In effect, if the Nazis get “Thor’s Hammer” back to shore, the Germans will have the atomic bomb in the middle of World War II.

In an attempt to rescue Mulder, Scully and the Lone Gunmen charter their own vessel and sail out to the Queen Anne. Though she believes none of what is happening, she and the Gunmen board the vessel in their search for Mulder. At this point, two different times are occupying the same space. In one, it is 1999, and Scully and the Lone Gunmen are searching an abandoned ocean liner that they have found in immaculate condition, despite its having gone missing some sixty years before. In the other, it is 1939, and Mulder has breached the membrane between these two worlds. Though it is never fully explained in the episode, Mulder’s transitions onto and off of the Queen Anne correspond with his being rendered unconscious, most likely due to some sort of violence and/or head injury. At the beginning of the episode, the ship’s 1939 crew fish him from the ocean, where he bobs unconscious among the flotsam of his chartered cabin cruiser. At the end of the episode, Mulder awakes in a hospital bed, unable to remember anything after the point where he jumped overboard while being chased by Nazis. This temporal membrane of the unconscious suggests that
Mulder is only able to cross over between the two times because he undergoes a traumatic event that either forces or allows his temporal displacement.

For most of the scene when everyone is aboard the ship, though in two separate times, the temporal displacement is emphasized through cross-cutting. Scully and Lone Gunmen are clearly on the ship, but they are not in the exact locations that Mulder is at any given time, until Mulder and the WWII OSS Agent Scully are running from the Nazis. At this point, a chase sequence begins, and the producers chose to forego cross-cutting in favor of a split-screen view. In the split screen, 1939 is shown on the left, while 1999 is shown on the right (Figures 4.2 through 4.9). In both shots, Scully is moving toward the camera such that, by Figure 4.3, the line demarcating the split screen also marks the corner of a passageway in the *Queen Anne*. This corner becomes an intersection of both space and time in the episode, a locus of repetition but with a difference. As the characters from 1939 pass into the right frame, they bring the past with them, and vice versa for Scully on moving from right to left.

Figure 4.2: The two Scullys cross paths across time (Image 1)
Figure 4.3: The two Scullys cross paths across time (Image 2)

Figure 4.4: The two Scullys cross paths across time (Image 3)

Figure 4.5: The two Scullys cross paths across time (Image 4)
Figure 4.6: The two Scullys cross paths across time (Image 5)

Figure 4.7: The two Scullys cross paths across time (Image 6)

Figure 4.8: The two Scullys cross paths across time (Image 7)
The viewer could dismiss this as only a camera trick if it were not for the reactions of the characters. The frames in which both Scullys pause and turn back toward the corner they just rounded (as in Figures 4.8 and 4.9) invite the reading that each Scully felt the other’s presence in space, but across time, even though neither of them explicitly articulates that feeling. What we witness as viewers is the televisual equivalent of déjà vu for Scully in 1999 but something akin to its opposite for the 1939 Scully (i.e., the discomforting certitude that she will turn that corner again far in the future).

What is most important about “Triangle” and its use of spatio-temporal disjunction is that it reinforces Mulder’s and Scully’s roles as analysts of the state just as much as they are analysts of the paranormal, it reinforces the serial and repetitive nature of the tensions and conflicts that the agents encounter in virtually every episode, and it posits once again that the cascade of historical influence does not flow in only one direction. Mulder does not simply regress his consciousness to an earlier time or an earlier life; he manages to pierce the temporal membrane that apparently is so thin in the vicinity of the Bermuda Triangle and physically travel sixty years into the past. This happens at the very beginning of the episode, rendering his success in terms of solving
the X-File, while not insignificant, essentially moot in terms of the remaining hour-long narrative. However, for Mulder and Scully, being an analyst of the state only begins with the solution to an X-File. Being witness to supernatural events or extra-terrestrial visitations does not end their quest; instead, it usually begins the process of grappling with the covert apparatus of the state that wishes to repress the truth. It is this grappling that makes up the bulk of the narrative of series. Even in those episodes that have nothing ostensibly to do with the mytharc, Mulder and Scully usually must deal with state and local governments reluctant to concede the truth.

In “Triangle,” Mulder is unable to convince the captain of the Queen Anne that he has come from the future. Though Mulder is obviously giddy about the success of his quest to find the lost ship and actually to have crossed over in time, he is also aware that larger historical forces remain in motion. Though the Third Reich is not the same evil antagonist that menaces the planet in 1999, the seriality of evil is expressed by the casting of William B. Davis (Cigarette Smoking Man) and Chris Owens (Agent Spender) as Nazi officers in search of an American nuclear scientist. Likewise, the seriality of good is expressed through the double casting of Gillian Anderson as an OSS agent, who is traveling undercover to protect that same scientist from the Nazis. Just as in “The Field Where I Died,” the same “souls” find themselves drawn to each other in every incarnation, always playing out similar narratives with similar conflicts and tensions. However, that is not to claim that the results of the stories are always the same. History repeats itself in some ways but not in others. In “Triangle,” the history of the twentieth century is not altered significantly by Mulder’s temporal breach, because the American nuclear scientist is killed on the Queen Anne, thus depriving the Nazis of his expertise,
but Mulder is adamant throughout the episode that the possibility exists to influence history from the future. When the two Scullys pass one another across time, they both feel the other’s presence, intimating that communication or influence — whether actual or metaphorical — is possible in both directions.

4.6 “The Truth” about American trauma

In order to fulfill their roles as analysts of the state, Mulder and Scully must be more than simply detectives; they must be able to exercise their deductive abilities and their superior moral judgment outside the confines of both the government hierarchy and conventional public notions of truth. Michele Malach has pointed out that Mulder and Scully occupy special positions as investigative characters on television. On the one hand, they are credentialed representatives of the state, obligated to enforce normalcy and conventional notions of cultural and legal boundaries. On the other hand, by virtue of coming into contact with otherworldly forces and occasionally finding themselves at odds with the authority of the state, they often act outside the confines of conventional law enforcement rules and procedures in pursuit of truth and justice (70-2). This liminal position within the state system allows these Special Agents to represent the state’s ability to rationally analyze itself. Mulder and Scully are attempting to peel back the layers of repression that hide the original traumas beneath the state’s repetitive somatic behaviors, which characterize its specific hysteria. *The X-Files* is not simply about a few alien abductions. It is about the modern state’s perceived need to defend its very

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37 In time travel narratives like “Triangle,” there is always the paradoxical and dizzying argument that history is never changed per se, because whatever the characters do while in the past did actually happen in the past in the first place.
existence from an encroaching outside threat. Just as we find the pathfinder Hawkeye living and fighting in the margin between the civilization and the wilderness, so too do we find Mulder and Scully conducting their investigations on the border of what is accepted as conventional truth and what is believed by those who have come in contact with the extra-terrestrial Other.

Agents Mulder and Scully discover all of this information about their past and about the past of the United States in general, as part of their search for “the truth.” For most of the series, Mulder’s search is focused on both the past and the present. He is constantly trying to unearth the truth about what happened to his sister Samantha when they were both children, and he also wants to uncover the truth about the existence (in the right now of the diegetic world) of extra-terrestrial life. In many ways, the action and events of “Act I” of the series (seasons 1 and 2) and focused on the answer to the question of present existence, while the events and actions of “Act II” (seasons 3 through 6) are focused on the past. This relation to time is roughly equivalent to the detective story structure discussed previously in Chapters I and II. Mulder and Scully arrive at the “scene of the crime” in Act I, and then they spend the bulk of Act II reconstructing the narrative that led up to the events that brought them to the scene in the first place. This reconstructed narrative, as we have seen, has as much to do with Native Americans and James Fenimore Cooper’s pathfinders as it does with aliens and UFOs. However, when the answer to the mystery is finally revealed, the question being answered is not simply, “are there aliens among us?” but also, “and so what?” There are certainly aliens among us in The X-Files — the viewer knows this by the end of Act I of the series, if not sooner — but there are also other
aliens who have yet to arrive, and these are the aliens who seem apt to do the most harm. These aliens who are coming carry with them a plague that will wipe out humanity, just as strange new pathogens wiped out tens of thousands of Native Americans when European explorers and settlers arrived in the New World. Act III of the series looks forward to this coming invasion and focuses primarily on the syndicate’s attempts to either find or engineer the secret to creating an alien-human hybrid that will be able to withstand the plague so that humanity can survive in some form.

The three-part trans-seasonal mini-arc from “Biogenesis” (6x22) to “The Sixth Extinction” (7x03) to “The Sixth Extinction II Amor Fati” (7x04) posits that extra-terrestrials are not only analogous to the European colonists of the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries; they are also (and perhaps more importantly) the source of all human life on the planet earth. “Biogenesis” opens with a lengthy voice-over from Agent Scully. This voice-over describes the origins of life on earth according to modern scientific understandings of evolutionary theory, continuing from the introduction of single-cell organisms, through multi-cellular creatures, and on to our current age. Time-lapse photography and CGI renderings of pre-historic life forms are punctuated by Scully’s descriptions of the five global mass extinctions that have occurred on earth:

Only 100,000 years ago, Homo Sapiens appear — man. From cave paintings to the bible to Columbus and Apollo 11, we have been a tireless force, upon the earth and off, cataloguing the natural world as it unfolds to us. Rising to a world population of over five billion people all descended from that original single cell, that first spark of life. But for all our knowledge, what no one can say for certain is what or who ignited that original spark. Is there a plan, a purpose, or a reason to our existence? Will we pass, as those before us, into oblivion, into the sixth extinction
that scientists warn is already in progress? … Or will the mystery be revealed through a sign, a symbol, a revelation? (“Biogenesis” 6x22)

Scully’s narration recalls the voice-overs common in science and nature documentaries, except for the plaintive note in her voice. As she points out the hole in the evolutionary theory (i.e., how did that first cell come to be?), she also wonders aloud about whether humanity will witness its own demise in the sixth mass extinction. Though she is a scientist, who understands the cyclical patterns of life and can appreciate evolution with a certain professional distance, she is also a self-aware human being, who harbors a justifiable fear of what the “sixth extinction” might mean for her and the rest of the human race. And yet the entire structure of the opening voice-over is built around the repetition of the sequence of extinctions. Scully does not refer to the extinction, the one that would hold any meaning for her and her fellow humans. Instead, her analytical mind allows her to identify it as only one in a series of impersonal extinctions, though the sixth would come with very personal effects. It is clear from what follows that, just like psychoanalysts, Scully and Mulder must come to understand this cycle of extinctions if they hope to have a chance of bringing the repetition to an end.

After the opening, a biologist named Dr. Solomon Merkmallen discovers unusual metal fragments on the Ivory Coast. These fragments are covered with strange glyphs and seem to possess even stranger physical properties. Merkmallen shows the fragments to a colleague, Dr. Sandosz of American University, who believes that all life on earth derives from a common extra-terrestrial source. A well-known debunker named Dr. Barnes murders Merkmallen, steals the fragments, and frames Sandosz. Scully, relying on a rubbing from the fragments, soon identifies the strange glyphs as Navajo, leading
her to believe that the fragments are a hoax. When the agents investigate Dr. Sandosz’s residence, they notice a photograph of Dr. Sandosz with the Navajo codetalker, Albert Hosteen. Scully believes Hosteen may have helped create the hoax. While Mulder returns to the university to try to locate the fragments, Scully travels to New Mexico to question Hosteen, but she finds him suffering from the late stages of cancer. Scully encounters Dr. Sandosz, who tells her that Hosteen had previously translated other fragment to find that they were passages from the book of Genesis. Other fragments appeared to have meaningless text, but as Hosteen is taken from the hospital and moved into a Navajo medicine lodge, Sandosz realizes that the so-far untranslatable fragments are actually pieces of human genetic code. After Mulder is hospitalized by his worsening spells (he seems to have a mental and physical reaction when he comes in proximity to the glyphs), and Sandosz is murdered in New Mexico, Scully finally travels to the Ivory Coast, where she discovers that the fragments are coming from the hull of an alien spacecraft buried in the sand.

In “The Sixth Extinction,” season seven opens with Agent Scully still in the Ivory Coast, attempting to decipher the markings on the hull of the crashed UFO. In Washington, Mulder’s condition continues to deteriorate to the point where Mulder is placed in a padded cell and monitored continually. In Africa, Scully and a colleague of Merkmallen, Dr. Amina Ngebe, discover that the writings on the hull of the ship are from every major religion on earth, not only from Genesis. As they continue their work, Dr. Barnes arrives and offers to help. Barnes becomes convinced that the ship contains the secrets to all life and death and takes Scully and Ngebe hostage so that they cannot claim credit for the discovery. They escape that evening.
The mini-arc concludes in “The Sixth Extinction II Amor Fati,” in which Mulder is abducted by the Cigarette Smoking Man and Diana Fowley (another FBI agent and member of the shadow government), who believe that he is the first successful alien-human hybrid and therefore offers a cure for the coming extra-terrestrial plague, the titular sixth extinction. While sedated for a medical procedure designed to extract some of Mulder’s hybrid DNA and inject it into Cigarette Smoking Man, Mulder is offered a fantasy life in which he gives up his quest for the truth, marries Diana Fowley, has children and a comfortable house, and eventually grows old, while unbeknownst to him the world is destroyed by the coming alien invasion. Scully is visited by Albert Hosteen, who urges her to find Mulder to save not only him but also the entire world (it later turns out that Hosteen was still in New Mexico comatose when he apparently visited Scully in Washington). Scully confronts Agent Fowley and urges her to help find Mulder. Soon after, Scully receives a book from an unknown ally; the book has the same markings on its cover that the UFO has on its hull. The book describes the Native Americans’ belief in the sixth extinction as well as their belief in the existence of one man who has the power to stop it.

This three-episode mini-arc fills the hole in the timeline Scully references in the voice-over introduction to “Biogenesis.” That first, single-cell organism was introduced by extra-terrestrials, but the aliens already had homo-sapiens in mind when they brought life to earth. But even this “answer” does not reveal all. For instance, though the mysteries of biogenesis may be revealed in the episodes, the purpose behind the origins of life on earth is not. For The X-Files, and particularly for Agents Mulder and Scully,
the sixth extinction is the trauma that they fear is coming for them and for everyone else on the planet.

For Native Americans in Cooper’s novels, and for the humans in *The X-Files*, there is reason to fear. The various nations represented in the Leatherstocking Tales recognize that the white settlers will continually expand their settlements westward. Some tribes respond to this realization with hostility, warring against the colonists whenever and wherever they can. But as Richard Slotkin speculates in *Regeneration Through Violence*, some Native Americans may have been amenable to offering captives the chance to become part of the tribe as a means of stemming the disastrous decline in their numbers (123). In either case, though they certainly viewed it in different ways, both Native Americans and white colonists eventually came to view “Manifest Destiny” as inevitable. In the same way, both the shadow government and Agent Mulder eventually come to view the complete colonization of earth by extra-terrestrials as inevitable, as well. As the fleeting glimpses of the “End Game” files in “The Truth” suggest, the overt alien invasion on December 22, 2012 will bring an end to human civilization as we know it (“The Truth” 9x19). Of course, the shadow government has its plan. Just as the choice between life and death prompted some white captives to join their captors’ tribe, the shadow government’s plan has been to engineer an alien-human genetic hybrid that will allow a limited number of humans to live in the aftermath of the alien invasion, albeit as a slave race. The shadow government does not intend to share this plan with all of humanity, and this selfishness in the face of annihilation simply reaffirms the show’s stance toward the conspirators as evil. As the alternate title of *The X-Files* feature film indicates, the only acceptable response to the truths revealed
throughout the series is to “fight the future.” Mulder takes up this fight explicitly in “The Truth” when he indicates that, in light of what he has discovered, his hope now is that he can change it.

Due to the nature of the conspiracy’s solution, this combative response to colonization and genetic hybridization suggests a direct renunciation of alien-human miscegenation. However, this is not the case. Though the general response to genetic experimentation and the existence of alien-human hybrid colonies in the show is supposed to be one of horror, that response is not entirely monolithic. One of these hybrids (or several, depending on how you look at it) is a clone of Mulder’s sister, Samantha. When we learn the details surrounding the provenance of the clones and Samantha’s fate, we are frustrated at the ever-changing “truth” and saddened at the futility of Fox’s quest for reunion, but we are not disgusted by the idea of the alien-human hybrid. This sympathetic reaction is due in part to the fact that the hybrids appear completely human until they are wounded or killed. It is also a result of the way the hybrids are deployed in the narrative. When we first meet the alien-human hybrids in “The Erlenmeyer Flask” (1x23), we are positioned to sympathize with them as victims of a relentless alien bounty hunter. It is this bounty hunter, who most thoroughly embodies a cultural resistance to miscegenation, but the bounty hunter is explicitly characterized as both a threat to the hybrids and a threat to Mulder, Scully, and anyone else who gets in his way. If anything, the show’s sympathies are with the hybrids, rather than against them, and this sympathy is at the root of the series’ concerns with Native Americans.

When the “Keeper of the Truth” turns out to be the Cigarette Smoking Man in the final episode of the television series, he is hiding out in the ancient desert village of the
Anasazi. In speaking with Mulder, Cigarette Smoking Man refers to the Anasazi as “the original shadow government” (“The Truth”). His characterization of the lost tribe of the Anasazi as morally equivalent to, and the predecessor of, the current conspiratorial syndicate says much about the function of Native Americans in the series, but it also says volumes about the wider symbolism of Native Americans in American popular culture of the 1990s. In The X-Files, Native Americans have gone through all of this before (i.e., an impending alien invasion), but they have gone through it more than once. In the alternate history created in the show, the Anasazi were the first group of “Americans” that had to deal with the coming of extra-terrestrials (excepting, of course, the pre-historic inhabitants of what would later become north Texas portrayed in the opening of the first X-Files feature film). They were the first established government that found it necessary to engage the aliens diplomatically in an attempt to ensure their own survival, despite how bleak the chances for survival seemed in the face of the technologically superior outsiders. Cigarette Smoking Man’s contention that the Anasazi were the original shadow government is meant as a gesture of explanation and amelioration of his own actions and the actions of other men and women of twentieth-century governments, who have been engaged in similar negotiations with the same (or perhaps a different?) set of extra-terrestrials. What is never made clear in The X-Files is whether or not the Anasazi attempted to survive the arrival of the extra-terrestrial through a program of covert hybridization in a fashion similar to the contemporary shadow government’s experiments. As we have seen, those experiments evoke the early-American anxieties over miscegenation between Anglo-European Americans and Native Americans.
However, the term “shadow government” evokes not only the sense of conspiracy that has overhung the American experiment since its inception, but it also evokes the spectral in the sense that a “shadow” or “shade” can refer to a ghost. The shadow government is the ghostly government. The ghostliness of the Anasazi’s original shadow government is right in line with Renée Berglund’s argument in the *National Uncanny* that white Americans have always insisted on the spectrality of Native Americans (1). Berglund points out that in the 1970s, this spectrality made its way into American horror films in the form of the trauma at the heart of American hauntings. Berglund is especially interested in Stephen King’s hauntings from *The Shining* and *Pet Semetary*, both of which are linked with disturbed Native American land. He argues persuasively that King’s use of the Native Americans as the basis for these hauntings springs from the tensions, especially in his native Maine, surrounding the American Indian Movement (AIM) of the 1970s (165). King keeps his Native Americans spectral rather than corporeal and militant, but these are not the Indian ghosts that haunt *The X-Files* of the 1990s. AIM’s activities were no longer in the public eye (and perhaps not even in the public memory) when Cigarette Smoking Man conjured the Anasazi as the original “government within a government.”

In the 1990s, the Native-American population within the United States was visible on a daily basis but in a much different way than they had been in the 1970s and 1980s. This renewed visibility was essentially spatial or architectural and was characterized by the conspicuous absence of Native Americans. In 1988, the U.S. government passed the Indian Gaming Act, which made it legal for tribal governments to establish and run casinos on tribal land. Prior to this law, Americans thought of gambling as something
that was legal in Nevada, Atlantic City, and a smattering of horse racing tracks around
the country. However, within a couple years, this law ushered in a wave of casinos, both
large and opulent and small and dingy, across the United States. Now there were casinos
from St. Ignace, Michigan to Tampa, Florida. Though it was clear to most and often
noted in public discourse about the casinos that they were owned and operated by Native-
American tribal governments, the physical plants of the casinos and their all-
encompassing entertainment experiences (many of which were patterned after the newly
family-friendly attractions of Las Vegas) rarely put a Native American identity front and
center. Some casinos did express their tribal identity — or their broader, socially
constructed and negotiated identities — in their names and designs. Establishments like
the Ojibwa Casinos, Apache Gold, Mazatzal Hotel & Casino, Kah-Nee-Ta High Desert
Casino and Resort, and the Soaring Eagle Casino & Resort are among these, but these
casinos are most commonly found in areas of the country that retain elements of a visible
and public Native American identity (e.g., the Seminoles in Florida, the Ojibwas in
Michigan, the Apache and Cherokee in the West and Southwest). Most tribal-run casinos
in other areas of the country fall into the category with names like The Mill Casino Hotel,
Riverside Casino, Bay Mills Resort & Casino, Creektown Casino, and King’s Club
Casino — or names in which the tribal element is eclipsed by a more familiar brand like
Harrah’s Cherokee or the Seminole Hard Rock Café & Casino.

None of this history is to suggest that the majority of Americans actually felt
threatened in any way by the rise of Indian gaming in the United States. Though there
are always anti-gambling groups that oppose the establishment of new locations or
methods of gambling (most notably Catholic advocacy groups), by and large most
Americans seemed either receptive or indifferent to the increased availability of gambling throughout the country. Rather than provoking a sense of menace, as white America might have felt when confronted with the militant activities of the American Indian Movement, the rise of Indian gaming in the United States simply manifests as an issue of visibility and the implications of that visibility. Native Americans in *The X-Files* are never contiguous with the threat of alien invasion; they are never complicit. Instead, they are representative of a past that has echoes in the present and perhaps in the future; they are symbolic of what may be again, because of what has gone before.

The flourishing of Indian gaming establishments across the country kept Native Americans within the public discourse, but in ways that emphasized the legal separation between tribal governments and the U.S. federal government. Indian casinos are owned and operated directly by tribal governments, rather than by private corporations at the behest or permission of those governments. Tribal governments have the authority to do this as a result of their sovereign status within the territory of the United States – though, to be clear, the vexed nature of that sovereignty is highlighted by the fact that the authority had to be recognized and ratified through the passage of the Indian Gaming Act of 1988 in the U.S. Congress. Still, the result is that casinos begin to pop up across the country in locations that many, if not most, inhabitants think of as United States land, but the existence of the casino is dependent upon the recognition, literally and spatially, of a “government within a government.” The very fact of the native tribes’ sovereign governments existing inside of the U.S. federal government presents a real-world analog and inspiration for the ever-present tendency in America toward conspiracy thinking, even though there is nothing malevolent in tribal governments.
In *The X-Files*, the evil in the shadow government’s plan comes from its coercive and secretive nature. The horror at Samantha’s abduction and cloning, the horror at the tens of millions of records secreted away in the abandoned mine in West Virginia, and the horror at the revelation that the shadow government is in negotiations with the aliens all originate with the victims’ ignorance. Samantha was not given a choice when she was twelve; her father chose for her. Americans who willingly received small pox inoculations unknowingly provided tissue samples that were used to determine if they were apt subjects for abduction and hybridization. And negotiations between the shadow government and the aliens take place outside the purview of duly elected governments. In fact, the consortium responsible for the alien-hybrid experiments is both extra- and trans-governmental. Just like Colonel Riley in *Twin Peaks*, they believe that the existence and suspected intentions of extra-terrestrials is a threat that makes the Cold War between modern nation states “look like a case of the sniffles.” They respond to this threat both practically and ideologically. In practical terms, they set up the genetic experiments they hope will allow a small portion of humanity to survive the colonization. In ideological terms, they publicly deny the existence of extra-terrestrials and work assiduously to conceal their own activities that might suggest otherwise. In “Sovereignty and the UFO,” political scientists Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall posit that the governments of modern nation states *must* deny even the alleged existence of extra-terrestrial UFOs, because to admit their existence would permanently undermine the anthropocentric metaphysical conceit underlying notions of state governance. Whether or not the extra-terrestrials’ intentions were hostile, they argue, any human response would of necessity be global, hence destroying the legitimacy of modern state-based
sovereignty as we know it and practice it. As a result, governments consciously deny the existence of extra-terrestrials without first seeking a rigorous and honest scientific inquiry into UFOs.\textsuperscript{38} The denial Wendt and Duvall describe is similar to the denial at work in \textit{The X-Files}, similar also to the denial that Smoking Man attributes to the Anasazi when he calls them “the original shadow government” (“The Truth” 9x19). Ultimately, it is not miscegenation that threatens humanity; it is any number of threats that might undermine the authority of the government at the turn of the millennium.

\textit{The X-Files’} series finale was broadcast on May 19, 2002, not long after the turn of the millennium, and, of course, the entire series straddles this temporal threshold. At such times, it is natural for a western society to look back into its past at the same time that it looks forward into a new future. American history is full of these millennial moments, and not all of them come at the turn of centuries or millennia, but certainly many of them do. Christopher Columbus left the “Old World” to arrive in the “New World” at the end of the fifteenth century. The New England Puritans began their experiment of a new utopian society at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The United States of America came into being at the end of the eighteenth century, and angst over its viability as a modern state continued well into the nineteenth century. By 2002, the United States found itself the lone super-power in a post-Cold War world. On the one hand, this situation is often read as a victory over Soviet communism and a validation of the “American way of life.” On the other hand, the turn of the millennium has not been cause for unalloyed optimism. The attacks on September 11, 2001 reminded many

\textsuperscript{38} Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall. “Sovereignty and the UFO.” Mershon Center for International Security Studies. January 19, 2006. Wendt and Duvall recognize that governments have in fact instigated
Americans that they had not, in fact, reached the end of history. Any number of threats still exists in the world, despite what had previously seemed like a supreme position militarily, technologically, and economically. The anxiety at the heart of The X-Files mytharc, the secret fear and shame that Mulder and Scully as analytical agents of the state seek to uncover and confront, is the recognition that any member of the three-point relationship can potentially be either colonizer or the colonized, victimizer or victim. The X-Files is, therefore, deeply concerned with vanishing Americans, whether it is looking back with a certain amount of shame and guilt at Cooper’s literary constructions of Native Americans as a vanishing race or looking forward in trepidation at the possibility — represented by popular constructions of abduction or colonization by extra-terrestrials — that the same process of vanishing could come back to haunt the descendants of the North-American colonists.

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studies of UFO phenomena (e.g. Project Bluebook), but they call into question the scientific honesty and rigor of these studies, as do many other critics of government UFO research.
5.1 “On location with the men and women of law enforcement”

One of The X-Files episodes to fall within the final year of the second millennium was titled “X-Cops” (7x12, original air date Feb. 20, 2000, during February sweeps week). A monster-of-the-week episode, the conceit is that a Fox Television film crew stumbles into an X-Files investigation while filming an episode of the hit television reality show Cops on location with the men and women of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. However, for sweeps week, the producers at Fox Television went the idea one further and inserted the actual series theme song from Cops (Inner Circle’s “Bad Boys”) into the standard three-minute cold opening for The X-Files. The producers of The X-Files followed the pattern of Cops by editing together a montage of shots from the episode to run underneath the song. Once the theme song is over, we the audience find ourselves in the passenger seat of Deputy Keith Wetzel’s (Judson Mills) cruiser as he responds to a call about a “monster” prowling around outside an L.A. residence. Wetzel is speaking to the camera (a camera that mimics the broadcast-quality digital video common in reality television and nightly news programs) in the hands of one of the familiar-though-rarely-seen camera operators from the Cops show. It is not until after the
deputy has run screaming from some kind of monster the camera never sees that the cold opening ends and the standard *X-Files* theme sequence plays. This title sequence, as utterly separate from the *Cops* theme sequence, is the only nod to the fictional narrative codes of *The X-Files* television series. Both before and after this sequence, the episode is filmed entirely by hand-held camera, by location crews. The episode breaks its fake documentary frame only this once, inviting viewers for the rest of the show to encounter Special Agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully as though they were no less real than any of the law enforcement personnel encountered on the reality show *Cops*. When the episode breaks for commercials, the standard *X-Files* screen card is displayed, but it is lit by the flashing red and blue lights of a police cruiser while the soundtrack continues from the previous shot (See Figure 5.1) in emulation of the standard *Cops* commercial screen card.

![Figure 5.1: “X-Cops” commercial break title card](image)

This episode also invites viewers to believe that the world of *The X-Files* more completely and cogently intersects with their own actual world in as much as there are no complicated special effects sequences. Additionally, characters repeatedly use strong language. These expletives are censored on the audio track (bleeped), which only adds to
the reality-television feeling of the episode. The monster of the episode never appears at all on camera. In fact, Mulder’s speculation that the entity feeds off mortal fear and manifests itself to its victims as the thing each person fears most makes it unlikely within the logic of the show that the creature would appear to audiences (unless someone in the audience went in mortal dread of sweeps week rating gimmicks disguised as experimental series/genre crossovers).

In “X-Cops,” though the entire episode is “filmed on location,” the viewer never sees the entity that is attacking and killing people in the Willow Park neighborhood of Los Angeles. The audience hears hysterical descriptions of it from survivors, but the entity never appears on camera. In spite of the documentary stylistics of the episode, the cameras and audio equipment are unable to document the focus of the investigative efforts of virtually all the officers and agents portrayed in the show. The fact that the evidence never appears on the video calls into question whether or not the eyewitness accounts are believable, as in this exchange between Deputy Wetzel and Agent Mulder:

    WETZEL: You really believe me, huh? You really believe I saw what I thought I saw?
    MULDER: Yeah, I believe you.
    WETZEL: Why?
    MULDER: Why do I believe you?
    WETZEL: Yeah. I mean, what proof do you have what I'm saying is real? I mean, it's not ... it's not on the videotape.
    MULDER: The camera doesn't always tell the whole story. (“X-Cops” 7x12)

The camera does not always tell the whole story, because the camera is not merely a neutral window through which all visual information passes unfiltered and unimpeded.

39 Perhaps ironically, the use of expletives in “X-Cops” and the ways in which the episode asserts that the diegetic world of The X-Files is equivalent to the extra-diegetic world of the audience only serve to
Even though hand-held video aesthetics meant “reality” to television viewers for so long (via cinéma vérité and years of news footage from battlefields, natural disasters, and other events seen “as they happened”), during the 1990s most consumers of television and other audio-visual media were more and more suspicious of the “truth” to be found in video footage. The truth of an audio-visual narrative was to be cued by other means, as Mulder points out to Scully at the end of the episode:

SCULLY: You didn't get the proof that you wanted, Mulder.

MULDER: Well, hey, you know, it all depends on how they edit it together. (“X-Cops”)

The reality television teams depicted in this episode fail to capture evidence of the paranormal as Mulder had hoped they would (“The possibility of capturing concrete proof of the paranormal? Of a werewolf in front of a national audience, even an international audience? What's not to love?”), but Mulder is aware that there is enough evidence on video to make an effective argument. Though there is no monster on tape, the scenes that are on tape, the inexplicable nature of many of the events, the stylistic assertions of reality using documentary codes and conventions, and the seeming absence of any workable explanation other than the one offered by Mulder lead the audience to believe (within the willing suspension of disbelief accorded by viewers of *The X-Files*) that there was no other plausible explanation for everything they had seen. The impossible, depending on how you edit it, just might be there after all.

The “X-Cops” episode, while ostensibly a ratings grab, also capitalizes on and interrogates a generic hybrid familiar to audiences in 2000; that is, the horror film passing retrospectively highlight the inauthenticity of previous *X-Files* episodes in which no one uses profane
itself off as a documentary. Some fake documentaries seem only to deal with violence and gore perpetrated by humans against one another, as in the Belgian film *Man Bites Dog* (1992). However, many of the fake documentaries that came out during this period assert that they are about irrational or impossible events (though not always supernatural) and thus constitute an intriguing paradox: a documentary about something that does not — and in some cases cannot — exist.

A number of critics have argued that the comfortable equation between the hand-held video aesthetic and the reality effect (the audience’s sense of audio-visual authenticity) was thrown into doubt during the 1980s and into the 1990s by a number of influences. In *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television*, Thorton Caldwell argues that during this period of change, television completed its transformation from a text-based, content-focused medium to a medium dominated by stylistics. In fact, he argues that stylistics became the text of television (6). This transformation affected a radical disconnect between the ostensible content of televised images and the manner, or style, of their presentation for broadcast. “Rather than [providing] a window on the world, TV flaunts videographic art objects,” according to him (152). “Even police reality shows like *America’s Most Wanted* consistently come across as more like *The Twilight Zone* than cinéma vérité” (228). Caldwell further claims that the emphasis on “television style suppressed the uncontrolled reality” outside of Americans’ living rooms. Among these uncontrolled realities were the 1992 beating of Rodney King (See Figure 5.2), the 1991 Persian Gulf War, as well as the seemingly infinite number of private (usually

language beyond the standards acceptable to the Federal Communications Commission. 197
humorous) moments conveyed to living rooms via the earliest reality-television programs like *America’s Funniest Home Videos*.

![Figure 5.2: Frame from Rodney King beating video](image)

In particular, the Rodney King video and the trial at which it was admitted as evidence are highlighted as crucial examples of the power of televisuality. Since that verdict and the violent fallout in Los Angeles and other cities because of it, serious questions have arisen about whether or not video evidence can or will be believed. Near the end of the 1990s, one part of this crisis manifested itself in the rise of a series of horror narratives in print, on television, and in the movies that used the stylistic codes and conventions of academic monographs, reality television, or documentary films. At the simplest level, and especially for the motion pictures in question, the appropriation of documentary stylistics was a financial consideration. It is considerably easier for independent filmmakers of limited means to reproduce the production values of professional documentaries than it is for them to attempt to match Hollywood big-budget production values on a shoestring budget. However, there is more going on here. Whether their innovations spring from financial necessity, creative intent, or some combination, these
artists are working through changes in the way media is able to represent reality to a
viewing audience.

5.2 Documentarists as detectives

This chapter addresses the use of impossibility in three groundbreaking horror
narratives from the turn of the last century: *The Last Broadcast* (1998), *The Blair Witch
Project* (1999)\(^{40}\), and *House of Leaves* (2000). Each of these narratives clothes itself in
the conventions of non-fiction in order to deliver and enhance its generically identifiable
horror effects. The horror of these stories comes largely from the depiction of the
impossible, but not in the recognizable forms of the supernatural, the fantastic, or even
the impossible logic of madness. In fact, these fake documentaries ultimately fail to
represent the traumatic moment at the core of each narrative. Instead, each of these
narratives contains a number of instances in which the generic anxiety (i.e., pleasurable
fear) is evoked through the suggestion of spatio-temporal impossibilities. I contend that
the disorienting effect of these impossible moments both prompts the anxiety that
accounts for the conventional pleasure in horror, while the repetition of these moments
also works to desensitize the audience to the crisis of representation playing out
continually in the millennial media landscape. I argue that employing these
impossibilities for their shock value in popular entertainments trains twenty-first-century

\(^{40}\) Intriguing work touching on these concerns has already been published in the 2004 collection *Nothing
That Is: Millennial Cinema and the Blair Witch Controversies* edited by Sarah L. Highley and Jeffrey
Andrew Weinstock. In particular, Keller’s, Banash’s, Moss’s and Weinstock’s essays explore notions of
the instability of truth and representation and the post-modern nature of the *Blair Witch* phenomena.
Highley’s essay also maps out some of the concerns surrounding the contributions of *The Last Broadcast*
to the paradoxes of fact and fiction. However, none of the contributors takes on *House of Leaves* and its
relations to these two films, and only Bryan Alexander’s essay makes a glancing reference to its author,
Mark Z. Danielewski.
audiences to cope with the constantly shifting registers of fact and fiction or reality and myth in the world around them.

In this chapter, I address not only the content of the films and novel in question but also their forms. Each narrative features investigators who encounter inexplicable events (or, in the case of The Last Broadcast, explanations that do not fit the facts). However, these investigators are not what we would normally call detectives. Instead, the protagonists are documentarians, investigative journalists, or scholars. In The Last Broadcast, Steven Avkast and Locus Wheeler are public access television hosts who go into the New Jersey Pine Barrens to investigate the legend of the Jersey Devil. David Leigh, the documentarian creating the film that the audience is watching, is also an investigative documentarian. Likewise, in The Blair Witch Project, three student filmmakers travel into the Maryland woods to make a documentary film when they encounter something that apparently costs them their lives. The unnamed editors who assemble the “found footage” shot by the three students — the footage which constitutes the film The Blair Witch Project — are also attempting to solve the mystery of what happened to them. Finally, the novel House of Leaves is about a documentary film that was made to investigate the nature of the house on Ash Tree Lane; it is also about the scholarly monograph investigating the documentary; and finally it is also about Johnny Truant, who investigates the mysteries of the scholarly monograph and its author. In all of these texts, and I would also argue in all documentaries, the documentarists are detectives, and they fulfill the same functions as the detective figures in the previous chapters of this dissertation. Instead of presenting the solution to the mystery in the drawing room at the end of the story, the film documentarist presents the evidence in
audio-visual form, editing clues into a rhetorical flow that reveals the solution to the mystery.

Since these narratives are quite complex in the ways in which their forms interact with their contents, I offer a detailed synopsis of each. The story, or fabula, for each of these narratives bears a certain resemblance to the others. They are all stories of small groups of people (symbolic families if not actual ones) that attempt to understand and record through audio-visual media some supernatural or irrational phenomenon. Some or all of the characters are killed or disappear in the process. On the level of discourse, or sjuzhet, these narratives appear quite different from one another. Though each film uses the codes and conventions of nonfiction discourse, each executes those codes in very different ways.

One of the most salient features of these three narratives is that they all make extensive and pivotal use of non-fiction conventions. The Last Broadcast and The Blair Witch Project, as motion pictures, employ recognizable codes of documentary filmmaking. In the case of The Last Broadcast, the viewer is immediately introduced to the documentarist, David Leigh, who appears in the very first shot as the person who will be providing the voice-over narration for most of the movie. TLB employs more features of conventional documentary with the use of talking head interviews, archival footage from local television news programming, 911 audio tapes, crime scene and autopsy photos, as well as the surviving footage taken by the victims on the night of the murders, as well as old footage from their public access cable television program, “Fact or Fiction?” Blair Witch, the film, is somewhat more limited in its use of documentary codes and conventions, since it presents itself as a compilation of found footage.
However, the footage that is used to compile the film contains recognizable documentary styles such as hand-held direct cinema, and vox-pox interviews with Burkittsville residents. If viewers had already perused the Blair Witch web site and watched the Sci-Fi Channel mockumentary *Curse of the Blair Witch*, then they had a much wider array of documentary elements at their disposal when they finally saw the film itself.

*House of Leaves* is a different case in that it is a book, though it is a print book that, in many ways, is about a documentary film. The book identifies itself as “a novel” on its cover, but the style of the text directly references the non-fiction conventions of academic discourse. The novel is one in which a number of editors and compilers have clearly had a hand. The text is composed of several frames of discourse, which manage to convey a number of different stories. At the core of the novel is the non-existent documentary film known as *The Navidson Record*, but the reader is only aware of this film through the treatise or monograph on it, which is also called *The Navidson Record*. This treatise is also titled *The Navidson Record* and was composed by a mysterious old man by the name of Zampanò. Johnny Truant, a twentysomething Los Angeles tattoo parlor apprentice, who comes into possession of the original “manuscript” for *The Navidson Record*, then annotates Zampanò’s original text with extensive footnotes. An unnamed group of “Editors” then compiles and edits this combined Zampanò-Truant text, adding their own set of explanatory footnotes. The frequency and extent of the footnotes (450 total) calls attention to the tropes of expert commentary most often associated with non-fiction works, especially of an academic kind. In addition to the overall structure of the devices of commentary, we must also consider the content of these devices. Zampanò’s treatise is not merely an exegesis of a documentary film; it also engages with
the dozens of books and articles that have been written by scholars, critics, and cultural commentators about the film. Of course, as the film itself does not really exist outside of the diegetic world, none of the referenced books, articles, or reviews exist either. They exist only insofar as Zampanò or Johnny Truant’s “referencing” of them gives them a kind of apparitional existence as simulacra.

Though we might initially believe that the generic distinctions between fiction film and non-fiction film (i.e., documentary) are easily identifiable, film theorists and critics are not nearly so secure in their definitions. Many theorists of the non-fiction film begin with the structuralist or formalist distinction between the content of the documentary and the way in which that content is conveyed to the audience. In a non-fiction film, according to Carl Plantinga, the filmmaker “takes an assertive stance” toward the represented world. That is not to say that the camera conveys reality unproblematically. Rather, Plantinga claims that the documentary filmmaker is asserting that the real world is really like this when seen/experienced from this particular point of view. The assertive stance is often signaled by the use of non-fiction modes of discourse, which may include any of the myriad filmmaking stylistics associated with documentary: voice-over narration, direct cinema aesthetics, talking head interviews, expository captions, use of archival footage, etc.


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41 I am not counting fans’ attempts to create fragments of the film for posting on internet film sites like YouTube.com, etc.
A structural mapping of the interrelationships between documentary and fictional film involves and interplay among four basic categories: documentary form, documentary content, fictional form, and fictional content. The relations among these categories can be diagrammed as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{documentary form} & \quad \leftrightarrow \quad \text{fictional form} \\
\text{documentary content} & \quad \leftrightarrow \quad \text{fictional content}
\end{align*}
\]

Such a model helps us to define the subject matter of this book through a series of combinations:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{documentary form} + \text{documentary content} & = \text{documentary} \\
\text{documentary form} + \text{fictional content} & = \text{mockumentary} \\
\text{fictional form} + \text{documentary content} & = \text{docudrama} \\
\text{fictional form} + \text{fictional content} & = \text{fiction}
\end{align*}
\]

The narratives in question in this chapter, then, are all examples of the mockumentary form as outlined by Rhodes and Springer — except for The Last Broadcast, which, as we will see, is a mockumentary until the last few minutes when it switches fully into fiction mode. Critics have come up with a number of synonymous terms for documentary. “Fake documentary” highlights both the fictional nature of the represented world as well as the fact that the fiction is apparent to the audience. “Mock-documentary,” as with “mockumentary,” highlights the ways in which the form is said to mock what is thought to be the parent form, documentary. However, the contributors to Alexandra Juhasz’s and Jesse Lerner’s *F is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth’s Undoing* are far more skeptical of these terms and of the generally agreed upon relationship between documentary and mockumentary. Lebow, in particular, questions whether either form has a greater or lesser access to reality, since even documentary often makes extensive use of staging, re-enactments, and scripts, to say nothing of such fundamental aspects of motion pictures such as framing and editing (228).

For now, I want to acknowledge the problems surrounding generic definitions while also positing that the story-discourse or content-form divide is still a useful way to
talk about the fiction/non-fiction divide. I believe that it is in the space created by this divide that these three narratives do their most interesting work, work that relies upon well-worn generic effects in order to deliver a different kind of terror. *The Last Broadcast, The Blair Witch Project, and House of Leaves* all use the codes and conventions of non-fiction discourse (academic monograph and documentary) to assert, however provisionally or temporarily, that their fictional contents are real as a way of enhancing the gap between the rational and the irrational. Non-fiction tropes have often been used in gothic fictions to enhance the truth claims of what will turn out to be a supernatural narrative. For instance, Bram Stoker’s novel *Dracula* is, in form, a collection of journals, newspaper clippings, and audio recordings. However, narratives like *Dracula* are involved in something else. That is, “documentary” evidence of a vampire’s existence is generally used to increase audience fear by enhancing the sense that the vampire exists in the same world in which the documentary reports exist. In the films and novel under discussion here, once the assertion of reality has been made and solidified through the use of identifiable conventions of non-fiction discourse, the texts confront readers with impossibilities of time and space that instantly and radically destroy the stability of the assertion that the discourse has heretofore constantly reinforced. In other words, the use of documentary does not enhance the authenticity of the impossible in these stories; instead, it calls into question the authenticity of reality.

The difference between these narratives and classic gothic or horror narratives featuring the supernatural is the difference between the impossible and the marvelous. In his treatise, *The Fantastic*, Todorov delineates the fantastic as, “that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently
supernatural event” (25). In most cases, this hesitation is resolved in one of two ways. Either the seemingly supernatural event is provided a rational explanation, and thus shades over into the category of the uncanny (41), or the event does indeed turn out to be supernatural. In the latter case, the narrative finishes as an example of what Todorov terms the marvelous (41). In its purest form, the marvelous is exemplified by the fairy tale, in which supernatural occurrences abound, but neither the characters nor the reader are shocked by these occurrences (54). In those situations when a character is shocked out of his or her complacency to realize that their diegetic world does indeed contain instances of the supernatural (Constable Crane in *Sleepy Hollow*, for instance), it is clear that the character began the story with a mistaken impression of the nature of the world, and this mistake is cleared up by the end of the narrative.

The impossible, as I am using it here, is different than the marvelous. The impossible *cannot be*; there is no potential for the phenomenon to exist while logic prevails. The marvelous simply has not been observed or confirmed to have been observed. The impossible is that which is inherently paradoxical, either along the axis of space or time (or both), rather than that which is as yet unknown. At first, it may seem like classic supernatural monsters (e.g., ghosts, vampires, mummies, werewolves, witches, etc.) are impossible, but this is not so. These beings are outside of our understanding of what exists, but they are not counter or paradoxical to it. In some ways, because these creatures have been part of human mythology for so long, there is some level at which we are comfortable with their potential existence, even if only as signs of psychological or cultural complexes of one kind or another. The fact that there are so many narratives about these marvelous beings in some way inures audiences to their
possibility, however remote. If myths, as Roland Barthes argues, naturalize ideological contradictions, then we might also say that ghost stories do the cultural work of naturalizing the possible existence of ghosts.

However, it is far less common for stories to attempt to naturalize the impossible or the anti-natural. The marriage of realist modes of discourse and the blatantly impossible is a surrealist strategy that has rarely been seen in motion pictures, though it has perhaps enjoyed a greater prevalence in prose fiction (e.g., in some works of magical realism). Any number of non-fiction-style narratives make truth claims regarding the existence of ghosts or aliens, but these narratives always offer a rational or scientific explanation for the supernatural, thus rendering it at least possible, if not plausible or probable. However, few will claim that the inside of a house is bigger than the outside without invoking science-fiction conceits such as wormholes and extra dimensions or fantasy tropes such as magic wardrobes. Without such explanations, the house on Ash Tree Lane constitutes an impossibility on the level of physics that violates the realist frame. These documentarist-detectives are confronted not only with the supernatural (and sometimes not at all with the supernatural), but also with the impossible, even though the audience never sees it or comes to know it directly.

5.3 The Last Broadcast and the impossible moment

In The Last Broadcast, the audience eventually comes to learn that there is nothing supernatural about the murders in question. To that extent, it is a fake documentary film that highlights the truth-seeking quality of documentarists-cum-detectives, but it is also a film that must resort to an impossible moment in order to reveal
its most important truth. For the vast majority of the film, viewers are led to believe that they are watching a fairly straightforward documentary in the formal voice by a documentarist named David Leigh. The documentary concerns the infamous “Jersey Devil Murders” of Locus Wheeler, Rein Clacken, and the disappearance of Steven Avkast in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey. Wheeler and Avkast were the hosts of a public access television program called *Fact or Fiction*, which featured the hosts speaking with studio guests about paranormal phenomena. The events covered in the documentary surround the telecast of one particular episode during which they took their video and audio equipment into the Pine Barrens along with Clacken, a sound technician who was reportedly skilled at capturing EVPs, and Jim Suerd, a young man who claims to have psychic powers. The point of this extra-studio expedition is the search for the legendary Jersey Devil; Wheeler and Avkast hope that Suerd and Clacken will be able to direct them into contact with the elusive creature. Instead, only Jim Suerd comes out of the Pine Barrens alive. Police eventually find the mutilated bodies of Wheeler and Clacken, but they are never able to recover the remains (other than a large quantity of blood evidence) of Steven Avkast. Suerd is tried and convicted of the murders of Wheeler and Clacken, and later he dies in prison never having abandoned his claims to innocence. The documentarist, David Leigh, questions whether or not Suerd was really responsible for the murders, and this questioning becomes more urgent when he receives and anonymous package containing to seriously damaged video tapes. While the tapes are being reconstructed by a magnetic media forensic technician, Leigh re-enacts the events as he understands them. The film culminates in a shocking sequence in which the documentary frame is destroyed and a new “third-person” camera watches Leigh as he
mURDERS THE FORENSIC TECHNICIAN WHO HAS DISCOVERED THAT LEIGH IS THE REAL KILLER BEHIND THE JERSEY DEVIL MURDERS. FROM THIS POINT ON, THE FILM IS LETTERBOXED AND MANIPULATED TO APPEAR MORE LIKE CELLULOID AS IT TWISTS NARRATIVE TIME AND REVEALS THE EVENTS OF THE TECHNICIAN’S MURDER AND THE DISPOSAL OF HER BODY HAD ALREADY TAKEN PLACE WHEN WE VIEWED SCENES THAT APPEARED EARLIER IN THE FILM.

THE FIRST AND MOST MUNDANE OF THE IMPOSSIBILITIES IN THE LAST BROADCAST COMES DURING THE PORTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY FRAME DURING WHICH DAVID LEIGH IS METHODICALLY QUESTIONING THE OFFICIAL VERSION OF THE EVENTS SURROUNDING THE DEATHS OF LOCUS WHEELER, REIN CLACKIN, AND PRESUMABLY STEVEN AVKAST, AS WELL. THIS IS THE VERSION OF EVENTS THAT SENT JIM SUERD TO PRISON, WHERE HE EVENTUALLY DIED IN HIS CELL UNDER MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES. LEIGH EXPLAINS THAT JIM SUERD HAD AN ALIBI FOR THE MURDERS: HE WAS PARTICIPATING IN THE IRC CHAT THAT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CABLE/INTERNET SIMULCAST FROM THE PINE BARRENS. HOWEVER, THE POLICE NOTE THAT WHEN THEY WENT THROUGH THE IRC CHAT LOGS FOR THAT EVENING, THEY NOTED A 45-MINUTE PERIOD COINCIDING WITH THE PRESUMED TIMES OF DEATH OF THE TWO VICTIMS RECOVERED (WHEELER AND CLACKIN). WHAT LEIGH POINTS OUT TO THE AUDIENCE — THROUGH THE USE OF A SIMPLE GRAPHIC WHICH ANIMATES THE TRIANGULAR ROUTE THAT SUERD WOULD HAVE HAD TO HAVE TAKEN FROM THE BASE CAMP, TO THE TWO SITES WHERE CORPSES WERE FOUND, AND BACK TO THE BASE CAMP AGAIN — IS THAT IT IS PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR SUERD TO HAVE COMMITTED BOTH MURDERS EVEN WITH THE 45-MINUTE GAP IN IRC ENTRIES. SINCE WHEELER’S CORPSE WAS FOUND 2.5 MILES FROM THE BASE CAMP AND CLACKIN’S BODY WAS FOUND SOME DISTANCE AWAY, JIM WOULD HAVE HAD TO RUN AT LEAST SIX MILES IN PITCH DARKNESS THROUGH THE PINE BARRENS, STOPPING TWICE TO HACK TO DEATH TWO GROWN MEN (SEE FIGURE 5.3).
Figure 5.3: Jim Suerd’s impossible journey from *The Last Broadcast*

Leigh presents this information to the viewer as the only piece of information necessary to establish “a mountain of reasonable doubt.” In doing so, *The Last Broadcast* effectively undermines the hegemonic narrative of the justice system. Legal truth, arrived at largely through the use of forensic science, but also crucially through the use of documentary video editing, is likened to a house of cards that eventually comes tumbling down under the weight of David Leigh’s scrutiny.

Shortly after Jim Suerd dies in prison, Leigh receives a mysterious package in the mail that contains damaged video tapes that turn out to have been the tapes that were in Wheeler’s and Clackin’s cameras when they were killed. The killer removed these tapes from the cameras and then later sent them to Leigh. Leigh enlists the help of Michelle Monarch, “a magnetic media recovery specialist,” whose job it is to recover as much audio and video information from the shimmering mass of video tape as possible. There are several sequences during which the audience views inserts of Michelle at work. She works in a plastic shrouded room, wearing latex gloves and manually turning the video playback heads of an exposed VCR (See Figure 5.4).
The implication is that by turning the heads like a jog/shuttle wheel, Monarch can view the damaged tapes frame by interlaced frame. This is a technical impossibility. The filmmakers are treating magnetic tape like celluloid as a way of representing forensic attempts to recover lost images and sound. However, the science they depict is impossible; magnetic video tape simply does not work in this fashion.

The magnetic media recovery specialist does not simply recover information from the physical video tape; instead, she creates that information to a significant extent. Monarch admits that she must “guide” the computer in its efforts to reconstruct images that cannot be played normally:

I digitized sections of this particular video — placed it into the computer — and am now reconstructing the actual picture frame. And I have to guide the computer to complete these pictures … The computer needs me to direct it. It doesn’t know how to reconstruct a circle. Maybe it’ll have an opening at the side, and I have to teach it to continue the circle. I’m a guiding factor. (*TLB*)

Monarch’s essential claim here is that she must use her own human cognitive abilities to recognize patterns in partial data sets. The computer cannot find a circle if an arc is not closed, so she must “teach” it to complete the circle. This process eventually renders the frame in which Monarch identifies the killer’s face after 1775 hours of forensic video...
rendering. As David Leigh says in his narration, “the truth comes down to this one frame.” But we must not forget that the truth Monarch has found is a truth that she has helped create through her “guiding” and “teaching.”

Monarch’s human intervention into the recovery of forensic video evidence is very much of a piece with Thornton Cladwell’s claims about videographic technology helping to drive television’s transformation from a content-based medium to a form-based one. While not losing sight of the fact that the results of her work turn out to be accurate, we must also acknowledge that her manipulations have the potential to color (quite literally) the audio-visual facts that may still exist on the magnetic tape. By valorizing the capacities of the technologies of discourse over content — Monarch’s tools are sophisticated analog and digital editing suites — Monarch and Leigh (and Avalos and Weiler) endanger their audiences’ relationship to facts and larger truths. *The Last Broadcast* recognizes this danger explicitly during the interviews with Clair Deforest, a professional video editor hired by the prosecution to edit together a video profile of Jim Suerd during his trial. This video is portrayed as so effective in convincing the jury of Suerd’s guilt, that Deforest is nicknamed “the Killer Cutter” by the press. This is the clearest example within the diegesis of the film of the dangerous potential of using the technologies of style to guide the facts.

Unfortunately for Monarch, she spends so many hours teaching and guiding the computer that she is unable to learn its lesson in time. In the most jarring impossible moment in the movie, Leigh’s camera zooms into a close-up of Monarch’s video monitor which shows the reconstructed video frame containing Leigh’s own face, frozen in a murderous grimace. As the audience confronts the truth in this frame — that the
documentarist himself is responsible for all of the death he has been attempting to explain — the movie explodes out of its generic frame. A visual pattern of knife cuts and slashes creates a negative-imaged, layered dissolve into a new shot from the point of view of the monitor. Crucially, this new shot and all the shots that come after it until the end of the movie are letterboxed. Monarch sits at screen right in front of the background of plastic shrouding. David Leigh, camcorder held to one eye, appears in the frame through another layered dissolve (See Figures 5.5 through 5.7).

Figure 5.5: The killer’s face in The Last Broadcast

Figure 5.6: Monarch realizes her client is the killer

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42 This is a confusing choice, since the letterboxing cannot change the aspect ratio of the projected image during a screening of the movie. The black bands would be clearly visible at the top and bottom of the screen. The intent is to switch into “film” mode, but the markers for that transition are problematic at best.
He and Monarch have, in effect, been *edited into the narrative fiction film world*. This sequence of shots passes very quickly, but the effect is jarring nonetheless. On the DVD commentary, the directors are clear that they wanted the shift in genres (from documentary to narrative film) to be “a punch in the face” to viewers (*Last Broadcast*). This punch in the face comes at the most impossible moment of the film, indeed it constitutes the impossible moment. In *The Last Broadcast*, David Leigh’s (the documentarist’s/killer’s) stated purpose in pursuing his documentary topic is to discover the truth about the Jersey Devil Murders. Evidence comes to his attention — evidence unavailable to law enforcement authorities — that renders the official account of what happened that night (i.e. Jim Suerd’s guilt) rationally untenable. However, the documentary is revealed as powerless to unmask the agent of destruction, because the documentary is a tool of that agent. The documentarist is able to manipulate time and space through editing in such a way that the impossible becomes plausible or even unnoticeable, and people die because of it.

On the surface of the documentary, and especially because of the order of discourse events in *The Last Broadcast*, it seems as though it is simply impossible that Jim Suerd could have left the base camp in the middle of his IRC chat session, traversed
six miles of the Pine Barrens at night, killing three grown men along the way (including a complete disposal of one body) within 45 minutes. The effect of this impossibility of time and space is not that the audience fears Suerd; we do not immediately think that he has some supernatural ability to move quickly or to teleport from one place to another in the blink of an eye. Instead, this minor instance of tempo-spatial impossibility seems to move the events outside of the realm of human possibility given what we know about the events of that night. The only conclusion that seems to make sense to the audience is the one for which they have been prepared by Leigh himself: the possibility that there is some monster, the Jersey Devil, prowling the Pine Barrens.

Of course, there is a monster prowling the Pine Barrens, but it is a very human monster. Leigh himself sent the hosts of *Fact of Fiction* the suggestion for the Jersey Devil show over IRC chat. In effect, he lured the team into the Pine Barrens where he could then slaughter them and leave Suerd alive as the scapegoat. Since he committed the murders, he knows everything about what went on out there in the woods. He knows that it is utterly impossible for Jim Suerd to have carried out the murders. In fact, immediately after he suffocates Michelle Monarch, Leigh films himself in her lab, explaining for the camera that:

I have determined that this is not time to be distracted or set aside in the course of the events that I have set into motion. My next step will be going to the Pine Barrens for a re-enactment of the murders of Steven Avkast, Locus Wheeler, and Rien Clacken. I am as strong in my resolve as before in proving that Jim Suerd was not responsible for these murders, that he had neither the intellect nor the logical capacity to carry them through. I think that the replayment [sic] of our events here will be quite compelling in the demonstration of Suerd’s innocence. (*TLB, my emphasis*)
Leigh in some sense intends to set the record straight, but of course he cannot do this unless he intends to implicate himself in a quadruple homicide. What *The Last Broadcast* claims emphatically, however, is that Leigh’s documentary alone is not able to give the audience the salient truth of the movie, that Leigh is the killer. The climax of the movie’s drive to knowledge is the break between the documentary mode and the fictional narrative film mode. This switching from one genre to another takes place so that the audience can become privy to information that it would not otherwise have if Leigh remained the director of the motion picture. Prior to the break, the audience is invited to believe that none of the footage in the documentary appears unless Leigh himself has filmed it or inserted it into his film (as with the archival footage of the *Fact or Fiction* show or the local news broadcasts). However, after the break, the various shots emphasize the need for a multi-person film crew through long shots of Leigh driving, jib tracking shots (implying the presence of a jib operator), and multiple camera angles on Leigh *while* he is in the process of shooting continuous video footage of himself that we have already seen as part of his March 31st “re-enactment” of the events in the Pine Barrens.

Indeed, once the generic break occurs and the audience begins seeing through a more mobile, conventionally cinematic (i.e., matching Hollywood codes for professional standards of cinematography), and letterboxed frame, it becomes clear that not only has the audience been deprived of certain crucial information but that the audience has been actively lied to. What we learn from this generic break is that the codes and conventions of documentary have been manipulated to turn back time. Though the viewer is told through a title card that Leigh conducts his “re-enactment” of the events in the Pine
Barrens on March 31, 1997 (while Michelle Monarch finishes rendering the frame that contains the killer’s face), we learn after the switching of genres that Leigh had Monarch’s body in the back of his truck the entire time. A second title card prior to the generic switch and immediately preceding Leigh’s attack on Monarch indicates that April 1, 1997 (April Fool’s Day, though this is left to the viewer to realize) is the date that Monarch finishes rendering the frame. Since Leigh is the one who inserts the title cards during the post-production process, there is no way of knowing whether either one of these dates is actually correct. All that is clear is that Michelle Monarch’s body cannot be in the back of Leigh’s truck on March 31st if he does not murder her until the next day. The on-screen ordering of the documentary discourse obscures this temporal impossibility that can only be illuminated by switching to a fictional narrative film mode.

For the makers of TLB, truth is to be found in narrative fiction film, rather than in reality-coded digital video documentary. However, not even their film is film. Constrained by their miniscule budget, Avalos and Weiler create what has become known as “film-look” from their digital camcorder using a variety of post-production techniques. Though TLB was produced before software firms began offering “film-look” filters for the most popular non-linear video editing programs, the directors of TLB were able to achieve the same effects by altering the gamma in the images from their Sony VX1000 camcorder and then letterboxing the frame in order to change the aspect ratio of the “film” to something more cinematic than the standard 1.33:1 of broadcast and digital video.
5.4 *The Blair Witch Project* and the impossible image

Whereas *The Last Broadcast* must display the impossible moment in order to convey its most salient truth, *The Blair Witch Project* wallows in impossibility at every moment precisely because none of the film should be available to the viewer. The documentary footage used to create the film is presented as evidence in the mystery of the disappearance of three young filmmakers, but those very images are impossible. Blair Witch was an independent film sensation when it was released in the summer of 1999. I should point out that when I refer to *The Blair Witch Project* in this essay, I am referring not only to the film, but also to the variety of official paratexts, including the web site (www.blairwitch.com) the mockumentary, *Curse of the Blair Witch*, that aired on the Sci-Fi Channel two days before the film opened in Manhattan, and the book, *Blair Witch Project: A Dossier* by D.A. Stern. All of these texts combine to present the story of three student filmmakers: Heather Donahue, Joshua Leonard, and Michael C. Williams. Heather, Josh, and Mike set off to make a documentary about the legendary Blair Witch in and around Burkittsville, Maryland. Some of the film consists of footage shot on 16mm in black and white, much of which is ostensibly the footage that would have gone into the documentary. The rest of the film’s footage comes from an 8mm camcorder that is most often trained on the filmmakers themselves as they get lost in the woods and come to believe that there is something after them. Soon after Josh goes missing, Heather and Mike follow what they believe to be Josh’s voice to an abandoned house, where they apparently meet their doom, though we don’t see their deaths or

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43 Due to the emphatically intertextual nature of the *Blair Witch* oeuvre, it is problematic to address the film alone as if it were the primary text of the *Blair Witch* narrative. If anything, as J.P. Telotte argues, the
disappearances on screen. The web site, cable television mockumentary, and companion book round out the story of the filmmaker’s intended project, the legend of the Blair Witch, the manhunt for the missing students, and the eventual discovery of their equipment (but not their remains) in the foundation of a burned out house. All of these texts display an absolute minimum of tags that would identify them as fictions.

The impossible moments in *Blair Witch Project* are even starker than those in *The Last Broadcast*. The first is what Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock identifies as “the uncanniest moment in the film” (“Lostness” 233). Mike, Heather, and Josh are increasingly frustrated by their inability to accurately read their map. Worried that they are lost or will soon become so, Heather suggests that they keep to the banks of a stream they have crossed so that they will eventually come to some road or other feature of civilization. Sometime later, the footage shows the audience what happens when the trio come upon the same log they used to cross the stream in that exact spot. Despite having followed one bank of the stream, they have reappeared at the exact same spot. They have walked in a circle when it was clearly impossible for them to have done so as long as we trust the narrative authenticity of their reactions to the moment (and we have no reason not to).

Near the end of *The Blair Witch Project*, after Josh has gone missing, Heather and Mike stumble upon an abandoned white clapboard house in the middle of the woods. They have been following what they believe to be the sound of Josh’s voice. They are frightened by their discovery of the house, but they enter it in search of Josh anyway. Audience members who have delved into the information on the web site understand that

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web site is the primary nexus of narrative information, while the two motion pictures and the *Dossier* function as paratexts of the web site (42).
this is an impossible moment. The house that Heather and Mike find in the woods is the house of Rustin Parr, the child murderer convicted for the slaughter of seven Burkittsville children in the 1940s (See Figure 5.8).

![Image of the Parr house]

Figure 5.8: The impossible house of The Blair Witch Project

What is impossible about this encounter is that the house was burned to the ground in 1944. When Heather and Mike step into the house in 1994, they are either stepping back in time, or the house exists somehow outside of time. The spatio-temporal dislocation of the Parr house relates directly to third and final impossibility of in BWP, and it is the one that supposedly makes the entire narrative experience possible.

According to the Sci-Fi Channel fake documentary Curse of the Blair Witch, the film canisters, video tapes, and DAT tapes used to edit the film that viewers were able to see in theaters or at home on video and DVD were found buried in the foundation of the Parr house as it was being excavated by a group of undergraduate anthropology students from the University of Maryland. The senior anthropologist on site confirmed that the undisturbed condition of the soil strata did not indicate that materials had been buried

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44 It may well be that the “love it or hate it” reaction of most audiences to The Blair Witch Project can be attributed to the fact that the information on the Blair Witch web site is more or less required reading if the
there (See Figure 5.9). “Even a forensic expert could not have put that thing in the site without disturbing the charcoal, the wall, or sterile soil. It was as if it materialized. And of course that’s not the language of science, so I can’t — I just don’t know what to say about this, really” (CBW). Instead, it seemed as though the tapes and canisters had simply appeared in the earth, magically (See Figure 5.10).

Figure: 5.9: Soil strata drawings from *Curse of the Blair Witch*

![Soil strata drawings from *Curse of the Blair Witch*](image1)

Figure 5.10: Location of backpack with film reels and video tapes in the foundation

![Location of backpack with film reels and video tapes in the foundation](image2)

This also means that the final reel of film in Heather’s camera and the final video tape in Mike’s were removed by someone or something and placed in the same area. *The Blair Witch Project* is indeed a found footage documentary. However, it is logically

viewer is to make sense of the film in any traditional way. My reading proceeds from the assumption that the viewer is familiar with all of the *Blair Witch* texts.
impossible for the footage to have been found in the manner in which the narrative claims it was found. The telling of the narrative is an impossibility in and of itself, but it is one that is belied by the presence of the narrative before us.

In *The Blair Witch Project*, what seems most impossible is the sheer existence of the documentary film at all. The audiences of all of the various media that make up the *Project* are forced to confront the narrative fact that the moment of reception is an impossible moment. The chain of evidence, we might call it, from the pro-filmic scene to the reception experience in front of the computer, the television, and the theater screen is fundamentally broken in several places. In the found footage, there is evidence that the filmmakers traveled in a complete circle by following one side of a creek. Regardless of the fact that this visual effect is achieved through a simple trick of elliptical editing, the filmmakers qua characters confirm for the audience that what they are seeing on the screen is impossible, and yet it has occurred. Even more problematic is the fact that the footage was ever found at all. When Heather and Mike enter the abandoned house at the end of the film, the audience is aware that the house does not exist in 1994. The house is out of time, or the filmmakers are. Years after the events depicted in the final disturbing moments of the film, the cameras, tapes, and film reels are discovered in the foundation of that house, which had been burned down fifty years prior. As though this disjunction were not enough, the anthropologist interviewed in *Curse of the Blair Witch* makes clear that the backpack was found below several undisturbed soil strata. The backpack was not buried in the foundation, but rather simply appeared there. Archeologically speaking, the backpack full of 16mm film canisters and 8mm digital videotapes must have been placed where it was found no later than the eighteenth century. Since none of the various
components of *The Blair Witch Project* agree on an underlying explanation for the evidence, the aggregate message of this documentary complex seems to be that isolated moments of actuality may be accessible through videographic representation, but these isolated moments are not part of a larger, continuous, coherent, and cogent reality. What the audience sees through the camera did indeed happen, but it may not mean what it so obviously appears to mean. This stance makes sense, in that the “magic” of *Blair Witch*, its suggestion of the supernatural, occurs as a suggestive function of elliptical editing rather than expensive special effects. The audience believes that everything that appears on screen actually did happen in front of the camera. All violations of time and space in this case are posited through the relations between footage instead of being represented in continuous, unedited clips. For direct representation of impossible space, we would have to look to the video known as the “5 1/2 minute hallway” from *House of Leaves*.

### 5.5 *House of Leaves* and the impossible space

In Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (2000), the documentarist-detectives are an absent presence throughout. The novel is composed of several narratives layered on top of one another through the use of footnotes, appendices, full color plates, and an index that contains its own embedded narrative. The story concerns a family of four — Will Navidson, his partner Karen Green, and their children Daisy and Chad — that moves into a house in rural Virginia. When the family returns from a short trip to Seattle,

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45 Here again, as with the “X-Cops” episode of *The X-Files*, the gap in audience judgment offers a clear point of comparison with George Holliday’s video of the Rodney King beating and its use as evidence in the brutality trial that followed.
they discover that there is a short hallway between the adults’ and the kids’ bedrooms that was not there when they left. This discovery prompts Navidson to get the blueprints to his new home to see whether anything in them can account for this mysterious space. Will discovers in this examination that the house is *bigger on the inside than it is on the outside*. Though the difference is a mere one-quarter inch, the sheer impossibility of the situation drives him to enlist the aid of his brother (a contractor) and several friends (among them an engineer) to solve the conundrum. Unfortunately for all involved, the situation only gets worse. Soon, a door has appeared in what is clearly an exterior wall, but the door opens into a featureless hallway that extends for at least ten feet — ten feet that should extend out into the family’s backyard. This hallway eventually extends itself into a labyrinth that violates all conventional and stable notions of time and space. The phantom documentary at the heart of this novel not only depicts the discovery of the spatial anomaly in the house, but also the various explorations (Exploration A, the first undertaken by Navidson himself, and Explorations #1–#5 undertaken by groups of varying size) into the “5 1/2 minute hallway” and beyond into the cavernous maze beneath the house.

The Navidsons’ story is merely the core of the novel. The reader learns of it by reading an exegesis of that story written by a blind amateur scholar who goes by the name of Zampanò. Zampanò apparently dedicated the last decade of his life to an in-depth study of *The Navidson Record* and all of the commentary surrounding it — this is the second “documentary” layer of the narrative. The old man’s work, complete with explanatory footnotes, is presented to the reader in Times New Roman font. However, amended to this is a second set of footnotes and an introduction in Courier by Johnny
Truant. Johnny’s best friend late one night and invites him over to see something strange. That something turns out to be the apartment where Zampanò has just died, leaving behind the cedar trunk full of manuscript, notes, and jottings that constitute *The Navidson Record*. Johnny takes possession of the trunk and soon feels compelled to edit the contents into single document, adding his own picaresque footnotes as he does so.

Mark Z. Danielewski’s novel reaches what seems in some instances like the apotheosis of impossibility. The first instance of impossibility in the book is the central conceit of the “haunted house” narrative, that the house on Ash Tree Lane is larger on the inside than it is on the outside. The inside dimension of the house exceeds the outside dimension by one-quarter inch. It does not matter that the discrepancy is so small. What matters is that the discrepancy is impossible given the most basic notions of physics. That space we designate as inside an object cannot take up more space than the space we designate as the outer dimensions of the object. It is a basic violation of the definitions of inside and outside. In the beginning of the story, the discrepancies are minor and perhaps the result of problems with perception (i.e., Navidson wants to believe that it is his own human error that has led to the problem). Later, however, when the “5 1/2 Minute Hallway” appears off of the living room and eventually leads into the massive labyrinth below the house, there is no way to discount the evidence of their own eyes.

In *House of Leaves*, the impossible is not only to be found in the experiences of Navidson and his family in the house on Ash Tree Lane. The impossible is also to be found in the way in which story and discourse unfold over the course of the novel. One of the most jarring of these impossibilities comes when the reader suddenly falls into a *mise-en-abyme* with Will Navidson during one of the longest expeditions into the
labyrinth beneath the house. Navidson is badly disoriented and settles down for some rest.

Taking a tiny sip of water and burying himself deeper in his sleeping bag, he turns his attention to the last possible activity, the only book in his possession: *House of Leaves*.

“But all I have for light is one book of matches and the duration of each ma—“ (for whatever reason the tape cuts off here). (465)

Zampanò’s impeccable scholarship tracks down the brand of matches in the video, determines the burn time of one match (12.1 seconds), multiplies by the number in the pack, and concludes that Navidson had five minutes and forty-four seconds of light, not nearly enough to read the novel, which Zampanò points out is 736 pages long. To make up for the deficit, Navidson tears out pages he has already read, rolls them into tight sticks and uses these sticks as reading torches (467). Unfortunately, Navidson begins falling behind and finally he is forced to light the last of his matches, and as it burns down, he lights the page he is reading, racing against the very flame that he needs in order to read the words that are being consumed in his own hands (467). Not only is Navidson reading the same book that the reader is, but so is Zampanò as evidenced by the fact that the length of the book he cites is identical to the length of the book in the reader’s hands, despite the fact that a significant portion of *House of Leaves* is written after Zampanò is dead, i.e., Truant’s footnotes, the appendices, the editors’ notes, and the index. Of course, all of this is diegetically impossible, but rather than the non-fiction conventions lending credibility to the impossible, this instance of the impossible tends to tear down the authority of the non-fiction conventions. This assault on reality goes so far that it ultimately brings contaminates mathematics and physics with similar doubt.
During Exploration #4, Navidson finds himself at the bottom of the great spiral staircase in the labyrinth beneath his house. In order to track how deep the staircase may become while the team is on its expedition, Tom Navidson occasionally drops a quarter over the banister from the base camp they have set up in what they term the Great Hall of the labyrinth. The third quarter’s impact, which comes after almost an hour, is important enough for Will to record an audio-visual diary entry: “If Tom dropped it say a few minutes after Reston reached the top, then it’s been falling for at least fifty minutes. I’m too muddled to do the math but it doesn’t take a genius to realize I’m an impossible distance down.” This bit of reasoning gets its own footnote, “If \( D_t = 16t^2 \) where time is calculated in seconds, the quarter would have to have fallen 27,273 miles exceeding even the earth’s circumference at the equator by 2,371 miles. Calculating at 32 ft/sec\(^2\) the number climbs even higher to 54,545 miles. An ‘impossible distance’ indeed” (305).

The inner world of the Navidson household has become larger than the planet, and depending on the mathematics one uses to represent just how large, it may have become twice as large as the earth. The inside of the house is no longer simply bigger than the outside of the house; the inside of the house is bigger than the outside world. The problem of inside and outside is no longer local, domestic, and familiar. It is now global, transnational, and alien.

For Mark Z. Danielewski and *House of Leaves*, the horror of impossibility seems to be a domestic horror, always close at hand. However, the structure of the novel leads inexorably to the conclusion that the actual is unreachable, untouchable, and impossible to represent and therefore utterly unfamiliar. The entire novel is about a documentary film that does not exist. Not only can the audience say this as a reader of a book of
fiction, but Johnny Truant also acknowledges/claims/hopes that the film does not exist (xix-xx). The documentary at the heart of the novel does not exist; and so of course all of the scholarly monographs and popular articles written about the film and referenced in the novel do not exist. Truant also points out the singular difficulty of the fact that Zampanò was blind (xxi), commenting in detail (in some cases engaging in a frame-by-frame exegesis) about a documentary film he never could have seen. Again, as in The Last Broadcast and The Blair Witch Project, we are confronted with a horror story about the impossibility of seeing what we are seeing — that is, the impossibility of representation — even or especially when artists employ nonfiction codes and conventions in an attempt to faithfully record or illuminate that reality.

5.6 Beyond belief

When we ask the question about what kinds of specific cultural work these fake documentaries are doing, we come upon an interesting conundrum. Most critics who have looked at fake documentaries acknowledge the many effects that films of this type can have on an audience. For the most part, however, these critics are paying the most attention to two broad areas of fake documentary effects: humor and self-reflexivity. That is, fake documentaries are either mocking or deconstructing (and sometimes both) the codes, conventions and assumptions of serious documentary filmmaking. When the audience laughs at the film This is Spinal Tap (1984), it is laughing at the antics of the band and the critique of “rockumentary” filmmakers, while at the same time it
undermines the conventions of documentary by putting them in the service of fiction.⁴⁶ None of these critics really address the ways in which nonfiction stylistics have been used as a means of heightening recognizable generic affects such as, in the case of the horror film, pleasurable fear.

All three of the narratives I am discussing here use non-fiction stylistics to enhance their generic effects. This enhancement is the result of a stretching of the confines of what might be called the safe space of the horror film. According to Andrew Schopp, horror films provide a safe space within which it is all right for the viewer to feel fear, because the viewer is always in some way aware that the source of the fear is not real and/or cannot harm the viewer (125).⁴⁷ For the audiences of The Last Broadcast, Blair Witch, and House of Leaves, this safe space extends farther out than normal, beyond the diegetic borders of the narratives, because they employ non-fiction codes and conventions, which signal the audience to associate the content of the narratives with the extra-diegetic world and not simply with the diegetic world. This extension of the generic fear effect further into the real world does not have to be entirely bad for the audience. What I suggest is that one of the most controversial psycho-social effects of viewing horror films — that is, the desensitization of the viewer to representations of physical violence — presents us with a mechanism by which we might understand popular genres like the horror film to be engaging in beneficial cultural work.

⁴⁶ This is Spinal Tap complicates this further, as the band from the film has released two albums since the film’s release and has gone on tour.

⁴⁷ Critics such as Wayne Davis have also pointed out that any emotional response felt under these circumstances simply could not be fear. Therefore, they argue, the safe space argument is untenable. Qtd. in Andrew Schopp. “Transgressing the Safe Space: Generation X Horror in The Blair Witch Project and Scream.” Nothing That Is: Millennial Cinema and the Blair Witch Controversies. Eds. Sarah L. Highley and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock. Detroit: Wayne State U P, 2004. 129.
Concerns over the deleterious moral effects of watching motion pictures have been with the film industry since its conception, and filmic violence has been at the forefront of those concerns along with frank depictions of sexuality or other behaviors deemed deviant. In general, the concerns seem to be about the potential for impressionable youths to mimic the behaviors they see on movie screens. With regard to violence, the charge is often more explicitly that frequent viewing of fictional filmic violence will desensitize these viewers to these images. As a result, desensitized viewers would be more inclined to mimic violent behaviors, because they would be unable to grasp the very real consequences of their violent acts. To the extent that horror film narratives naturalize depictions of physical violence while also tying them to pleasure, the resulting encouragement to sadism can certainly be read as a danger. However, by itself, the desensitization to the shock of witnessing realistic portrayals of bodily trauma may have culturally useful effects on mass audiences.

It virtually goes without saying the standards for acceptable on-screen violence have changed drastically over time, and it is also worth noting that American censors, in the many guises in which they have appeared, have never been as manifestly concerned with depictions of violence as they have been with depictions of sexuality. Though there are occasional regressions to earlier standards of acceptable violence, the history of motion pictures has generally seen a steady increase in both the frequency and realism of violent acts in film and television. Violent action sequences like western gunfights, fist fights, depictions of wartime combat, and swashbuckling swordfights have been part and parcel of Hollywood narrative since its beginnings. Edwin S. Porter’s Great Train Robbery of 1903, one of the first narrative films, is essentially a string of violent acts,
including no less than a dozen homicides in its 12-minute run time. Though the restrictions of the production code in place during most of the Hollywood studio era limited the realism of on-screen violence, it did very little to restrict the frequency with which the relatively unrealistic violence was portrayed. Once the code was set aside, and production companies began testing the limits of the self-imposed ratings system, audiences began to see more realistic depictions of physical violence in breakthrough films like *Psycho* (1960) and *Bonnie & Clyde* (1967). During the 1970s, the frequency and realism of violence rose steadily through the new horror films like *Last House on the Left* (1972), *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), *Halloween* (1978), and *Friday the 13th* (1980), but it also found outlets in crime films (*The Godfather* trilogy from 1972, 1974, and 1990), war films, e.g., *Full Metal Jacket* from 1987, and westerns, e.g., *Unforgiven* from 1992. This trend — in tandem with the traditional calls for a cleaner Hollywood product — continued apace through the 1980s and 1990s including seemingly self-aware Hollywood films like *Natural Born Killers* (1994). Currently, producers continue to push the envelope with new horror films like *Saw* (2004) and *Hostel* (2005), so-called “torture porn” films.

What is most important to for the purposes of this argument is the fact that realist violence straddles generic distinctions. Heightened realism with regard to violence is to be found in the war film, the action film, the thriller, the horror film, and the crime drama. In fact, television news programs are one of the last places where bodies are not depicted in the process of being traumatized. The news shows many violent images (e.g., natural disaster, war, mob violence, etc.) and shows the *aftermath* of violence to a certain degree (e.g., blood stains, the wounded, corpses in medium or long shot), but it generally
avoids recognizable images of people being shot, burned, blown up, or dismembered, the very images in which violent films revel. Graphic depictions of realistic violence have become the province of fictional motion pictures (and video games). The general consensus on the effects of these images is that they desensitize viewers to real violence, leading to an overall social or cultural reduction in empathy for the victims of violence and/or an increase in the likelihood that the drastically desensitized members of society will be more prone to commit violent acts against fellow beings, because they cannot conceive of the weight of their actions. I would like to suggest that there is another effect of the depiction of increasingly realistic violence in narrative fiction films. I argue that the same process of desensitization allows an audience to witness depictions of large-scale acts of violence that approach historical acts of violence that have heretofore remained unrepresentable. Far from inuring audiences to violence, these depictions may allow audiences to finally begin to confront historical events so emotionally catastrophic that they have essentially been repressed from the fields of representation.

The idea that audiences who have been fed a steady diet of horror films from the 1970s through the 1990s are eventually able to “stomach” the Omaha Beach sequence from the opening minutes of Steven Spielberg’s 1998 Saving Private Ryan indicates on some level that audiences are closer to confronting the realities of war with less gloss than ever before. However, the increase in realism does not necessarily mean that there is an increase in the documentary historicity or fact in combat films. Spielberg’s film is certainly more realistic in its depiction of bodily trauma during the storming of Omaha Beach and in combat generally. However, Saving Private Ryan focuses on the fictional exploits of fictional characters. As Robert Toplin explains, the effect of this heightened
visual and auditory realism, coupled with a distance from the historical record, is an increased focus not on how the assault on Omaha Beach was but rather on what it must have been like (27). In Saving Private Ryan, documentary codes, conventions, and stylistics have been employed in the service of a fictional story in order to heighten the audience’s emotional response. Toplin is writing specifically about the value of such fictionalized historical films (he prefers the hybrid term “faction”) when he writes, “the primary contribution of such movies to historical appreciation relates to the audience’s emotional connection to conditions in another time, place, and situation” (28). I argue that this emotional connection contributes not only to historical appreciation specifically, but also to a broader conception of emotional experience of combat violence related to the national trauma of total warfare. The more realistic the depiction of the violence of the battle, the more the film becomes an instance of narrating a traumatic event in safety (i.e., the safety of the theater instead of the safety of the analyst’s couch).

Elizabeth Cowie also believes that filmic battle re-enactments can be viewed as therapeutic. In her discussion of the film War Neuroses (1917), Cowie employs her reading of Lacanian psychoanalysis (a reading more or less in line with Cathy Caruth’s treatment of trauma, as well as the view Ruth Leys identifies as antimimetic) to explain how the fictional battle scene filmed for the movie acts as the recollection of trauma in therapy.

War Neuroses constitutes an extraordinary document of remembering by the formerly shell-shocked infantrymen. The men enact themselves as soldiers moving out of trenches to attack the enemy under shell fire; they thus play out the scene of trauma that had caused their bodies to act outside of their intellectual knowledge and control — producing their hysterical symptoms. ... The reenactment is an enactment of their cure. ...
Thus precisely because it is fictionally enacted, the reality of war is given representation. (40)

Cowie is writing about a film that depicted British soldiers launching a successful charge from trench fortifications in World War I, the very thing they were unable to do when suffering from the trauma of warfare. In *Saving Private Ryan*, the opening sequence is a similar exercise in that it depicts a successful storming of Omaha Beach, despite the omnipresent gore of soldiers’ shattered bodies. The difference here is that the soldiers in *War Neuroses* were actually shell-shocked veterans, whereas the actors in *Ryan* were not. Cowie can argue that the *War Neuroses* is “an extraordinary document of remembering,” because they very soldiers who have been emotionally and psychically scarred by trench warfare are re-enacting (successfully this time) the scene of their trauma. The actors in *Ryan* are not remembering for themselves in the same way that the *War Neuroses* soldiers are; instead, they are acting as conduits for the audience, symbols with which the audience can identify in order to experience the emotional connection posited by Toplin. The brutality of the Omaha Beach sequence in *Ryan* is therefore an extended moment during which audiences are temporarily exposed to the shock of a highly realistic (though ultimately fictional) depiction of combat. In this sequence, as with the battlefield charge in *War Neuroses*, “while the ‘real’ of trauma remains absent, it is figured in the picturing of a cure that is the mimetic double of the source of the disorder — the battle” (40). Representations of trauma, in fiction and in non-fiction, must necessarily be separate from the Real, because they are representations. However, it is precisely these representations, especially as they are analogous to memory, which constitute the activities of the detective and the documentarist, as well as the analyst and the analysand.
Watching these re-enactments of traumatic events is similar to recollecting trauma in the safety of the analyst’s office, and it is this safe revisiting of the trauma in memory, the symbolization of the Real, that is the treatment of hysteria and trauma in psychoanalysis.

Instead of portraying a penetration of the physical protective barrier surrounding an individual (skin or the body generally) or of the psychical protective barrier (Freud’s notion of the psychic shield), *The Last Broadcast, The Blair Witch Project, and House of Leaves* are addressing the postmodern or deconstructive assault on the barrier protecting our pragmatic understanding of referentiality. It is not enough in these scenarios to witness what appear to be supernatural events recorded on media thought to convey the immediacy of reality. That is, it is not sufficient to watch a videotape showing “live” or documentary footage of what appears to be a ghost or a vampire or werewolf. All of these entities come with their own cultural narratives, genres, and histories that make their photographic depiction less than sufficient as proof of their existence. When it comes to ghosts, vampires, werewolves, and zombies, seeing is *not* believing.

In order for a horror narrative to generate a sufficient fear response with regard to the impossible, the narrative must be able to convey the idea of the impossible in an affective fashion. That is, the impossible phenomenon cannot already have a culturally accepted narrative that would to a great extent normalize or naturalize its appearance. In other words, impossibility must become the monster itself; it must be the thing that engenders the fear reaction in the first place. For this fear reaction to be heightened, the impossibility’s distance from rationality must be emphasized, and the easiest way to do this is to represent the impossible with a straight face, to use a nonfiction style of discourse so that the audience does not immediately offer up their suspension of disbelief,
which might otherwise allow them to accept virtually any representation as possible within the diegetic world. In a fake documentary horror narrative, the goal is to put off the audience’s willing suspension of disbelief as long as possible, perhaps even beyond the closing credits.

As I have already argued, one potential effect of decades of increasing realism in cinematic violence is the possibility of eventually creating a filmed event so shockingly realistic (while still fictional) that it presents the possibility of standing in as a reasonable narrative recollection of historical or cultural trauma. The pleasurable fear effects in horror films train audiences to accept (but remain affected by) increasingly graphic and realistic depictions of bodily trauma. The audience’s acceptance of these depictions allows (different) filmmakers to use similar imagery as a means of portraying historical traumas like Omaha Beach, the genocide in Rawanda or Darfur, or the Holocaust.

These three fake documentary narratives do something similar, but manifest themselves at a much earlier stage in the process. These narratives attempt to achieve the pleasurable fear affects standard to horror narratives through the deployment of logical impossibilities. These impossibilities or paradoxes are analogous to encounters with the Lacanian Real. They are, at their core, unrepresentable as such; their representations are meaningless because impossible. We might say that the postmodern condition is one that is characterized by an increasing awareness of the lack of reliable links between the Real, the imaginary, and the symbolic. These narratives attempt to shock their audiences by bringing them into contact with shocking moments of knowledge beyond their accepted generic narratives. They do not scare with ghosts or vampires; they scare with houses that are bigger on the inside than the outside; they scare by implying that documentary
reality manipulates time and space to present the actual; they scare by reaching outside the text to gain a foothold in the world of reception independent of the audience.

And yet, neither *The Last Broadcast* nor *The Blair Witch Project* nor *House of Leaves* is analogous to *Saving Private Ryan* or *Schindler’s List*. None of these narratives is one that attempts to fully, graphically, and realistically represent the trauma that has been done to epistemology during post-modernism and post-structuralism. Instead, these narratives are analogous to the films of the 1960s and 1970s that began experimenting with ever-increasing levels of graphic violence. By inuring audiences to the horror of the irrational and the impossible, they are perhaps preparing those audiences for future (therapeutic) confrontations with the traumatic break with representation.
This dissertation examines a number of feature films and television shows, from the decade prior to the turn of the millennium, in which detectives encounter the supernatural. By utilizing the critical framework provided by recent trauma studies, I have shown how these narratives allegorize personal or cultural trauma as manifestations of the supernatural, especially in the form of haunting. Though detectives normally deal entirely within the realm of rationality and the known, I have shown how in these cases, the detective carries out a similar therapeutic function to the psychoanalyst. The analyst seeks to uncover the memory that will unlock the motivation for the seemingly irrational psychosomatic behaviors of the hysterical neurotic. I have also shown how spaces can be read as having been traumatized in ways similar to people or characters by introducing a new Bakhtinian chronotope, the traumatized space. The traumatized space is a concept that ought to be useful to scholars of narrative dealing with representations of a wide variety of places such as haunted houses, crime scenes, battlefields, as well as the scenes of natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and nuclear detonations.
The sampling of texts here is in no way exhaustive. In fact, at no time since the premier of *The X-Files* in 1993 has television been without one or more series meeting this description. Just a brief list might include such popular, multi-season programs as *Forever Knight* (1989-96), *Charmed* (1998-2006), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Angel* (1999-2004), and *Millennium* (1996-99). This list does not even approach those series that never made it beyond their first seasons or even their pilot episodes. New series have also premiered since the turn of the millennium as part of this continuing trend. In particular, *Medium* (NBC), *Supernatural* (CW), and *Ghost Whisperer* (CBS) all feature supernatural detectives, all premiered in 2005, and all remain in production at the time of this writing. Any of these series would make interesting subjects for the continuation of the work in this dissertation. For instance, the intersections of gender, sexuality, and technology (especially technologies of communication) are explored at length in *Supernatural, Medium, Ghost Whisperer,* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* How do some of the characters in these shows negotiate the gender expectations surrounding the supernatural detective? The Winchester brothers in *Supernatural* continue the tradition of the masculine ghost hunter or ghost chaser, who uses technology to find and eliminate supernatural evil, but the series and its focus on the brothers’ relationship with one another and with their father offer an opportunity to read the show for its sub-text of masculine gender construction. The female psychic mediums of *Medium* and *Ghost Whisperer* also meet many of the gender assumptions about these kinds of stories by emphasizing mediumistic gifts as primarily feminine. However, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* complicates these expectations, especially through the character of Willow. Willow begins the show as perhaps the most sleuth-like of the “Scoobies,” the group of
Buffy’s friends who generally act as the investigative squad in the show (Buffy herself is the enforcer); and, at first, Willow is a heterosexual and tech-savvy researcher. As the show progresses through its seven seasons, however, Willow undergoes two major (and I would suggest, related) transformations: one from a user of technology to a user of magic, and the other from an awkward, tacitly heterosexual young woman into a proud and powerful lesbian. I have done some preliminary work on gender in the supernatural detective narrative, but there is much more to be done.

Though I touch on the issue in Chapter 3, the rapidly increasing number of supernatural reality-television programs like *Paranormal State, Ghost Hunters, A Haunting, Haunting Evidence, Most Haunted*, and *Haunted History* also begs for a treatment that perhaps combines the insights of Chapters 3 and 5. Do these programs follow the chronotope of the traumatized space in the presentation of their stories? How do they use the techniques of videographic exhibitionism to fulfill their generic expectations, and are those expectations more closely aligned with their status as documentaries, their status as ghost stories, or their status as television reality programming? When these programs do actually show what they purport to be video evidence of supernatural activity, how does that complicate my conclusions in Chapter 5?

In addition, what is the significance of the fact that the supernatural detective is far more likely to appear on television than almost any other media after print? Does the particular hybrid of genres meet a need on television? That is, detective programs and police procedurals are and have always been tremendously popular on television, but the supernatural genre, by itself, has met with far less success. Does the combination of these two (and in some cases more) genres manage to attract members of both potential
audiences? Or is it something about seriality itself. Certainly, the detective and the monster are genre figures that have discovered the commercial viability of the serial. Detectives never die (for long), and monsters can never seem to remain dead. Is the compulsion to repeat somehow tied up with our engagement with television? Is series television a medium that speaks to our drives, instead of one (as most critics have argued) that speaks to our desires?

Another and much larger question is whether or not the proliferation of the supernatural detective narrative is in some way millennial. Some of these films and programs touch on the theme directly. Specifically, *The X-Files*, with its conspiratorial concerns and doomsday scenarios eventually revealed its mytharc to be about a coming apocalypse through extra-terrestrial invasion to come just a few years after the turn of the millennium. Additionally, the show’s creators spun off two new television shows, one of which was titled *Millennium* and was about a former FBI agent tracking the efforts of a doomsday cult to bring about the end of the world. And when Constable Ichabod Crane proclaims the new millennium in *Sleepy Hollow*, he speaks to both the courtroom audience in 1799 and the theater-going audience of 1999. This link highlights the fact that the supernatural detective narrative has been popular, in one manifestation or another, at the turn of every century in America since the Salem witchcraft trials of the 1690s. In the 1790s, it was hidden but still present in the fiction of Charles Brockden Brown, who wrote about the collision of rationality and irrationality in the new republic. In the 1890s, the first fully formed supernatural detective characters began to appear in print (originating mostly in Britain). What is it about temporal thresholds like the turns of centuries that seems to encourage the production of this particular sub-genre?
Perhaps there is something about eschatological modes of thought and their relation to temporal thresholds like the turns of centuries in the West. Whenever the turn of a century approaches, the public is reminded of the millennial in its original religious sense. Whether or not the sense of a new era retains its religious flavor, Americans may be likely to imbue the coming “new age” with an ethical or moral sense. From a secular perspective, this may manifest as an uncommon feeling of connection to the ongoing narrative of history. The transition from the twentieth century into the twenty-first invites not only speculation about what the next one hundred years will bring, but it also invites reconsiderations of what has led us to this point. It is a period when society is more likely to reconsider the official version of the past. To the extent that this is the case, perhaps millennial time is in some ways functionally analogous to trauma time. If the clues of the classical detective story and the supernatural manifestations of the ghost story are seemingly incongruous elements of an obscured historical narrative struggling to be revealed, then perhaps the turn of a century is a similar sign post. These thresholds may encourage us to look into the past for obscured historical narratives in order to come to some kind of reconciliation. In this case, supernatural detective stories might flourish during these threshold decades, because they offer a pattern the form of a mass entertainment for how we might like to deal with our own history. The detective offers a rational and seemingly easily available mode of addressing the past, while the apparent irrationality of the conundrum signifies the real historical contradictions that have been smoothed over in the accepted historical narrative.
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