***UNCANNY OTHERS:***

***HAUNTOLOGY,***

***ETHNOGRAPHY,***

***MEDIA***

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**The work presented in this thesis is the candidate’s own.**

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis presents my study of “ghosthunting”—the practice of attempting to capture ghosts, primarily using cameras and audio recorders—as a metaphorical device for the use of audio-visual media within anthropology. I conducted fieldwork with ghosthunters, paying particular attention to their attendant audio-visual media practices and outputs, in order to redress the reluctance of anthropology to a) evaluate audio and visual media as mechanisms for producing anthropological critique—although some anthropologists have taken pains to do that with writing—and b) to understand the particular "haunted" history of audio-visual media as being related to critical anthropological concerns such as representation, time, and the other.

The history of the use of audio-visual media within ghosthunting follows a similar trajectory to that of anthropology, and the resultant methodologies and outputs of both disciplines function in ways that are less inclined towards discursive “speaking with others” than they are towards attempting to produce demystified representations of others. Neither practice has, in contemporary times, acknowledged the historical connection of audio-visual media to the supernatural, nor its capacity to deal with the uncanny as a critical provocation.

My study of ghosthunters shows that despite attempts to reify ghosts via photography, audio, and film, those media are themselves devices that maintain the uncanny as an ethical injunction towards the other—whether as ghosts or as the cultural “other” of anthropological critique. An acknowledgement of the “haunted” origins and capacities of media allows for ethical engagements with anthropological others, ultimately suggesting critical media methodologies for anthropology that, while informed by anthropology’s “crisis of representation,” radically differ from written ethnography. Viewing the relationship of media and anthropology through the lens of Derrida’s hauntology is a useful framework for thinking about media methodologies that can stand as critique.

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**PREFACE**

Contemporary media may be said to be a “haunted medium”: its development was bound up with the early Spiritualist concerns of communicating with others beyond the world of the living and its products today are ghost-like in their capacity to thwart the boundaries of space and time. While much has been written linking media to haunting (cf Erik Davis 1999, John Durham Peters 1999, and John Potts 2006) the relevance of this connection has not been appreciated by anthropology, despite its increasing engagements with photography, audio, film and other media. Media is linked to critical anthropological issues such as representation and discourse, temporality and borders, and their connection to “the other,” that is the cultural other, defined as being distinct in one way or another from the anthropological observers. In this thesis, following Emmnuel Levinas’s (1978) linking of ethics and others, I will be using terms such as “the other” and “others” to also refer to cultural others of anthropology against whom we, as anthropologists, define ourselves, and for whose wellbeing we are therefore ethically responsible. Ariella Azoulay (2011) has written about the ways in which the photographic event is never over, and therefore always implicates a responsibility to the other, while Bliss Cua Lim (2009) has argued that the “supernaturalism” of media may function as a mode of resistance and a starting point for more ethical engagements with others because of its presentation of different modes of time and place. Within anthropology, Ghassan Hage (2012) has drawn upon Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s (2003) insistence that space and time are dictated by a false dichotomy of the “other” and the West with his calls for a re-assessment of “primitivist” anthropology as a way of rethinking about radical alterity as a form of resistance. As Lim argues, the temporality of film (and I will argue below, photography and audio as well) presents other modes of being in space that may function as ethical injunctions. My thesis takes these ideas as a starting point in order to argue that audio-visual media thus enables forms of engagement with the other that differ from written ethnography, and is hence well-placed to function as a critical and potentially ethical anthropological tool.

This thesis emerged from a concern about the on-going ambiguity of the role of common audio-visual forms--photography, audio, and film--as avenues of critique within anthropology. Following the “crisis of representation” of the 1980s, the past few decades have seen anthropology focus on audio-visual media via the sub-discipline of visual anthropology, and with an emphasis on discursive methods, rather than representational ones.[[1]](#footnote--1) More recently attempts have been made to define “media anthropology” as a valid anthropological practice. I argue, however, that anthropology has failed to fully comprehend the possibilities of its commonly-used audio-visual devices as mechanisms of anthropological critique. In order to explore the connections between media as a haunted medium and its implications for anthropology, I studied ghosthunters, people who use photography, audio, and film in order to create knowledge about the other in the form of ghosts. My contention is that a study of the ways in which these media are used to pursue the other—whether supernatural or cultural—flags up issues that point to both the shortcomings and possibilities of these media forms. Such findings are of increasing interest not only because, as Sarah Pink (2013) contends, anthropologists now have access to the same audio-visual media devices as the others of their study, but because these media present a potentially radical alternative to predominantly ethnographic anthropological methods.

This thesis will demonstrate that ghosthunting is a useful metaphor through which to redress the shortcomings of anthropology’s own use of media to engage with others because of the striking parallels between both disciplines’ media methods, outputs and analysis of data. Both ghosthunting and anthropology are “disciplines” that have, despite setting up their subject-matter as the “unknowable” other, tended to reproduce and reify this unknowable as data. Ghosts are not only an allegory for some repressed cultural guilt or an unsettled past. Their presence represents the category of the other in the form of the generalised past, which is expected to remain dead and buried, and this disruption implicates those living in the present. An engagement with ghosts therefore entails an encounter with the fluidity of seemingly rigid categories such as space, time, and self and other. Both ghosthunters and anthropologists may attempt to harness and reify these encounters, usually by seeking to deal with them through “exorcism” via homogenisation, archival, or some sort of manipulation of text or media. But the “context” of the ghost, as with the radically alterior Levinasian other, is its uncanniness, and it cannot exist outside of this context. My study ultimately suggests that a “hauntological” approach to the media used by anthropologists, an approach which takes seriously the unknowable as a form of ethical engagement with others, opens up a critical avenue via which anthropology may take seriously the uncanny, a form of critique that can unsettle accepted borders and boundaries to produce radical accounts and critiques of culture, history, and politics.

The term “ghosthunter” may refer to anyone engaged with the capture of ghosts.[[2]](#footnote-0)

I use the term here to refer to people who pursue ghosts using technologies such as cameras and audio recording equipment as a matter of course. Contemporary British ghosthunters are the antecedents of late-nineteenth century Spiritualists and twentieth century psychical researchers whose attempts to engage with ghosts primarily resulted in written or oral accounts. Though not bound by any one official organisational body, ghosthunters nonetheless share common practices and the goal of collecting media data in the form of photographs and audio to be categorized and filed as data in archives, data that acts as supporting evidence of the existence and nature of a world beyond the known one of the living. In this sense, the aims of ghosthunting are on par with those of anthropology, a discipline based on empirical demands and in which textual accounts have increasingly been supplemented, and occasionally supplanted, by media. At the heart of both disciplines is the desire to draw other and unfamiliar worlds closer, an engagement that inevitably calls accepted temporal, spatial, and other borders into question via the use of “haunted” photography, audio, and film methodologies. And yet neither discipline has quite grasped the problems--and the more radical possibilities—of its use of such media. In the broadest sense, I liken the work of anthropologists to ghosthunters, and aim to introduce a “crisis of representation” to anthropological media engagements with the other in order to suggest that media allows *not* knowing for certain to stand as an ethical and political act.

Two aforementioned concepts provide a useful framework for thinking about media as a tool of both anthropologists and ghosthunters: the uncanny and hauntology. The uncanny, that which is at once familiar and strange, is both an inevitable and significant part of anthropology. Anthropology and ghosthunting each maintain particular relationships with the uncanny. Ghosts are uncanny “others” in that they are both spatially and socially liminal: they call into question linear time and categories such as past and present and living and dead. Anthropology also deals with “others”—as objects and subjects of study who, at times, have inadvertently been made strange within the contexts of their representations, but which are more often rationalised as data.

Representations are intrinsically linked to the methodologies, imperatives, and tools that produce them, so my study of ghosthunting as a discipline that is literally concerned with the pursuit of the uncanny in the form of ghosts has implications for media use within anthropology, a discipline that deals with the uncanny in the form of cultural others. However, a shortcoming of both written and audio-visual practices within anthropology has been a reluctance to acknowledge the critical value of the uncanniness, not just of others, but of media itself. For both disciplines today, photography, audio recording and filming, are acts that seek to rationalise the uncanny other. For ghosthunting, which has been called the ultimate pseudoscience (Shermer 2007), the matter of using media to engage with ghosts has been simple: seeing or hearing is believing, and the early media imperatives of communicating with the dead have given way to proving the existence of life after death using audio-visual media data in contemporary times. For anthropologists, the burden of proof in the form of fetishism or salvage activities is less great, but the rationalisation of the cultural other and the production of “knowledge” for collection and archiving nonetheless remains a disciplinary goal today, no matter how “postmodern” the work of anthropology may now claim to be. Media, itself an uncanny medium, offers anthropology different ways of engaging with the uncanny as a form of critique.

Jacques Derrida (1993) proposed hauntology—or paying attention to ghosts as they “disrupt” the present as an ontological disjunction--as a corrective to traditional ways of understanding history and culture; if the categories of the past, present, and future are necessarily inter-implicated, rather than chronological, then hauntology functions as a kind of deconstruction. Ghosts, though they tend to be place-bound and tied to houses and the “homely,” are not to be domesticated; that they are uncanny means they represent the opposite of the neat and bounded safety of home. They transgress the borders of space and time, and are not so much anachronistic—chronologically displaced—as they call into question attempts at chronology and border-enforcement in general. This is the possibility of the uncanny for anthropology: the prospect of a representation that is less mimetic or aesthetically-affecting than the Kantian or Lyotardian forms of the sublime and is rather politically deconstructive and disruptive—and hence able to stand as critique.

While hauntology has been applied primarily to literary and historical contexts, the aim of my study is to use a hauntological perspective—that is, paying attention to ghosts, to paraphrase Derrida--to reveal the underexplored potential of media, in the form of photography, audio and film, as critical representational device within anthropology. The development of many media and communications technologies, from telephones to digital video, has been associated with the uncanny in the form of the supernatural, with “ghostly media” producing disembodied voices, enabling scenes of the past to repeat in the future, and conjuring the presence of those long since dead. In a sense, any transmitted or recorded media haunts and is haunted: as Roland Barthes (1980) pointed out about old photographs, the people we see in them are likely dead, but are also going to die. With digital media, this unsettling of time is all the more uncanny, as sound and image recordings can be created, archived, fast-forwarded and rewound, or even frozen in time, at the click of a button. Such disruptions of space and chronology illustrate that media is hauntological in nature: like ghosts, media may evoke, rather than rationalize, otherness as a form of cultural critique.

In order to demonstrate that a comparison of ghosthunters to anthropologists redresses the shortcomings of the latter’s use of media, I propose in my Thesis Introduction that all media is “haunted,” both by the historical concerns with the spectral that influenced its development, and because of the ways in which it may thwart the conventions of time and space in the present. I then demonstrate the ways in which anthropology hasn’t reflected on these aspects of media in order to take it up as a form of critique more affectively. Finally, I explore the historical and ongoing connection between anthropology and surrealism: anthropology’s engagements with surrealism were part of the beginning of an anthropological questioning of the dichotomy between Others and the West, even as these categories were used in fetishistic ways to make those critiques. Surrealism’s connection to anthropology underscores the discipline’s relationship with the uncanny, and I propose that surreal anthropology, following Hage’s calls for a return to the “primitive” anthropology that acknowledged the uncanny as a cornerstone of anthropological critique, may now be expanded to include the audio-visual media already being used by anthropology. To do so requires an acknowledgement of haunted media—and I will argue that this constitutes a “hauntological” approach that pushes audio-visual media into the realm of critique for anthropology.

Following the Thesis Introduction, the two main sections of my thesis demonstrate the utility of my study of ghosthunters as a metaphor for thinking through anthropology’s engagements with media. In Part I, I recount my study of ghosthunters in order to build my case for paying attention to ghosts as others through an account of the development of the “discipline” of ghosthunting: in particular, I focus on the establishment of ghosts as historical cultural others who inhabit denoted “field sites” and on the contemporary commitment to methodologies that prioritise the use of audio-visual media and that have evolved from communicative to representational practices that reify ghosts as consumable data. Ghosthunters’ engagements with ghosts through media thus function as a metaphor for anthropology’s own ambivalence about taking up audio-visual media as devices capable of producing critique. In Chapter 1, I delineate the “field” of ghosthunting and describe how ghosts are used as agents to propagate a homogenous history and promote particular versions of heritage and nostalgia. Chapter 2 is my account of ghosthunting as “discipline” that evolved from communicative Spiritualist communication into committee based activity, to finally a leisure activity merging with tourism. Chapter 3 describes the ways in which audio-visual media has been at play in ghosthunting, initially as a magical conduit through which to commune with ghosts, but more recently as a digital device to capture ghosts for archival purposes. Part I makes the following main points in order to establish that ghosthunting is a discipline with useful parallels to anthropology:

* Ghosts are akin to the other of anthropology in that they are political operatives, but may be manipulated by those engaging with them in the present.
* Ghosthunting has evolved into a “discipline” on par with anthropology, replete with methodologies and fieldwork.
* The media imperatives of ghosthunting have also evolved, and are less about communication with others than they are about representing them as data and evidence.

In Part II of the thesis I turn to media, first in the form of photography, and then in the form of audio, film, and other “experimental” media in order to draw conclusions about media’s relationship to the uncanny, and the possibilities of representing the invisible. I begin by discussing the ways in which photography is often produced as data or artefact for the archive, while simultaneously holding the dialectical possibility to both blind and illuminate, to paraphrase Benjamin (1923), with the archive itself an uncanny product of audio-visual media. The first half of Part II charts the progression of photographic encounters with ghosts from spirit photography to contemporary digital photography in order to demonstrate the ways in which photographs have come to be collected for archival, evidential and conservation purposes, not as a form of critical inquiry. Chapter 4 details the ways in which spirit photography employed the camera as a medium in order to channel others onto film, with ghosts remaining silent “others,” or “extras,” as they appeared in recognizable human form. Chapter 5 plots the evolution of spirit photography into a research pursuit, with digital cameras now used to capture evidence of ghosts that appear digitally as non-human forms, such as orbs. Such representations are mimetic not in that they resemble familiar human forms, but in that they adhere to the data that comes before them in the archive.

Chapter 6 turns to other forms of audio-visual media, namely audio and film, in order to suggest ways in which thinking beyond images—and beyond the “frame,” as Paolo Favero (2014(b)) has suggested. Audio that records apparent voices of the dead conjure the haunted origins of media as a medium that may produce a two-way communication with others across space and time, suggesting the possibility of looking beyond the occularcentric rhetoric of mimesis and instead using audio-visual media to produce more radical methods of engaging with anthropological others. The practices of translation, interpretation, and dissemination surrounding audio recordings of ghosts in the form of electronic voice phenomena demonstrate the ways in which the digital in particular may also return audio-visual media to a more communicative/discursive and even “supernatural” form. I conclude Chapter 6 with a discussion of film as it has been used in anthropology, and suggest that hauntological media practices should become part and parcel of anthropological critique as a matter of course. While filmic “experiments” in anthropology in particular go some way towards demonstrating the ways in which the uncanny may be taken seriously as a form of critique, Chapter 6 suggest that audio-visual media as critique could be taken as more than “experiment” in order to engage with others in ethical ways beyond the traditional remit of ethnographic writing.

The key points advanced in Part II are therefore as follows:

* Spirit photography stemmed from efforts to communicate with others, efforts that maintained the alterity of ghosts, whilst hinting at the possibility of dialectical images that hold the potential to function as an ethical engagement with others. Such engagements would be ethical insofar as the “secret” of the other is maintained by the conjuring medium.
* Contemporary digital photographic practices, particularly those that produce images of ghosts that no longer resemble humans and instead stand as data, relinquish ethical responsibility of the ghostly other, as the latter is reified as data that merely mimics what is already in the ghosthunting archive. However, the mimetic and iterative aspects of digital photographs produced for archives also point to their dialectical potential, and to the archive itself as uncanny.
* Beyond photography, audio and film offer the possibility of hauntological engagments with others, and could be taken up by anthropologists to this end as a matter of course. Audio is capable of evoking the “haunted” aspects of earlier media technologies by seeming to magically conjure the disconnected voices of the dead, allowing for more radical and even critical interpretations and translations of the other and the “messages” of the other, on par with surrealist methodologies and discursive anthropological engagements rather than representation. Film, in the form of “experimental ethnography” has been the primary conduit for audio-visual critique within anthropology, particularly because of its relation to time, with certain contemporary examples of film methodologies such as re-enactments and the re-assemblage of archive footage may be considered hauntological.

Part II advances the arguments presented in Part I by showing that while photography has the potential to function as critique within anthropology, by virtue of its capacity to produce “dialectical images,” the mimetic imperatives of ghosthunters are more about data collection, as has also been the case for some anthropologists. Beyond the occularcentric and mimetic imperatives of contemporary photography, other audio-visual media forms such as audio, film and other audio-visual media engagements are being used to the contrary to represent the invisible and to engage with the uncanny

The Thesis Conclusion then assesses the utility of my study of ghosthunting as a metaphor for anthropology that addresses the latter’s reluctance to embrace audio-visual media as a form of critique to the same degree as it has done with written ethnography. I suggest that a hauntological approach to audio-visual media within anthropology entails further research into the specific relationships between audio-visual-media, time and the anthropological other that may yield less ambiguous methodologies of using audio-visual media as critique within anthropology. Extending the tenets of the “crisis of representation” and “surreal ethnography” to audio-visual media have constituted experimental media practices within anthropology, but my research suggests the possibility of audio-visual outputs that differ from existing experimental ethnographic films or the collage of ethnographic surrealism, going a step further to produce media forms more along the lines of cinematic montage in the form of digital remixes that may constitute new forms of critical media practice within anthropology beyond experimental ethnography.

**THESIS INTRODUCTION**

**ANTHROPOLOGY AND MEDIA:**

**HAUNTED MEDIA, THE UNCANNY, HAUNTOLOGY**

Much has been written about the relationship between ghosts and early media devices that were developed to transmit to and from, and to record, these “others” across spatial and temporal distances. I propose that the ways in which media is now being used by “ghosthunters” to engage with ghosts—generally to reify them as representational data--flags up the ways in which it may also be used to the contrary within anthropology, as an ethical engagement with others. The media history of ghosthunting follows a similar trajectory to that of anthropology, and the resultant methodologies and outputs of both disciplines function in ways that are less inclined towards discursive “speaking with others” than they are towards attempting to produce demystified representations of others. Neither practice has, in contemporary times, acknowledged media’s historical connection to the supernatural, nor its capacity to deal with the uncanny as a critical provocation. My study of ghosthunters shows that despite attempts to reify ghosts via photography, audio, and film, those media are themselves devices that maintain the uncanny as an ethical injunction towards the other—whether as ghosts or as the cultural “other” of anthropological critique. An acknowledgement of the “haunted” origins and capacities of media thus allows for ethical engagements with anthropological others, ultimately suggesting critical media methodologies for anthropology that, while informed by the “crisis of representation,” radically differ from written ethnography.

Avery Gordon (1998: 8), in her text on the relevance of haunting to the tasks of social science, writes, “to be haunted is to be tied to social and historical effects.” For Gordon, the phenomenon of haunting registers cultural experiences such as slavery or torture more fully and in different ways than other accounts are able to; she is right to argue thatanyone concerned with social and cultural representation, not to mention political reform, must engage with ghosts. Ghosts are metaphors for the cultural others of the past, and I argue, for the others encountered by anthropologists in the present as well. Haunting describes a temporality in which the past, present and future are not autonomous, but inter-implicated: through ghosts, the cultural and social conflicts of the past are always haunting the present, and the eternal return of ghosts suggests that the very notions of history, culture, and even time are always both irrational and politically charged. Understanding the category of the anthropological other as akin to the idea of the ghost is my starting point for assessing the connections between anthropology and the uncanny, connections that ultimately add up to a hauntological approach to media as a mode of anthropological critique.

In order to demonstrate that a comparison of ghosthunters to anthropologists redresses the shortcomings of the latter’s use of media, this Thesis Introduction first introduces the concept that all media is “haunted,” both by the historical concerns with the spectral that influenced its development and because of the ways in which it may thwart the conventions of time and space in the present. I then demonstrate the ways in which anthropology hasn’t reflected on these aspects of media in order to more affectively take it up as a form of critique. Finally, I explore the historical and ongoing connection between anthropology and surrealism. Anthropology’s engagements with surrealism were part of the beginning of an anthropological questioning of the dichotomy between Others and the West, as underscored by even as these categories were used in fetishistic ways to make those critiques. Surrealism’s connection to anthropology underscores the discipline’s relationship with the uncanny, and I propose that surreal anthropology, following Hage’s calls for a return to the “primitive” anthropology that acknowledged the uncanny as a cornerstone of anthropological critique, may now be expanded to include the audio-visual media already being used by anthropology. To do so requires an acknowledgement of haunted media—and I will argue that this constitutes a “hauntological” approach that pushes audio-visual media into the realm of critique for anthropology.

**Haunted Media**

The history of the development of media and communications technologies is inextricably linked with ghosts and the notion of haunting as described above. Long before the early cinematic travelogues of two centuries ago allowed audiences the uncanny experience of seeing and hearing other times and places, audio-visual technologies were used to produce phantasmagoria: sound and light shows that seemed to magically conjure and project voices and figures from thin air, to the delight and often terror of audiences. X. Theodore Barber (1989) has described how phantasmagoria shows prefigured modern contemporary film techniques such as superimposition and tracking shots, while Cristina Britzolakis (1999: 79) understands the shows to have denoting “a heightened, distorted, or manipulated visibility; the apparitional quality of objects extracted uncannily from the process of their own making, and disporting themselves in the new urban landscape of modernity.” It is no wonder that Walter Benjamin (2002) likened the arcades of 1920s Paris to phantasmagoria, replete with dialectical images in which the archaic and the modern combined, offering the possibility of profane illumination via this radical chronological and spatial displacement. Contemporary media, with its phantasmagoric roots, is always a haunted and potentially critical medium.

Erik Davis (1999), John Durham Peters (1999), and Jeffrey Sconce (2000) have all explored the ways in which Spiritualism, and later psychical research, were two of the driving forces behind the development of telephonic, photographic, and phonographic technologies. Just as anthropology has embraced audio-visual media for the purpose of creating factual accounts and archives of cultural others, nineteenth-century Spiritualists were keenly devoted to the tasks of advancing technology for the purpose of scientificallybringing the world of ghosts closer to that of the living. Spirit photography, in which the images of dead family and friends were made to appear in photographs alongside the living, was invented for similar reasons: as Steven Connor (1999) describes it, when otherness is made visible in this way, it is no longer unmasterable, but rather part of the record and manipulable. Likewise, the advent of devices for contacting, and later recording the voices of, those not present came at a time when people hoped that technology could extend to realms beyond death. Film, Frederic Kittler (1999) has pointed out, was part of a primarily ocular rhetoric of 19th century scientific exploration, that was originally conceived in order to record movement too fast to otherwise study; as is often noted in accounts of film history, viewers of early cinema were enchanted and unnerved by the medium’s capacity of conjuration and the apparently magical transgression of the properties of physics. According to Connor (1999: 222), “spiritualism attests and contributes to the ghostliness of these new technologies [telephonic (transmissive) and phonographic (reproductive)], even as it also deploys them in its strangely enthusiastic struggle against the supernatural, to affirm the materiality, the manipulability, the technicality of the unseen.”

Peters (1999: 180) is less cynical about the spectral drive behind the development of media and communications technologies, citing the circumstances of the first telephone call made by Alexandra Graham Bell to his assistant Thomas Watson (as recounted by Ronell (1991)); he considers Bell’s exclamation--“Watson come here, I want you”--as “the symbol and type of all communication at a distance—an expression of desire for the presence of the absent other.” Electricity would not only add to the ease of these desirous communications with and recordings of loved ones at a distance, but would also further contribute to the uncanniness of the media technologies themselves. As electricity was harnessed for communications inventions, scientists from Nikolai Tesla to Thomas Edison and later, even Einstein, explored the possibility that it could serve as a conduit to some unreachable world beyond that of the living. Indeed, technologies such as television and wireless radio would disrupt the previous concepts of proximity and the boundaries of place, while telephones, and much more recently, the Internet, would bring about the uncanniness of virtual communication—the opportunity to converse with voices without bodies, and in some cases, instantaneously receive “live” textual communication from some invisible and silent source across the ether from one’s computer screen.

Kittler (1999: 22) has written that “media always already yield ghostly phenomena,” and even the face and voice of a living loved one experienced on Skype is rendered ghost-like and uncanny when an inevitable audio delay and frozen screen remind us that we are reaching across a great void, thwarting accepted conventional concepts of space and time in the process. As Scott McQuire (1997: 686) has stated, “even those who don’t believe in ghosts might acknowledge that technology often produces surprisingly similar effects.” Certainly, digital technology has introduced new aspects of the uncanny to media. While “analogue” hints at the likeness between a source and a recording of that source, digital recordings, despite their presumed lack of accretion and deference to an original, are infinitely repeatable (and thus potentially simulacrous) and easily malleable. Through digital media, the magic of the phantasmagoria shows lives on. Beyond representation or evocation, beyond discourse and basic communication, the critical element of any media for anthropology lies in its “magic” ability to invoke the uncanny--not just the uncanniness of the other at a distance, in space or time or culturally--but the uncanniness of the act of transmitting, recording, and ultimately reaching out to others for whom we are ethically responsible.

In this thesis, I will be focusing on media in the form of audio-visual recording devices, rather than communication technologies. While contemporary communicative digital media has its own implications for anthropology (cf Horst and Miller 2006 and 2013), I am concerned with the traditional forms of “representational” media that have been taken up by both ghosthunters and anthropologists alike: photography, audio recording, and film. That media’s connection to ghosts and haunting was initially to do with communication, and later about recording, is of particular relevance for anthropology, whose representational crisis, outlined below, was to do with a turn away from imperatives to represent others, and towards “discursive,” communicative engagements “with others.”

In the next section of this introductory chapter, I introduce the ways in which anthropology’s turn to “discourse” has been part and parcel of its development into a discipline of critique, and its debates about the ways in which ethnography must speak with others, rather than attempt to represent them. I argue, however, that the methodological outcomes of these debates haven’t filtered down to audio-visual anthropological practices, much less been taken up in different ways by anthropologists engaging with recording media. Despite media’s historical links to haunting, the implications of these links to the media of contemporary times--and more importantly for our purposes, their implications for anthropological engagements with audio-visual media—remain underexplored. While some experiments with ethnographic media have taken place within the sub-discipline of visual anthropology, there remains a common assumption that audio-visual media function more as a means of producing knowledge than as a form of critique. Likewise, media anthropology remains a contested sub-discipline, focusing either too broadly or too locally. Nor has either sub-discipline sought to define media methodologies of critique—as has been done with writing--or attempted to understand the history of media and its connection to haunting as part and parcel of media’s capacity as a critical category of anthropological production. However, anthropology’s links to surrealism have pointed to the uncanny as a form of critique, connections I explore in the latter half of this Thesis Introduction.

**Anthropology: Crisis and Critique**

Audio-visual media is able to make unique contributions to the tradition of critique within anthropology, especially when understood in terms of its "haunted" history and its connections to the uncanny via hauntology. The notion of anthropology as a critical discipline has evolved over the last century or so; Franz Boas’s (1911) questioning of the “natural” culture of the U.S., Ruth Benedict’s cross-cultural best-seller (1934), and Margaret Mead’s (1928, 1935) critiques of adolescence and sexual divisions of labour are examples of early critical anthropology stemming from the U.S. In Europe, anthropological critiques of colonialism could be found in engagements with “primitivism” by Marcel Mauss, Michel Leiris, and Marcel Griaule, discussed later in this chapter. Anthropology’s contemporary critical concerns, however, were primarily borne out of the “crisis of representation” that came to the fore following the publication of the collection of essays *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Marcus and Clifford (eds) 1986). While this crisis called for a reflexive, discursive ethnography and focused primarily on writing as a method, it also had obvious implications for critical anthropological practices beyond both written ethnographic texts. By the 1980s and 1990s, visual anthropology was just beginning to be accepted as a relevant sub-discipline engaging with audio-visual media and methodologies, replete with distinct issues of theory and practice still to be worked out (cf. Heider 1976 and Collier and Collier 1986). Yet in the nearly twenty years following anthropology’s crisis of representation, few of the suggestions regarding the more radical possibilities of ethnography, much less alternatives to ethnography, have been taken up by visual anthropology or by the more recently developing “media anthropology,” despite these sub-disciplines’ engagements with media making them well-placed to take up the suggestions for alternative forms of critique within anthropology.

The representational crisis of anthropology was an outcome of a gradual move from evolutionary anthropology, to cultural relativism, and finally to an attempt to establish ethnography as a critical and “post-modern” practice.[[3]](#footnote-1) Ethnography, the scientific description of people and their cultures following observation, is usually understood as having arisen in opposition to evolutionary anthropology. Texts such as Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) and Evans-Pritchard’s *The Nuer* (1940)) paved the way for the cultural relativism that would emerge, especially within the American academic context, as a critique of former racist judgments of culture. Keth Hart’s (2009) summary of anthropology’s relationship to critique notes that anthropology students during the middle of the last century were encouraged to take ethnography as fact; fictional cultural representations were to be eschewed in order to establish the validity of the findings of long-term participant observation with races and cultures that were formerly thought to be inferior.[[4]](#footnote-2) Ethnography was therefore understood to be a critical injunction against racism via its presentations of facts, rather than fiction, about others cultures.

By the 1980s, however, anthropology’s paradigm of cultural relativism had begun to fray. Texts such as *Writing Culture* (Marcus and Clifford (eds) 1986) and *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Marcus and Fischer (eds) 1988) attempted to re-establish ethnographic writing as a discursive rather than representational practice, but first and foremost as a form of critique. [[5]](#footnote-3) This movement away from “factual” representation stemmed from the “literary turn” of ethnography that was highly influenced by Clifford Geertz’s writing during the 1970s (see, for example, Geertz’s 1973 essay “Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight,” still a staple of many introductory anthropology courses). Discursive ethnography is inevitably linked with poetics and politics: it is “made up” and persuasive, involves the politics of interactivity between writer and subject, and is linked to the epistemological issues of knowledge and power. *Writing Culture*, writes Hart (2009), confronted “realism, naturalism, and objectification inherent in the positivist tradition of scientific ethnography” and “made explicit the faults in a paradigm that had been unraveling for decades.”[[6]](#footnote-4)

In *Writing Culture*, three authors in particular—Talal Asad, James Clifford, and Steven Tyler--address the shortcomings of ethnography in its written form and hint at the potential of media as a critical mechanism for anthropology. Talal Asad’s (1986) essay questions the notion of translating culture into writing, and suggests that other forms of cultural evocation might be more effective as anthropology (though he cautions that anthropology is too caught up in ethnography to take suggestions of other modes of practice seriously). Asad writes that if Benjamin was right about translation not requiring a mechanical production of the original, but rather a harmonisation with its intent, then there is no reason why this always has to be done in the same way each time. He suggests that perhaps ethnographic representation isn’t the best anthropological method—maybe it is instead “the execution of a dance or the playing of a piece of music” (Asad 1986: 159). Such representations, writes Asad (ibid 160) would amount to “transformed instances of the original, not authoritative textual representations of it.” But such expressions would have little chance of being accepted by anthropology, as anthropologists are trained to translate cultural language into texts, “not to enlarge cultural capacities, learnt from other ways of living, into our own” (ibid). The notion of culture as text has reinforced the assumption that translation is primarily about verbal-textual representation, with no room for the other modes of expression—in this case, evocations via forms other than writing—that are the possibility of engagements with media.

In Clifford’s introductory essay in *Writing Culture* (drawing on Walter Ong’s (1982) analysis of the consequences of literacy and Jacques Derrida’s (1967) treatment of logocentrism), he writes that one of the limitations of anthropology has been its emphasis on literary visualism, at the expense of the other senses. The basis of ethnography is that cultural facts are gleaned from things observed, not from things heard or stemming from dialogue. Clifford (1986: 12) states that “once cultures are no longer pre-figured visually—as objects, theatres, texts—it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances.” Clifford (ibid) is suggesting a discursive, rather than observational, paradigm, in which what he calls the “metaphors of ethnography” shift to expressive speech. Relevantly, he questions how this may be achieved by a written medium. The possibility of an anthropology that does not privilege visual observation has more recently been taken up by Tim Ingold (2011), Sarah Pink (2009) and others who are concerned with a “sensory anthropology,” and with embodiment as part and parcel of anthropology. Only recently has such a position focused on the senses, including vision, as they may come into play in relation to media; the Sensory Ethnography Lab at Harvard is a training centre for making anthropologically informed works of media that deploy both aesthetics and sensory experience, including photography and film, hyper-media and sound. Sound media is explored in detail later in this thesis as it raises questions about anthropological discourse, and about the related issues of translation and transcription—issues that link the media practices and outputs of both ghosthunters and some anthropologists.

Finally, Stephen Tyler, in his essay in *Writing Culture*, eschews written representation in favour of discursive evocation. For Tyler, this evocation is experienced initially as a jarringly uncanny depiction of the other and then as an ultimately ethical anthropology as participants are returned to “reality.” Ethnography as evocation, writes Tyler (1986: 123) transcends by evoking what cannot be known:

Evocation is neither presentation nor representation. It presents no objects and represents none, yet it makes available through absence what can be conceived but not presented. It is thus beyond truth and immune to the judgment of performance. It overcomes the separation of the sensible and the conceivable, of form and content, of self and other, of language and the world.

Tyler’s links suggest the important relationship between the uncanny and others and anthropological methods of critique. His depiction of the changing place of the anthropological other—from allegory, to savage, to other, and finally to data in the later 20th century--mirrors the historical trajectory of the manner in which ghosts have been dealt with by ghosthunters, as we shall see. Tyler (1986: 128) invokes Derrida on the importance of discourse, whereby self is other and vice versa; the point of discourse is “not how to make a better representation but how to avoid representation.” Tyler (ibid 130) emphasizes that evocation is “beyond representation”:

It is not a presence that calls into being something that was absent; it is a coming to be of what was neither there present nor absent, for we are not to understand ‘evocation’ as linking two differences in time and place, as something that evokes and something else evoked.

Indeed, like Asad, Tyler is suggesting that evocation frees ethnography from mimesis. But what has not been taken up are the ways in which media may both evoke and represent. Tyler (1986:131) writes that “to represent means to have a sort of magical power over appearances, to be able to bring into presence that which is absent, and that is why writing, the most powerful means of representation, was called ‘grammarye,’ a magical act”. He argues that to break the spell we have to attack writing, just as Ong, Benjamin, Adorno, and Derrida have all done. While Tyler’s, Clifford’s, and Asad’s essays have each provoked responses in the form of critical ethnographic textual practice, I argue that anthropology has yet to address the “magical” power of media to make present things that are absent, not as representation, but rather as an evocation of the uncanny inherent to Derrida’s hauntology to aid in its critiques. Contrary to Tyler’s views on written texts, one way in which media may encompass critique is to “magically” evoke rather than to present mimetically and factually. As with traditional ethnographic representation, media may be perceived as lending itself to the latter, but another possibility of media is to be magically evocative, and it is this underexplored aspect of media that furthers the aims of anthropological critique.

**The Shortcomings of Visual Anthropology**

Responsibility for the others of anthropology lies at the root of anthropology’s operation as a self-critical discipline. It also influenced the crisis of representation in anthropology, which sought to move away from factual representation and towards some sort of discourse between anthropologists and others via more radical forms or ethnography. The “attack on writing” suggested by Tyler should not only have resulted in different ways of doing written ethnography, but also different ways of doing anthropology in general. It could even have resulted in a move towards different forms of anthropological expression, as suggested by Asad. Visual anthropology--the sub-discipline of anthropology concerned with creating and analyzing visual representations of culture—certainly flourished in the years following the “crisis of representation.”[[7]](#footnote-5) But by and large it has not recognized the haunted history of audio-visual media and its capacity as a critical tool; rather, visual anthropology, similarly to ghosthunting, has tended to be understood as a device for producing or supplementing more traditional factual knowledge about others.[[8]](#footnote-6) The “magic” of media nonetheless remains unaddressed as a critical methodology within anthropology.

One of the many useful comparisons between ghosthunting and anthropology, as discussed in Part I of this thesis, are the similar ways in which the two have attempted to define their uses of the media of photography and audio and their practices and fields of study. The literature attempting to establish visual anthropology in the years following *Writing Culture* tends to wholly or partially function as practical “how-to” manuals for utilizing visual media in anthropological practice. Such overviews, many now republished in more recent editions (cf. Rose 2013 and Hockings 1999), parallel ghosthunting instructional texts found online and published by ghosthunting groups. Such “manuals” commonly give a sense of not only trying to define what visual anthropology should be (usually academic, and not for mainstream audiences, and often supplemental to written texts), but also of attempting to prescriptively detail how to use visual media and its products.[[9]](#footnote-7)

During the earlier years of contemporary media use in anthropology, recording technologies were primarily understood to be either a tool or an impediment to the gathering of usually supplemental information about cultures. Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson’s debates around photographic and filmic method and purpose, stemming from their pioneering visual anthropological fieldwork in Bali during the 1930s, remain of interest today because they introduced the issues that continue to define visual anthropology.[[10]](#footnote-8) Mead maintained that photography and film should be used for research purposes, while Bateson, while also more aligned to the collection of objective data, was more in favour of the production of ethnographic film, with more scripted editing and sequences.[[11]](#footnote-9) Both understood the inherent bias of the fieldworker on his or her subjects and the direction of the camera, but Mead believed that the camera, when set at a middle distance and kept running constantly, could nonetheless serve as a sort of scientific tool that could capture and salvage culture for others to interpret and find patterns in later.[[12]](#footnote-10)

It is remarkable that the same faith in recording media held by ghosthunters is held by anthropologists, who have tended to be much more critical and creative about shortcomings and possibilities of writing. In more recent visual anthropological publications, the same issues debated by Mead and Bateson about the use of media within visual anthropology are kept alive. For example, Fatwa El Guindi (2009: 63) in her text on visual anthropology, interprets Mead and Bateson’s faith in the camera in Bali in this way:

Taking a picture of a suckling baby is different from looking at a suckling baby through an instrument. If the one taking the picture is an anthropologist, as it should be, then the eye is employed in the research phase of data gathering with a mind that has the mastery of the language spoken and the language unspoken and has deep knowledge of the cultural system. In this case, the picture will tell more than a mere baby suckling.

This analysis of anthropological media use is problematic and is the inverse of the common assumption that media is unbiased, and that cameras don’t lie; it makes an assumption that anthropologists can “conjure” cultural knowledge. It is on par with saying that if one is a good enough “medium” then something supernatural might appear in a photo; as we shall see, it echoes the beliefs of many ghosthunters and their approach to photography and audio recordings, whereby those with psychic powers are able to use media instruments more effectively to produce ghosts that, although “magically” produced, are able to function as data.

It is the opposite of what I mean by the haunted “magic” of media, a “magic” that comes not from psychical power, but from the actual ability of media recordings to do strange things with accepted chronologies and physical distance. El Guindi’s text thus exemplifies that visual anthropological debates have changed little over time, a fact that points to a study of ghosthunters as a useful conduit for understanding the ways in which other forms of the uncanny may be engaged with using media, and the ways in which those forms are reified as data or conjured as cultural knowledge. And while anthropological “research films” have now been replaced by “ethnographic films” following the crisis of representation, media has not been taken up as an anthropological method of critique. It is rather understood as presenting many of the same issues it always has since Mead and Bateson first took it up in Bali eighty years ago.

While traditional and limited understandings of the place of media carry on for both ghosthunters and anthropologists, the recent media engagements of both have placed an emphasis on more modern media forms such as the digital, particularly in the form of websites. As for visual anthropology, the third edition of Sarah Pink’s (2013) *Doing Visual Ethnography* begins with a chapter entitled “Why Do We Need Visual Ethnography,” in which she states:

Visual ethnography is now a practice which, in my experience, rarely involves the use of analogue cameras, that in some way or other always involves the use of computing equipment and web-based media, and is practiced in a context where sometimes ethnographers and research participants have access to very similar technologies (ibid 13).

Indeed, the homogenisation of digital media practices across disciplines forms the basis of my study of ghosthunters, who today use the same digital media equipment such as smart phones and laptops--for recording, editing, and dissemination—as anthropologists, as well as other practitioners, not to mention people in general.[[13]](#footnote-11) As Martin Lister (2003) has pointed out, digital media are merely a continuum of the analogue media preceding them and this is one reason why a comparative study of the use of media of anthropology and ghosthunting—disciplines that both employ media to engage with the uncanny--yields such valuable lessons about the possibilities for anthropology of contemporary media practices today, as based upon the historical development of media and its relation to the uncanny in the form of the supernatural.

There are, of course, differences in ghosthunting and anthropology. Pink cites Collier and Collier’s (1986) acknowledgement that, prior to the 1980s, film and audio tape necessitated selective recording choices, whereas more accessible video (which in turn segued into even more accessible digital media) made reflexive methods of filming and editing more necessary—a response to digital media that has not been taken up by more scientifically-minded ghosthunters. To that end, Pink’s (2013: 31) visual ethnographic approach was developed “as a critical response to the scientific realist influence in the social sciences of the 20th century” and “against the idea of visual methods as modes of data collection and in favour of visual ethnography as a process of producing knowledge.” Pink sees her definition of ethnography as expanding upon the simpler one of Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson (1995) – that is, participating, watching, listening, asking questions and collecting whatever data is available to throw light on the area of research. Instead, writes Pink (2013: 35), ethnographic concern should be “with the production of knowledge and ways of knowledge rather than the collection of data.” She (ibid) further writes that ethnographies should be “versions of the ethnographers’ experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, the embodied, sensory, and affective experiences, and the negotiations, and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced.”

But it is not clear what Pink means by knowledge production as a form of critique that stands in contrast to the collection of data. As we shall see, ghosthunters understand the capture of media data to be a scientific enterprise, but the vast array of instructional guides do still stress the “embodied, sensory and affective” nature of ghosthunting as part and parcel of this data collection via media. Furthermore, it is unclear what being “loyal” to a context entails, unless it is the loyalty to an arbitrarily-bounded cultural (or “haunted,” in the case of ghosthunters) “field.” Pink’s and others’ faith in ethnography exemplifies the shortcoming of visual anthropology’s relationship to media so far. It is easy to pinpoint the ironies of ghosthunting: media is used to produce data about the uncanny subject-matter of ghosts, even though media itself is uncanny and far from scientific. While ethnography stemming from fieldwork remains the calling card of critical anthropology, media equipment, particularly digital recording devices, as Pink herself notes, simply don’t function practically in an unbiased manner, nor do they function the way that writing instruments do. Audio-visual media used within visual anthropology has not been considered as a conduit that, as a medium, has particular implications both for the practice of ethnography (or “knowledge gathering,” to use Sarah Pink’s (2013) problematic definition) and for anthropology beyond traditional ethnography.

**The Ambiguity of Media Anthropology**

It seems reasonable that, in light of the limitations of visual anthropology (its primary interest being the production of ethnographic films that produce “knowledge”) a “media anthropology” would emerge that takes into consideration media in all its forms and beyond the realm of visual ethnography. Indeed, the emerging sub-discipline of media anthropology (or “anthropology of media,” among other suggested names (Susan L. Allen 1994)) has grappled with issues about its scope, purpose, and methodology, but has not managed to agree upon the issues of incorporating media into critical anthropological practice. Instead, its concern has tended to be with mass media (cf Kelly Askew 2003), a topic that used to be seen as a almost taboo for anthropology (Faye Ginsburg and Abu-Lughod (2003)) or has else been highly localized, and focused on remote or specific uses or reception of media in traditional anthropological field areas. While these topics should certainly be of interest to a critical anthropology, until recently (for example, via the Sensory Ethnography Lab at Harvard), media anthropology has so far done little to embrace media as a tool of critique for anthropology itself.

The term “media anthropology,” according to Allen (1994: 2) was coined following the 1969 American Anthropological Association meetings because of a growing concern about “the death of public knowledge of anthropological concepts and their own lack of skills to disseminate them.”[[14]](#footnote-12) More recently a debate between Mark A. Peterson and John Posthill (2009) has attempted to determine what media anthropology is for.[[15]](#footnote-13) Peterson (2003: 3) had previously suggested that media anthropology has three main contributions to make: thick ethnographies, a decentred West and alternative theories. Peterson (2009: 343) wonders “whether there is a specifically anthropological approach to examining human engagement with media [or] whether there are merely anthropologists engaged in interdisciplinary media studies.” Problematically, there seems to be very little connection between existing examples of “media anthropology” and visual anthropology—a sub-discipline that purports to be actively involved via both analysis and creation of media. I propose that an anthropological approach to media itself, beyond others’ engagements with it, must acknowledge the critical role of the uncanny and its connection to media as a representational device, via an understanding of media’s connection to the supernatural.

Posthill (2009) likewise believes that what has been missing from the proposed frameworks of media anthropology is any sense of media history.[[16]](#footnote-14) There is a need, writes Posthill (2009: 336), to add historical depth to media anthropology’s geographical breadth and “to venture beyond our ethnographic comfort zones and into the media worlds of our ancestors.”[[17]](#footnote-15) This is the inverse of what seems to be happening in the wider discipline of anthropology. Practice-wise, self-scrutiny of writing practices stemming from the representational crisis after the mid-1980s is *de rigeur*. But while visual anthropology runs the gamut of ethnographic photographic and film forms, there is very little wider awareness of the ways in which the history of media—in particular, the history of the development of media technologies (for our purposes, the ways in which concerns about the supernatural have had a huge influence on the development of early communications technologies)—may be of significance to a discipline concerned with representing the culture of others. While Posthill believes that a wide-ranging historical approach should be part and parcel of media anthropology, I am suggesting that an understanding of media’s particular history be understood in relation to anthropology’s own historical relationship with the uncanny in order to produce radical engagements with the culture of others, beyond what textual ethnography has produced so far.

Posthill further argues that by and large, media anthropology has been associated with ethnographies of media texts, as opposed to media methodologies. In some ways, this is not in keeping with the “holistic” cultural approach advocated by many of the key authors of texts on media anthropology (cf. Allen 1994, Peterson 2003). And a questioning of where and how to site media is always one of method. Why has “ethnography” as a method set anthropology apart from cultural and media studies? What are the implications when a laptop and screen and electronic methods of dissemination are as—if not more—commonplace as a pencil and notebook? It could be argued that laptops are just modern equivalents of the latter, but dissemination is the difference. That is, the medium: *media*. As Posthill argues for anthropology to understand writing as a form of early media, and for its importance to anthropology, so too must the history of audio visual methodologies be taken into account by visual anthropology, or anthropology as a whole for that matter, if it is to move ahead with these sub-categories of media anthropology and digital anthropology (let alone use media devices as tools).

While there have been anthropological studies of media and communications devices, such as Heather Horst and Daniel Miller’s (2006) study of the cell phone, such studies were preceded, of course, by texts such as Avital Ronell’s (1991) *The Telephone Book*-- a history of haunted communication technologies on a par with the work of John Durham Peters (1999), Erik Davis (1999), Frederick Kittler (1999) and others whose histories of media support my claims about the uncanny nature of all media. Horst and Miller’s *Digital Anthropology* (2013), like Sarah Pink’s (2013) book on visual ethnography, proposes “digital anthropology” as a new sub-discipline.[[18]](#footnote-16) But such an approach doesn’t address the intersection of the digital and representation; it’s as if the groundwork of studying the contemporary (ie, the historical understanding of why the digital as a representational technology is uncanny) hasn’t yet been conducted before already moving on to contemporary concerns that continue to understand media in terms of the old debates of visual anthropology or traditional ethnography.[[19]](#footnote-17)

Conrad Kottak (1990: 12) has suggested that perhaps the reluctance of anthropology as a whole to embrace media (and the ambiguous status of media anthropology as a sub-discipline) has had to do with anthropology’s drive to preserve cultural diversity and spread relativism, “revealing the others.” Media tends to be homogenizing, which goes against anthropology’s function as a discipline of critique that defends otherness. But this is of course the very narrow and archaic understanding of media that I’m criticising; as I explain below and argue for in the subsequent sections of this thesis, media may not only “reveal” others, but can also maintain their secrets and otherness as an ethical act. Furthermore, a reluctance of anthropologists to embrace media smacks of the universal anecdotes of IT staff at universities around the world: professors may be widely published and lauded in their field, but many encounter basic classroom technology as if they had never experienced it—completely confounded and at times even threatened and offended by it, without realising that in many cases aspects of it--its history and its on-going developments—have been so relevant to (and at times, constitutive of) their fields, whether science, mathematics, literature, performance, or anthropology or cultural studies.

It is not that anthropology should take up mass media, but that the continued reliance upon classical modern ethnography is so far removed from the use of audio media technologies that there is simply little interest in expanding the understanding of its capabilities, even in its newer and more multi-faceted digital forms, despite the ability to illuminate all sorts of anthropological issues such as representation, materiality, time, and otherness. As Mihai Coman and Eric Rothenbuhler (2011) have noted, today media is culture and it mediates culture. Post-modern anthropology cannot be anything else but media anthropology, just as it once was cultural anthropology. Beyond debates about mass media, anthropology has already engaged with media devices and its representations in visual anthropology and beyond, but the ways in which anthropology, the uncanny, and media are interwoven need to be understood in terms of its haunted history, as Posthill hints at, in order to understand the ways in which media may serve as critique within contemporary anthropology.

**The Legacy of Surrealism**

Beyond the *Writing Cultures*-inspired discussions, the prospect of alternative, critical methods of anthropology in the present have been linked to the connections between historic surrealism and anthropology (cf. Clifford 1981 and 1988, Russell, 1999, and essays by Foster, Jay, and Moore in Taylor 1999). The mutual tendency of both anthropology and surrealism to fracture, to juxtapose, and most importantly, to engage with audio-visual media techniques such as collage and montage has perhaps most famously (and most controversially) been taken up by James Clifford in his essay on ethnographic surrealism.[[20]](#footnote-18) Clifford set out to differentiate ethnographic humanism, which seeks to make comprehensible that which is unfamiliar or strange, from what he terms “ethnographic surrealism,” which seeks to provoke otherness in order to destabilize. He proposed ethnographic surrealism as a way of thinking of “surrealism as ethnography” (1988: 147).[[21]](#footnote-19) Clifford reminds us of Andre Breton’s insistence that surrealism is defined by actions rather than written doctrines, and of Susan Sontag’s (1977: 119) claim that surrealism intrinsically involves critique, when he states that “ethnographic surrealism is a utopian construct, at once about past and future possibilities for cultural analysis.” Such a depiction is reminiscent of the blurring of chronology inherent to Derrida’s hauntology, and it comes closest to an anthropological approach that takes into account the haunted nature of media as that which enables it to criticise in ways that differ from traditional ethnography.

In footnotes, Clifford (1988: 151) implicates anthropological cultural description as itself uncanny: citing Malinowski’s “co-efficient of reality,” he notes the counter-balancing “co-efficient of weirdness”: those “imponderabilities” inherent in the experience of other cultures. The “weirdness”—the uncanny—is no longer about the exoticism of other cultures, but rather to do with the oddness of attempting to describe the culture of others. And yet, as Clifford describes, and in the words of Cristine Britzolakis (1999: 82), “the Surrealist moment in ethnography has been characterized as one in which a radical questioning of norms was underpinned by an appeal to the exotic.” Perhaps the best example of this “moment” is the Paris-based journal *Documents*, published during 1929-1930. “Primitive” art at this time was a popular and elitist commodity in the West, with the objects of others being exalted in the European art world. It was in this context that *Documents* emerged, showcasing anthropological findings and essays on seemingly disparate topics such as jazz and archaeology, its texts and images arranged collage-like. As Carl Einstein, one of *Documents*’ editors, described its goals:

We're going to put together essays from the most diverse research areas, beginning with prehistory, Mediterranean art, the early Middle Ages, up to Asia Minor, Egypt, Arabia, China and Japan; that means things from all countries and all times (cited in Kelly (2007: 4)).

Thus the uncanny in the form of “all” others, from all times (for the past is a foreign country; those “discarded forms” of “primitive” cultures described by Freud were, to contributors and readers, worth conjuring up again), was displayed in *Documents*, echoing a new push for the moral and cultural relativism being taken up by the arts and anthropology at the time.

In this way, primitivist-tinged relativism was able function as a deconstruction of time and space, and to provoke using re-assemblage in visual-material form. *Documents*--under the directorship of Georges Bataille (who insisted that attention be paid to the mundane and darker elements and moments of culture and art)--constituted a break with the more romantic strand of Surrealism promoted by those such as Andre Breton at the same time as ethnography was just beginning to embody a questioning of the underpinnings of a culturally hierarchical anthropology. According to John Hutnyk (2004: 160), Bataille considered *Documents* to be a “war machine against Surrealism and its alleged leader Andre Breton,” Bataille’s own pre-occupation with Surrealism was not orientated towards the contrivances of dreams and chance encounters, but was instead concerned with “the eye as perspective and horror, with shock contradiction, and the uncontrolled—what he called heterology.” Such a heterology seems to invoke the provovation inherent in the notion of radical alterity, bringing to mind Tyler’s evocation, “beyond representation” of that which cannot be known, and Hage’s calls for a return to the “primitive”—with full awareness that it is an arbitrary category--as one of the foundational points of critique within anthropology.

Drawing contributors from the art world, the numismatic friends of Bataille, and anthropologists such as Marcel Griaule and Michel Leiris (who, like Bataille, had been influenced by Marcel Mauss and by Griaule’s views of ethnography as a challenge to an anthropology primarily based in the West and that viewed other cultures as locked in the past), *Documents*, according to Julia Kelly (2007) in her re-assessment of the journal, seemed to be attempting to decode European culture on a par with emerging critical disciplines like anthropology to “primitive” cultures. It could be understood as a recognition of the arbitrary categories of the Other/the West but using that false dichotomy in order to politically critique it. Moreover, it constituted a new approach towards anthropological representing and collecting, as would soon be exemplified in the archive of the expansive Dakar-Djibouti expedition made by France during 1931-1933, a turning point in the progression of anthropology as a critical discipline.[[22]](#footnote-20)

That surrealist artistic practices of textual collage, abstract photographic juxtapositions, not to mention ethnography and archaeology outside of the dominant Greco-Roman tradition (all of which challenged the existing cultural anthropological status quo, and also included Bataille’s send-up of factual dictionary entries, in his regular “Critical Dictionary” feature in the magazine) came together in *Documents* at this time suggests a particular and potentially productive relationship between anthropology and the uncanny—and the ways in which the former enables provocation via the latter.[[23]](#footnote-21) Beyond fetishisation of the primitive, no distinction was made between high and low culture; likewise temporality was treated as relative in the journal’s exalting of archaeological finds (remembering the journal’s stated focus was not just “other cultures” but “other times”). As Kelly (2007) notes, the journal displayed vigorous relativism taken to almost absurd extremes on occasion. Despite a break with earlier strands of more “romantic” Surrealism, Einstein’s statement –quoted above--concerning the aims of *Documents* echoes the earlier “goals” of the movement reflected, for example, in the Surrealist Manifesto of 1925 (Breton et al 1978: 33):

Even more than patriotism – which is a quite commonplace sort of hysteria, though emptier and shorter-lived than most – we are disgusted by the idea of belonging to a country at all, which is the most bestial and least philosophic of the concepts to which we are all subjected…Wherever Western civilization is dominant, all human contact has disappeared, except contact from which money can be made – payment in hard cash.

The journal was not meant to be an art review but to present “evidence,” not in the form of data, but rather as critique of existing cultural hierarchies, categories and borders. And yet this evidence was not meant to be something concrete, but rather to stand as a “playful museum,” as Clifford (1988: 119) describes it, in which objects from various different cultures were classified and re-classified. Like deconstruction, or haunting, nothing was pinned down scientifically, chronologically, or geographically, and yet, like a museum, any given issue of the journal could stand as evidence of the uncanny nature of both culture and representations of it, in general.

*Documents* ran for only 15 issues, but it is consistently cited in debates concerning surrealism and anthropology. In his essay on the subject, Clifford (1988: 119) invokes the poet Lautréamont’s description of beauty through collage as lauded by the Surrealists (“the chance encounter, on a dissection table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella”) and discusses the juxtapositions of image and text in *Documents* as he implicates “ethnography” as the element that makes this destabilization possible; he credits the journal with illustrating the clear convergence of surrealism and ethnography during the 1920s, with so many of its contributors going on to become influential fieldworkers and museum curators. Its legacy, writes Clifford (ibid), is the critical “ethnographic attitude” of anthropologists who see “culture and its norms—beauty, truth, reality—as artificial arrangements, susceptible to detached analysis and comparison with other possible dispositions.” The fact that such arrangements are “artificial” in the first place would seem to render them inappropriate to any sort of unbiased “study.” But Clifford’s celebration of the relationship between representation and the uncanny, as exemplified in *Documents* and of the unintentional surrealism inherent within contemporary anthropological outputs, is nonetheless a starting point for thinking about the uncanny in contemporary times and beyond the work of written ethnography.

As Clifford (1988: 151) notes, “ethnographic lists tend to produce reverie.” What he doesn’t mention in his essay is that to an outsider, even contemporary and carefully “postmodern” ethnographic accounts, replete with lists of foreign words, obscure cultural concepts and lengthy descriptions of life in the “field” may have the opposite effect too, and induce only boredom. Clifford describes how the clips and sutures apparent in the construction of any ethnography are what constitute its capacity to stand as critique: the process is on view with the author fully implicated in the building of the cultural representation. The ethnographic representation is like a collage, the chance meeting of a self with some other in a strange land. But as John Hutnyk (2004: 32) has asked of Clifford’s lauding of collage, “how useful are even ‘historical and political’ [Clifford 1997: 3] juxtapositions without thinking politically about what to do with them?” While many anthropological outputs are unintentionally uncanny, it must be questioned whether they may act as a form of critique or whether they merely evoke a sort of apolitical cultural relativism.[[24]](#footnote-22) There is a need, as Hutnyk suggests, to do more than just create collages “cocooned in self-satisfied contemplation,” as Adorno (1967: 34) put it. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that collage is always critically deconstructive. Rather, collage necessarily implies the rigidity of categories (Lautréamont’s umbrella, sewing machine and dissecting table may equate to self, other, and some context/text) in the way that they must necessarily be unlike each other to be successfully juxtaposed.

Nonetheless, Clifford (1988: 146) describes ethnographic surrealism as “that moment of incongruity before ethnographic comprehension takes over.” This is perhaps what Tyler (1986: 125) had in mind when he described “post-modern ethnography” as consisting of “fragments of discourse” to “evoke…an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality.” It is thus poetry, not in its textual form but in its function: an evocation that provokes those who experienced it to act ethically. Like ritual performance, writes Tyler (ibid), this type of ethnography “defamiliarizes commonsense reality in a bracketed context of performance, evokes a fantasy whole abducted from fragments, and then returns participants to the world of common sense—transformed, renewed and sacrilized”—and is hence ethical. “The break with everyday reality,” writes Tyler (ibid), “is a journey apart into strange lands with occult practices—into the heart of darkness…” I propose that extending this understanding of surreal ethnography to the contemporary media outputs of anthropology constitutes an anthropology of critique that takes into account the uncanny—the unknowable—as an ethical engagement with others. In the next section, I operationalise the uncanny as I will be using it throughout this thesis in order to argue that my metaphor relating ghosts to the others of anthropology is hinged upon the uncanny, not only because of its provocative capacity to stand as critique but also its inherent link to media as a haunted medium.

**Freud’s Ghost(s): The Uncanny**

The connection between ghosts and the uncanny is made quite clear in Sigmund Freud’s, “The ‘Uncanny” (1919). “Many people experience the feeling of the uncanny in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, and to spirits and ghosts,” writes Freud (ibid: 241) in his maze-like essay, stating that of all the examples of the uncanny he can think of, the ghost is “the most striking of all.*”* He chalks this up to our ambivalent feelings about death in general, stating that “there is scarcely any other matter…upon which our thoughts and feelings have changed so little since the very earliest times, and in which discarded forms have been so completely preserved under a thin guise, as our relation to death” (1919: 241-2). While superstitions and archaic or “primitive” beliefs have generally been rationalized away, there is nonetheless a lingering fear of death and insufficient scientific knowledge about it; despite advances in science and medicine in both Freud’s time and contemporarily, what happens when we die is as unknowable as the Levinasian other—the person across the inevetible great divide that and against whom we define ourselves, but who is impossible to totally know at the risk of losing ourselves.

Freud (1919: 242) relates that he feels no living person can actually grasp that “all men are mortal” and that religions and governments have touted this fact in order to maintain moral order: “Since almost all of us still think as savages do on this topic, it is no matter for surprise that the primitive fear of the dead is still so strong within us and always ready to come to the surface on any provocation.” The provocations to which Freud refers are essentially uncanny others: the sighting of the figure of a person long dead, the apparent animation of an inanimate object (especially human-like mannequins or dolls), precognitions or dreams of the death of someone still living. All of these examples of the uncanny are related to the dead returning in that “discarded form” of the other of ghosts (Freud 1919: 241).[[25]](#footnote-23)

Freud (1919: 242) recognized that in cosmopolitan Europe, by the twentieth century, “all supposedly educated people have ceased to believe officially that the dead can become visible as spirits.” However, some feeling of “piety”—perhaps a form of Levinas’s responsibility for the other that we recognise defines ourselves, and for whom we are therefore ethically responsible—for the dead continues unabated, leading to the production of monuments and other visible memorials to those departed (1919: 242). Written nearly one hundred years ago, Freud’s description (1919: 242) of the ways in which people have “toned down” their emotional response to death, but not reigned it in entirely, resonates today, with ghosthunting serving as a popular leisure and tourist activity and the prevalence of reality television shows set in haunted places:

In our great cities, placards announce lectures that undertake to tell us how to get into touch with souls of the departed; and it cannot be denied that not a few of the most able and penetrating minds among our men of science have come to the conclusions, especially towards the end of their own lives, that a contact of this kind is not impossible.[[26]](#footnote-24)

The fact of this “savage” yet ongoing attempt to contact the dead is used by Freud to test his hypothesis that the uncanny is not about the shock of experiencing something new, but is rather related to repression, the “secret” from the past returning to haunt the present.

For if there is an anxiety that has been repressed, then the uncanny is conjured by its recurring. It doesn’t matter if the original anxiety was frightening or not, as its recurrence, by way of returning from repression, is disturbing. As with Derrida’s hauntological account of history, as the repressed memory returns, it also debuts as something unsettling. Thus Freud (1919: 241) shows that a defining aspect of the uncanny is that it is never something completely new or unknown, “but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.” This is how the uncanny is thus at once strange and familiar—a jarring provocation, a disruption that calls into question accepted categories and refuses attempts of homogenisation. The uncanny is thus able to stand as a form of critique.

Freud’s essay is itself uncanny, as has been noted by those who may be considered his legatees and have in one way or another expanded upon the concept in their own work (cf. Lacan (1972), Cixous (1976), Kristeva (1991), and others).[[27]](#footnote-25) Freud only writes about ghosts in the latter part of the essay; according to Royle (1999: 9), he spends most of the first half of it making a “lexicological pilgrimage,” with the subject of the uncanny resulting in “even one of the boldest thinkers of the twentieth century turning (back) for shelter in a dictionary, indeed a whole mound of dictionaries.” Royle, writing in English, acknowledges that his own attempt at introducing a literary study of the uncanny is itself uncanny due to its own linguistic absurdity: an English translation of Freud’s original essay, including Freud’s entomological quest to define the word “uncanny,” is already a translation of a German translation of interpretations of other translations!

This is along the lines of the critical uncanniness of written ethnography as explored by Clifford and Marcus et al (1986) and Clifford’s conception of ethnographic surrealism—but never quite stated as such and certainly never applied in any effective way to media. Royle’s own attempts to translate the word *unheimlich* into English result in him, like Freud, finding contradictory meanings. The English word “canny,” for example, means “wise” but also “wily,” although its apparent opposite, “uncanny,” has, since about 1850, been used to describe the supernatural and ghostly.[[28]](#footnote-26) As detailed in Chapter 6 of this thesis, acts of translating and interpreting—other languages, other cultures (even others’ dreams, as we nod to Freud)—are themselves uncanny and often unintentionally deconstructive. The attempts of ghosthunters to interpret and rationalise their uncanny subject matter via media may at times be as absurdly amusing as Freud’s essay, but the resultant representations again prove Derrida’s statements that nothing exists outside of context: any end to haunting is not haunting, with attempts to rationalize ghosts, or bring them into the fold, destined to fail, as they can only exist within a haunted context. Likewise, the many attempts to represent the uncanny in the form of both ghosts and cultural others using media only end up leading to more uncanniness.

Freud eventually focuses in on the definition of the uncanny as something that has come to light that should have remained hidden. For if we consider the definition of

the German *das unheimlich*—usually translated as “un-homely” in English--it makes sense that ghosts, who so often haunt houses when it is dark, should represent that which unsettles them by “coming to light” there. This gels with Freud’s hypothesis that the experience of the uncanny is always related to something repressed returning, as a return signifies that there is an origin from which something has taken leave (even if ghosts are also “at once” debuting, as Derrida describes). And yet before settling on ghosts as that most uncanny harbinger, Freud, in the words of Royle (2003: 13), “keeps pausing to see if it is now possible to draw up an inventory, an exhaustive list of what is uncanny” in a way reminiscent of the experiments of the ethnography attempts of *Documents* described in the last chapter: “it is as if he thinks, or is willing to pretend that we might think, that the uncanny can be collated, classified, taxonomised. But one uncanny thing keeps leading to another.” As such, Freud recounts a long list of situations that can be said to feature the uncanny, citing Otto Rank’s work on doubles, the uncertainty about whether something is animate or inanimate as described by Ernst Jentsch (1906), the experience of precognition, and even his own experiences of repetition and déjà vu. He makes the point that the uncanny is not always a negative feeling; in the case of the latter examples, the feeling may be one of pleasant surprise or fatefulness.[[29]](#footnote-27)

As Royle (1999: 1) also points out, the uncanny may be gruesome or sublime, but there is also always the “flickering sense (but not conviction) of something supernatural”— there is always a disruption to the assumed order of things when encountering the other. Freud’s thwarted efforts to pin down the uncanny are reminiscent of the attempts of both ghosthunters and anthropologists to ontologise their subject-matter using media. But ghosts, like the cultural others of anthropology, refuse to be relegated to interpretation in this way. As iterative and “supernatural” texts, they float free, despite efforts to the contrary. Thus ghosts are related to the uncanny—to that which returns from some origin to haunt, and serve as a political critique. In the next section, I describe how the category of the other—which is both arbitrary and yet constitutive of the notion of self, or of the anthropological West—is also a utility of critique by virtue of its uncanniness, hence making it amenable to evocations via the audio-visual media I’ve described above.

**Haunted By Others: The Anthropological Uncanny**

While aspects of cultures may be “collated, classified, taxonomised”–as Nicholas Royle (2003: 13) accuses Freud (1919) of attempting in vain to do--culture does not necessarily correspond to “natural laws” as proposed by Levi-Strauss (1955) and other proponents of viewing culture functionally. If anthropologists study the “phantom realties” of others, as Richard Schweder (1992) has stated, then culture itself may be said to be supernatural: beyond scientific understanding, and more akin to fiction.[[30]](#footnote-28) Ghosts are but one example of aspects of culture that may be thought of as supernatural, and so too might be possession rituals, love, and art. This is not to say that the category of the supernatural isn’t also functional, fictional, or cannot be represented, but rather that it may also occupy that category that Freud tries futilely to exhaustively define, but which keeps escaping proper analysis: the uncanny. The supernatural is familiar as a cultural feature, but it is strange in its refusal to correspond to the known scientific logic of the world. Freud’s incessant and absurd listing of uncanny features and examples in his essay mirrors the ways in which anthropologists, in their attempts to demystify aspects of otherness, have often succeeded in producing representations that are themselves uncanny—the anthropological uncanny as described by Clifford above.

In his essay, Freud (1919) realises that his attempts to pin down the uncanny—to represent it as something solid and adherent to certain laws and to rhetorical and descriptive language—only leads to more uncanniness, as he skirts around the issue of haunted houses and the notion of the un-homely, and when he describes love as homesickness. For we are all able to recognise the familiar in others: those who are “other” are uncanny because what is familiar about them is akin to a feeling of being at home in the world, and what is different about them is alienating. Freud’s delving into the lexicon also produces an earlier source-word relating to the uncanny: heimilich evolved from the word *heimish*, which means “native” or “local;” thus what is *un-hemisch* could be said to be foreign, other. It is a reminder of Heidegger’s (1927) argument that one is perhaps never at home in the world, that an individual is always individuated from others, and that “at bottom” the very state of being in the world is uncanny.

For Freud, we are thus drawn towards others—and anthropologists are drawn to study other cultures--for myriad reasons that ultimately are related to alienation and homesickness: we are both attracted to and unsettled by others because “the other”—as sure as our inevitable deaths that ghosts represent--is ultimately uncanny and reminds us of ourselves and our origin and our destination, not to mention the routes not taken along the way.[[31]](#footnote-29) As Levinas (1978) described, the absolute exteriority of the other is a function of desire. The “phantom realities” we experience as anthropological depictions of other cultures are like ghosts: always at once familiar and strange, and calling into question the established borders of what we perceive to be home and its relation to our history and self-hood. This is why audio-visual media recordings are always related to the uncanny—they are able to evoke other times and places as if by magic.

As Julia Kristeva (1991: 170) has stated, “Freud teaches us to detect foreignness in ourselves.” Kristeva is referring here to Freud’s theory of repression, though her earlier notion of the abject (Kristeva 1982) is related to the uncanny. While the abject describes something that is repulsive precisely because it has been permanently cast off and exists apart from the norm, ghosts are instead unsettling in their habit of straddling supposedly irreconcilable categories (the past and the present, the living and the dead, the physical and the spiritual) while floating free from any attempts at authentication. They are no longer part of the world from which they originate—or more accurately, the origin from which they were conceptualised--but they are also never completely exiled from it either.

In that sense, it is possible to categorise ghosts as a culturally “hybrid” phenomenon and to relate them to Homi Bhabha’s (1984) use of the term “unhomely” to describe the situation of living people who have been displaced or who are not quite at home, culturally or geographically, due to their “mixed” or “inauthentic” status. Those people who now tend to be labelled as “hybrid”—for example, refugees or transsexuals--are more uncanny than abject: they don’t necessarily repulse with their familiar-strangeness but instead haunt the border of what is acceptable and integrated and what is other and foreign. As with ghosts, those considered cultural others always entail an interruption and unsettledness, and always to some degree constitute a provocation.[[32]](#footnote-30)

To settle this provocation—to attempt to exorcise, capture, or explain ghosts, or to integrate or authenticate the hybridity or “foreign-ness” of others (or else discard it wholesale—to relegate it to the realm of the abject)—is akin to attempts to rationalise the uncanniness of the other: in the end, the other is compromised and no longer uncanny, or may become fetishised into something unintentionally more uncanny; rationalising the uncanny is not of the uncanny.[[33]](#footnote-31) The drive to label and “authenticate” that which is supernatural—beyond science, but also culturally and psychologically irrational (surreal, even)--is akin to the essentially impossible task of ghosthunters of trying to rationalise the uncanny in the form of ghosts using audio-visual media, itself an uncanny, as I have established. These attempts, which share so much common ground with traditional anthropology, and with anthropology’s engagements with media in contemporary times, are the subject of Part I of this thesis. As Adorno (1951: 47) stated, “Anything that is not reified, cannot be counted or measured, ceases to exist.”

It is not that science or scholarship (applied by ghosthunters to particular media and archival practices) kills the supernatural or renders it irrelevant. Nor am I rehashing earlier anthropological arguments for relativism or stance-free evocations, which relegate the category of cultural others to the realm of the sublime.[[34]](#footnote-32) Rather, I am arguing for an anthropology that acknowledges and embraces the uncanny as a provocation that calls into question all that we think we know, as derived from some perceived chronological and authoritative history, but also as gleaned from some sense of ourselves and of others—from the uncanniness of being drawn to alterity even as we long for home. I argue that while written ethnography may have its own ways of functioning as critique in this way, audio-visual media, with its relation to haunting and the uncanny, offers different critical possibilities.

Ghassan Hage (2012: 290) sums up the provocation inherent to being “haunted” by others as follows:

When critical anthropology delineates the possibility of us being ‘other than what we are’, it is always materialist. It is always speaking to a world, a reality, that is not necessarily dominating our consciousness, but which anthropology – in speaking to it – helps bring to the fore and haunt us with its very possibility.

It is not just that attempts to represent others via anthropology are also individual acts of searching for one’s self in the other (though they have surely been that as well), but also that at the heart of such activity is the homesickness described above: a longing for a Heideggerian sense of being-in-the-world that incorporates a desire for, and inevitable alienation from, others beyond various borders and categorical boundaries that bind and comprise the familiar world of “home.”

As Allan Lloyd Smith (1992: 285) has written, the uncanny is always linked to wider psychological and political issues—the very issues that have been the concern of both anthropological representations and the haunting that ghosts do, as I will describe in more detail in Part I:

Male and female interactions involving power and sexual desire are determinants; so also may be the historical and political experiences of class, race, or age, and certain specific features of culture, such as imperialism and the fear of what is brought back from colonial adventures.

The uncanny has always been central to anthropology and hence cultural representation, with that which has been “brought back” featuring so prominently in the ethnographic accounts and public displays of other cultures produced in the West during the last two centuries.

An attempt to represent the other or the culture of others is always to some degree an attempt to evoke the uncanny: the desire to make contact with others and to draw other worlds nearer through anthropology is not unlike the “primitive” but still extant desire to be in contact with ghosts, whether through explicit communication via discursive ethnography or through the medium of media. Acknowledging this relationship between the uncanny and anthropology opens up new avenues of poetics and politics and lays the groundwork for the possibility of a hitherto unrealised contemporary critical media anthropology.

**Beyond “Experimental” Ethnography - Hauntology**

The relationship between surrealism and anthropology has been an important touchstone for those who have argued for media as form of anthropological critique. Surrealism is frequently cited as an important basis for “experimental ethnographic” media practices that challenge traditional ways of using audio-visual methods within anthropology. For example, some approaches to audio-visual methodologies within the social sciences have called for specific filmic practices that use media to radically surpass both representation and evocation (cf Trinh 1987, 1991 and Rony 1996). More recently, Christian Surh and Rane Willerslev (2015) have written about the radically disruptive possibilities of media montage and the possibility of “evoking the invisible,” raising issues related to anthropology’s legacy of dealing with the uncanny, the reality (and surreality) of others and ethics, and the notion of hauntology as it relates to representation and time. Film, they write, can evoke hidden dimensions of reality, with the coupling of recorded sounds and images as montage that functions as a technique to disrupt observational realism, an idea I turn to in the final chapter of Part II of my thesis.

Arnd Schneider and Caterina Pasqualino (2014) likewise echo some of my own arguments about unrealized potential of media within anthropology. They write that there are only a handful of innovators of film in anthropology (such as David MacDougall,[[35]](#footnote-33) Jean Rouch, and Robert Gardner), and concur that while the *Writing Culture* debate has seen some innovations in text, it hasn’t trickled down to audio-visual media. Schneider and Pasqualino use the term “film” in their text to indicate all moving-image products of all post-analog media. They argue especially for the utility of film to anthropologists: it functions as both a material object and as experienced time, and hence, as I have mentioned, contains issues relevant to critiques of anthropology such temporality. Film is, of course, literally a medium between the experienced world and representation. This is a different approach to Pink’s “digital media” in that Schneider and Pasqualino’s text proffers a history of using media beyond ethnographic knowledge production in the present, and the notion of “experiment” is key here. While this approach does draw upon legacies such as experimental cinema and surrealism, my study seeks to redress the continued need for such critical media practices to exist outside the realm of mainstream visual or media anthropology, when in fact, media practices stemming from an awareness of the haunted history and uncanny nature of the convergence of media and cultural others could be taken up as a matter of course.

Catherine Russell’s (1999) text on experimental ethnography remains one of the seminal texts on the convergence between experimental film and ethnography as a useful coupling for expanding upon the radical possibilities of media within anthropology. Russell (ibid: xii) writes that both experimental cinema and ethnography were declared “dead” in the 20th century, but that “in their ghostly convergence they survive as a site of radical praxis.” She further draws upon historical surrealism and the resistance to the closure of surrealist, and the early affinities between “primitive cinema” and the avant-garde, the gaze, and other issues in common between ethnography and film. Now that ethnography may be understood as a discursive, rather than representational, practice, writes Russell (ibid: xiv), affinities with filmic ontologies can emerge:

As archaic textual forms become legible as discourses of imperialism, as the gaze of power is dethroned, new histories can emerge. Reworking memory and tradition as fantastic forms of cultural desire—rather than sites of authenticity—ontologies of loss can become allegories of desire.

This is my argument for a hauntological approach to media within anthropology, an approach that unveils new histories, with uncanny, ghost-like cultural others not being written out of or subsumed by the anthropological archive, but rather written back into the experience of cultural otherness itself: the desired encounter with the other through which we are able to define ourselves (and for whom we are therefore ethically responsible).

Jacques Derrida has conceived of a scholarly engagement of ghosts via his concept of hauntology as part and parcel of deconstruction. In his *Spectres of Marx* (1993) he underlines the capacity of ghosts to disrupt linear chronology—and hence the notion of history. As Jameson (1995: 140) argues in his discussion of Derrida’s conception of ghosts, “spectrality does not involve the conviction that ghosts exist or that the past (and maybe even the future they offer to prophesy) is still very much alive and at work, within the living present.” Rather, ghosts “make the present waver,” for their appearance shows that the here and now are not as solid as they claim to be.[[36]](#footnote-34) Ghosts don’t just imply the present’s determination by the past, but call into question the very existence of such categories. According to Buse and Stott (1999: 15), Derrida’s notion of spectrality, with its implications for the ways in which we think about time, “enables us to concentrate on reading history as a series of iterations and recontextualisations, traces, and returns that constitutes our experience of it.”[[37]](#footnote-35) This is a radically different take from most ethnographic approaches to the culture of the other, but it is one that implicates the supernatural-seeming temporality of media as tool.

Ghosts, and the uncanny in general, are not to be ontologised because doing so is to exorcise the ghost, to domesticate the anachronistic uncanny into something determinate and solid and no longer disruptive. Heidegger’s own description of

history, upon which Derrida is expanding, is worth keeping in mind (though to do so is to act against his observation):

Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial ‘sources’ from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn. Indeed, it makes us forget that they have had such an origin, and makes us suppose that the necessity of going back to these sources is something which we need not even understand (1927: 43).

The paradoxical debuting/returning of ghosts always entails a disruption of what we think we know of concepts and categories, including the category of the other. The behaviour of ghosts is, in a sense, the very definition of the act of deconstruction: that is, a hauntology, rather than an ontology. Certainly there has been some scholarly engagement with ghosts, both “literal” and literary –in the form ethnographic accounts of cosmologies or folklores, and studies of the supernatural in fictional texts, for example--but the ghosts of these subjects are nearly always resolved, if not outrightly “ontologised.”[[38]](#footnote-36) But it is the concept of hauntology—of “dealing with ghosts” as indicative of the uncanny behaviour of the iteration of texts—that demonstrates the relevancy of ghosts to audio-visual media, and which hence redresses the relevancy of the uncanny to anthropology.

Colin Davis (2007) has assessed hauntology as an emergent literary studies trend stemming from two origins: Derrida on the one hand and the psychoanalysts Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham on the other. There is a difference in the ghosts of Derrida and those of Torok and Abraham (cf. 1994, 2005): while Derrida’s spectres gesture towards an unformulated future, those of Torok and Abraham tell lies about the past (they are gatekeepers of a secret--repressors, as it were; they seek to keep things hidden). The resolution of Torok and Abraham’s phantoms is a process that, like Derrida’s spectres, seeks to bring interpretation to an end, but this resolution differs from Derrida’s in that he wants to maintain what is strange and other about ghosts, while Torok and Abraham seek to return the ghost (and its secret) to the order of knowledge. According to Davis (2007: 11), “for Derrida, the ghost’s secret is not a puzzle to be solved; it is the structural opening or address directed towards the living by the voices of the past or the not yet formulated possibilities of the future.” Derrida, according to Davis (2007), wants scholars to engage with ghosts not because doing so may reveal a secret, but because it leads to the experience of secrecy: “an essential unknowing that which underlies and may undermine what we think we know.”

The concept of hauntology—“maintaining the secret” of ghosts, the secret of the other—points to an acknowledgement of the uncanny as a form of ethical critique for anthropology. Davis (2005: 373) is explicit that hauntology is always about how we deal with others:

Attending to the ghost is an ethical injunction insofar as it occupies the place of the Levinasian Other: a wholly irrecuperable intrusion on our world, which is not comprehensible within our available intellectual frameworks, but whose otherness we are responsible for preserving.

Representation, of course, is always the presenting again of something that no longer exists in its original from. Nicholas Royle’s (2003: 16) analysis of the uncanny includes his declaration that deconstruction—as implied by Derrida’s hauntology—is an uncanny practice and one that implicitly implicates the representation of others as a self-centred act:

It is impossible to think of the uncanny without this involving a sense of what is autobiographical, self-centred, based on one’s own experience. But it is also impossible to conceive of the uncanny without a sense of ghostliness, a sense of strangeness given to dissolving all assurances about the identity of a self.

Anthropological outputs therefore represent, as Royle (ibid: 13) says of the uncanny, “the most and least subjective experience, the most and least autobiographical ‘event.’”[[39]](#footnote-37) All representation is ethically problematic; that it is inevitably authored—as much about self as about others--means that it is always “biased,” but also always potentially ready to stand as critique. The crisis of representation of anthropology instigated an exploration of the ways in which representation may evolve into engagements with others that function critically; Derrida’s hauntology enables those critiques of writing to be taken further to the realm of audio-visual media.

Despite that crisis of representation and the establishment of an anthropology whose critiques have turned from relativism and representation towards discourse and evocation, media within anthropology has not been taken up as a mechanism of critique. Part of the problem, as exemplified by visual anthropology and media anthropology, seems to lie in a refusal to understand that audio-visual media holds the potential to push beyond the boundaries of ethnography as it has been understood so far. Georges Barlandrier (2010: 58) has noted that anthropology has already mapped geographic worlds, but what remains unmapped are the non-geographic “worlds” that we are creating ourselves: “universes of existence that are techno-worlds.” Anthropology, he writes, “regains its full legitimacy, for we are as disoriented in these new worlds as we could have been when arriving in New Guinea, as Malinowski did.”

But part and parcel of accepting media as this new world—including the digital methodologies that open themselves to anthropological use—is to also understand media’s past. Drawing upon Kittler, Jussi Parikka and Paul Feigelfeld (2015) write that we must “[recruit] the way we think about new media cultures through old media, in order to track genealogies and surprising openings.” I propose that one way of understanding media’s potential in the present is, as Posthill suggests, to understand its connections to the past. Therefore, my study of ghosthunters and their use of media is predicated on an understanding of the history of media as it relates to the supernatural, which in turn connects it issues of anthropological critique such the concept of the other, and its relation to the uncanny and hauntology.

**Conclusion**

John Durham Peters (1997) has written of the “bifocality” of media that allows us to be both far- and near-sighted, seeing both the global and the local. Anthropologists always place emphasis on the “the local” as being romanticised as confined, traditional, and authentic, while the anthropologist’s spatial mobility stands for enlightenment, development and modernity. This links, of course, to Peters’ (1999) other writing about communicating at a distance, the driving force of early communications technologies that would lead to representational and recording technologies used by ghosthunters and anthropologists alike, such as photography and phonography. Overcoming distances through these technologies perhaps didn’t happen in some of the ways that people initially hoped for (ie, building a machine to communicate with the dead), but media’s relationship to critical anthropology in the form of drawing others closer is now of relevance in the digital worlds beyond the current remit of visual anthropology and most existing media studies.

Tyler (1986: 123) provides a succinct summary of the recent methodological issues of both ghosthunters and anthropologists when he writes, “science failed because it could not reconcile the competing demands of representation and communication. Every move to enhance representation threatened communication and every agreement in communication was the sign of a new failure in representation.” The question of representation versus communication, that is, the abiding question of how to deal with the other—of “radical alterity”—is at the heart of critical anthropology. As Hage (2012) has written, critical anthropological thought challenges us by telling us not only are there people who live differently to the way we live, but also that they are relevant to us, and that we are therefore responsible for them.

Hage, (2012: 290) seems to be acknowledging the relevancy of surrealism to anthropology when he writes that “any anthropology, whether concerned with the modern world or with non-modern tribal formations, needs to allow for the flourishing of the ethos of critical primitivist anthropology if it is to remain critical.” While critical sociology initiates analysis that induces understanding, critical anthropology, writes Hage (ibid), “is more akin to the shamanic act of inducing a haunting: indeed it encourages us to feel haunted at every moment of our lives by what we are/could be that we are not.” It is this notion of “haunting” with which I am concerned in this thesis: the “occult” documents of Tyler, the surrealist reveries of Clifford, the “fantastic forms of cultural desire” of Russell. The ways in which these encounters with others are related to media’s own haunted history and capacity for producing the uncanny are addressed via my study of ghosthunters in Part I.

**PART I:**

**THE METAPHOR OF GHOSTHUNTING**

**INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF PART I**

**THE IDEA OF THE GHOST**

In the Thesis Introduction, I proposed that anthropology has been reluctant to engage with media as a form of critique. I introduced the issues surrounding my study of ghosthunting as a metaphor, and outlined the ways in which both ghosts and cultural others are associated with the uncanny, a concept that underpins anthropological surrealism as a form of critique. I suggested that certain aspects of anthropological surrealism may now be returned to and expanded upon in contemporary times and in relation to the audio-visual media that is already being utilised by anthropology. Finally, I proposed that the connections between haunted media and the uncanny point especially to the utility of hauntology--an acknowledgement of the “ghostly” nature of media--as a model for contemporary anthropological engagements with photography, audio, and film that can stand as critique.

Part I of the thesis is my account of ghosthunting as a set of practices that have evolved over time into a “discipline” that, like anthropology, uses “fieldwork” and audio-visual media to attempt to reify the uncanny other in the form of the ghost. Part II of the thesis further develops this account into an argument that ghosthunting also produces audio-visual representations of ghosts that inadvertently demonstrate the uncanny capacity of media to stand as critique and to “maintain the secret” of the other as an ethical injunction. Hence, ghosthunting points to the ways in which such engagements with media may serve as a suggestive metaphor for anthropology’s own shortcomings and possibilities with regards to media.

My use of ghosthunting as a metaphor hinges upon my assertion that ghosts may be likened to the inevitably uncanny others of anthropology, with the other being a category that has been based on a false dichotomy of the Other/the West (see for example Said (1978) and Fabian (1983)) and which nonetheless is the premise upon which the uncanny as a form of critique is based. Ghosts have never ceased to exist cross-culturally in popular lore of one form or another, and practices and beliefs relating to the return of the dead in non-Western contexts have long been a recurring focus of anthropology. Texts such as Frazer’s (1890) *Golden Bough* and later, Evans Pritchard’s (1937) writing on witchcraft and magic introduced the notion of spirits as an irrational but functional cross-cultural commonality, while later anthropologists would insert themselves into spiritualist or sorcery practices of other cultures (cf. Harwood (1977), Lan (1985) and Stoller and Olkes (1987)). More recently anthropologists have taken up the inevitable contemporary slippage between traditional “spirits” and the Westernised version of ghosts experienced or understood as very different entities existing within the same context (see for example Tomlinson (2015)). However, little attention has been paid by anthropology or other disciplines to people’s attempts to interact with the ghosts of contemporary times in Western contexts, despite their pervasiveness in cultural theory and practice, and in particular, their unique historical and ongoing relationship to media that I summarised in the Thesis Introduction.

Historians have offered contemporary re-readings of late nineteenth-century Spiritualism in England and the United States as a way of rethinking the agency of women and other historically marginalised people. Ghosts in film and literature have received much attention.[[40]](#footnote-38) They haunt the major theories of Freud, who admitted in his essay on the uncanny that his own research should rightfully have begun with them. [[41]](#footnote-39) Marx begins *The Communist Manifesto* by speaking of a spectre, while in *Capital*, “fairy tale” figures of ghosts occasionally haunt the text, and even his allegorical dancing table—inanimate and yet animated, both living and dead--could be said to be uncanny and spiritually possessed. And of course Derrida’s hauntology, which spawned a major trend in literary and cultural criticism in recent years, is based on Marx’s ghost(s), even as it is haunted by Heidegger’s and Freud’s own senses of the uncanny described in the Thesis Introduction.

Ghosts have seemingly never ceased to haunt all times and all places. According to Keith Thomas (1973), however, in contemporary Western cultures ghosts should have now declined, at least for Protestants, following the dispensing of purgatory and the ushering in of Enlightenment-age rationalism. And yet in the UK and US, many people continue to claim to believe in the existence of ghosts.[[42]](#footnote-40) Thomas acknowledges that the persistence of ghosts no longer has to do with belief anyway; they return and circulate in some form or another as the subjects of various personal, historical, or fictional narratives. In this sense, ghosts are very much “real”—or have been made real by their circulation.

Ghosts are so common and pervasive a presence that their physical nature has become near stereotypical and is even parodied as children’s entertainment in animations, toys, and Halloween costumes. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud (1905: ) relates the following joke (paraphrased here):

“Do you believe in ghosts?”

“Not only do I not believe in them, but I’m not afraid of them.”

While belief remains a key issue when discussing ghosts anthropologically, it does not define them philosophically, and hence their existence is not predicated by it. As Peter Buse and Andrew Stott (1999: 3) state in the introduction of their attempt to introduce a general cultural study of ghosts, “spectrality and haunting continue to enjoy a powerful currency in language and in thinking, even if they have been left behind by belief.” [[43]](#footnote-41) While the existence of ghosts as a narrative feature is not reliant upon people’s explicit belief in them, there is nonetheless a concern to establish their “actual” existence--and a popular tendency in Western contexts to look to scientific research to pin them down, rather than take them as a cultural phenomena that is predicated on existential ambiguity, much less allow them the obscure task of signifying the uncanny.[[44]](#footnote-42)

During the early years of this century, ghosts and ghosthunting became particularly widespread in popular culture: examples include tourist and heritage experiences, ghost walks, and popular mass media such as “reality” television shows featuring a “haunted” motif. Likewise, they gained an increased Web presence, with the

proliferation of online shops selling ghosthunting instructional manuals and media equipment, or else online forums offering advice and the chance to share anecdotal experiences. The Internet still hosts many thousands of websites related to ghosthunting, and many of these are depositories for the vast amount of audio-visual “data” collected by ghosthunters as “evidence” and data. During this time I conducted historical research, participant-observation and interviews at haunted sites with people pursuing ghosts around the UK. As John Hutnyk (1996: 139) has written that “there is still some truth to the taunt that anthropologists are a species of tourist.” I became a tourist and a ghosthunter, though there is also a fine line between those two categories, given that ghosts tend to be site-specific and usually involve heritage tourism to some degree.

I ultimately found ghosthunting practices to be engaged with historicism and the notion of heritage, with ghosts functioning not to “make the present waver,” as Jameson (1999: 39) described hauntology, but to propagate a particular version of the past as heritage. My study of ghosthunters shows that the idea of the ghost is actually contrarily maintained by the ongoing uncertainty about their existence, and by the uncannines of the media that is used to record and represent them. It is this fact that ultimately points to the possibilities of audio-visual media as a form of critique for anthropology: while it may be taken to be an unbiased ethnographic tool, it is capable of evocations that maintain the uncanniness of ghosts and cultural others in ways that differ from ethnographic writing methods.

The three chapters in Part I of this thesis suggest that the history and methods and media outputs of ghosthunters are akin to those of anthropologists, and should confirm to readers generally familiar with contemporary Western culture what they already “know” of ghosts (whether they are believed to exist or not) from popular culture: they are the dead returning to the living, and among many other related characteristics, they are often temporally and physically ephemeral (they may appear briefly and are transparent and shadowy) and are often tied to houses or other places pre-ordained as being “haunted.” Ghosts demonstrate Derrida’s (1967: 163) statement that “there is no outside-text.” Ghosts are context-bound in that their context must always be uncanny and hence unbounded; as with anthropology’s attempts to homogenise the culture of others into post-modern representation or discursive practice, to “prove” the existence of ghosts is not of the concept of ghosts, though it doesn’t stop ghosthunters trying.

John Potts (2006), in his edited text concerning ghosts and technology, has found it useful to view ghosts as an “idea” in the Weberian sense: it matters not whether people believe in ghosts, as the idea of the ghost is so well-known that everyone knows ghostly characteristics; according to Potts (2006: 78), “even those that ridicule the notion are conversant with the rules of haunting, as if it were a genre.” My study of ghosthunters takes ghosts to be both a “genre” and an “idea,” and in Part I, I will primarily focus on ghosts as they circulate within popular culture in the heritage and tourist industry which ghosthunting is a part of. For the pervasive idea about ghosts as exemplified by the practices of ghosthunters has very much been defined by the popular “genre” of ghosts and haunting depicted in fictional books and movies, tourism and popular history, television reality programs, and children’s action figure toys.

The ways in which ghosts have been used to narrate history itself in order to “locate” ghosthunting--on a par with the ways in which cultural others of anthropology have determined the fields of ethnographic study, geographically and historically--is the subject of Chapter 1. Here, I establish the “field sites” of those engagements, the haunted heritage sites often accessed through tourist activities, using examples from my fieldwork in Brighton, London and Edinburgh. Heritage tourism understands ghosts as a utility not of the uncanny, but of an ontology that attempts to freeze the past for reasons related to nostalgia and consumerism in order to define the present, with ghosthunting standing as an adjunct activity that supports these narratives via its pursuit of these heritage ghosts using audio-visual media.

In Chapter 2, I establish that as an organised “discipline,” ghosthunting has evolved from an idealised mental state to a committee-based activity and finally to a hobby with rules and guidelines for best practice, and one which is now interrelated to the commercial and tourist landscape of ghosts. A case study of a contemporary ghosthunting club, the Ghost Research Foundation International, and one of its major events demonstrates the ways in which heritage tourism, commerce and ghosthunting, have now merged into a popular, and financially profitable, engagement with others.

In Chapter 3, the historical evolution of ghosthunting into its contemporary framework serves to contextualiuse the parallel developments of media from a “magical” device, capable of conjuring others through time and space, into a scientific tool primarily utilized to collect data to for the archive, usually Internet databases, with “salvage” activities of the other, or culture of the others, the imperative of both ghosthunters and anthropologists. I make comparisons between anthropological fieldwork and media methodologies and those of ghosthunting using a well-known instructional ghosthunting document entitled “Ghosthunting 101.”

Part I therefore establishes the idea of the ghost as one that is bound up with the cultural imperatives from which it originates: British ghosts are used to promote a homogenised idea of the past as history and to create particular versions of nostalgia and heritage in the present. People’s engagements with ghosts in contemporary times tend to take place as part of the tourist and heritage industry, but this wasn’t always the case, as ghosthunting evolved from a discipline concerned with supernatural communication imperatives to scientific ones, with media’s relationship to the spectral playing a large part in shaping this evolution. The role of people’s media engagements with ghosts itself evolved from one in which media was understood to be “magical” to one in which it is primarily understood produce mimetic data that may be collected and catalogued in the repository of the Internet archive. Part I illustrates that the related engagements with the other and with audio-visual media that are shared by ghosthunting and anthropology serve as a metaphor that forms the basis of my argument that audio-visual media, despite its evolution into a decidedly empirical tool for gathering knowledge, also holds the possibility of being taken up as a form of critique because of its relation to haunting.

**CHAPTER 1**

**FIELD SITES AND THE OTHERS OF HERITAGE TOURISM**

**Ghosts as Political Others**

Marx (1865, 1867) and especially Engels (1898), and later Adorno (1995 (1946)), whose thought underpins so much of the political reasoning of critical theory, all derided popular engagements with ghosts and the supernatural as politically disabling.[[45]](#footnote-43) But ghosts may be likened to repressed memories that disrupt the notion of a neatly linear temporality and allow us to think of them as political operatives along the lines of the anthropological other, with the past disturbing the present with implications for the future. The argument of this thesis is that ghosts operate politically in same way that the “others” of anthropology do: the very category of the other is a culturally determined one, set up in conjunction with the West as a false dichotomy within anthropology, but the concept of the uncanny that inherently allows for the ghostly disruption of the other is what also allows it to stand as critique. I have further argued that in this way, audio-visual media may serve to both reinforce and reify the other (in the form of ghosts and anthropological others), but that media is also able to maintain the uncanny by virtue of its own “hauntedness” (both historically and operatively). Before turning to the particular media imperatives applied to ghosts in the subsequent chapters of Part I, this chapter momentarily puts aside the audio-visual media of ghosthunting and anthropology in order to first establish the way in which the idea of the ghost functions as a symbol of the radically alterior other from the past that not only delineates the “field” of study of ghosthunters, but also establishes the “heritage” of the UK in the present.

John Potts (2006: 81) defines the way in which the expression of the idea of the ghost is culturally determined, and determines culture:

The ghost is an idea shaped by its worldly environment, undergoing transformations in specific cultural habitats. As it will be used to meet varying cultural demands, its functions and characteristics will alter across cultures.

A general historical and cross-cultural survey of the apparently universal concept of ghosts reveals a smorgasbord of ghostly characters: the animism as practiced within all cultures has tended to involve some sort of reverence for, and often fear of, the return of the dead. So-called “hungry ghosts” of deceased family members as found, for example, in Central-Asian and some South American cultures, need appeasing with food and other commodities to prevent them acting malevolently upon the living.[[46]](#footnote-44) Other ghosts may require that their bodies undergo certain burial rites to prevent their return, while still others are called upon to help the living with problems both personal and societal.[[47]](#footnote-45)

Ghosts abound that are not necessarily specifically ancestral but which can be viewed as serving similar functions: for example, *bhoots* in India, fetches in Ireland, not to mention the ghostly characters of folk tales, from Japanese *oiwa*, to *La Llorna* of Mexico, to the various grey ladies of the UK, to ghostly hitchhikers along North American and Australian motorways. In most cases, ghosts tether the living to a sense of their ancestry or invoke respect for the past or for societal boundaries and norms; as Claude Levi-Strauss (1955) described, the living must make contracts with the dead. For example, Ken Gelder (1994: xi) in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Australian Ghost Stories*, describes how Australian ghost stories double as tales of post-colonial guilt, illustrating that the history of white settlement is “fundamentally unsettled.” Likewise, Renee Berglund (2000) has written about the “spectralization” of North American Indians not only through stories of haunted burial sites and indigenous ghosts but also via government policies that have sought to write Native Americans out of U.S. history and politics (while nonetheless maintaining them as fantastical figures in the public imagination).[[48]](#footnote-46)

In the UK, victims of epidemics, workhouse inhabitants, those who suffered through the torturous penal system in centuries past, not to mention members of royalty who met disturbing ends or meted out harrowing punishments to those hierarchically beneath them, are just some of the familiar ghostly others related to past injustices that haunt the contemporary narrative landscapes of British heritage and tourist attractions.[[49]](#footnote-47) From a simplistic and functionalist standpoint, ghosts serve the specific needs of the cultures in which they originate and circulate, and this function is my starting point for understanding the uncanny nature of the audio-visual media so often used to engage with them, and its own “supernatural” abilities freeze time and return others from the past to the present that I discussed in the Thesis Introduction.

That ghosts seem to be ubiquitous across cultures and through the ages suggests that there is actually more at stake than the mere functionality contained within this apparent tendency of the spirits of the dead to always be returning.[[50]](#footnote-48) I have described how Freud (1919) postulated that ambivalent feelings about the dead—the guilt over the inevitable ill-will felt towards others when they were alive, not to mention the fear of death in general—results in a concern with the dead returning. Such feelings of ambivalence and dread are at the heart of Freud’s (1915) theory of repression, of which Buse and Stott (1999: 8) comment: “We could not hope for a more eloquent definition of haunting, which in this case is also a definition of contradiction and social conflict.” For Buse and Stott, history is synonymous with memory, and necessarily entails the repression of events that are written out of, or don’t sit easily within, narratives of the past.

As Freud (1915: 157) wrote of the act of the repression of personal memories, “the vanished effect comes back in its transformed shape as social anxiety, moral anxiety, and unlimited self-reproaches.” Freud’s definition of repression mirrors the behaviour of ghosts: like the resurfacing of repressed memories, they are not something that happen once, but are always happening, coming to the surface, re-circulating. As Potts (2006: 83) argues, a ghost is “a representation of the past as it endures in the future” and “to be haunted by a ghost is to be haunted by the past.” Michael Taussig’s *The Magic of the State* (1997) illustrates the significance of ghosts in the process of dealing with the uncanny in the form of spirits as a politically powerful agent. As Taussig describes his text’s subject-matter elsewhere:

People today gain magical power not from the dead, but from the state's embellishment of them. And the state, authoritarian and spooky, is as much possessed by the dead as is any individual pilgrim (Levi Strauss and Taussig 2005).

Taussig illustrates by example that ghosts are not just cultural phenomena or scientific anomalies to be collected and archived; representations of possession and haunting provide lessons about the ways in which the past may survive and be transformed and manipulated by agents in the future. Ghosts may be interpreted as the external expression of some notion of the unsettledness about the past; their presence signifies the past impeding upon the enjoyment of the present, and as we shall see, always entails a disruption—but a hauntological disruption that illustrates the way in which the uncanny may function as a form of critique.

As with anthropology’s others, the “location” of ghosts both geographically and temporally establishes the “field” of study, where “fieldwork” is to be conducted. As with anthropology, the field must be established as a place apart; the others that are the subject-matter of ghosthunting or anthropology must, in some way, represent anther time or another culture, and in this way, others always present “alternatives” to the ways we’ve chosen. As Ghassan Hage (2012: 289) has described, a re-engagement with the notion of the “primitive” other upon which earlier anthropological critique—including anthropology’s historical engagements with surrealism discussed in the Thesis Introduction—is based is a way of rethinking anthropological critique in the present:

It can…be summarized by the very simple but also paradoxically powerful formulation: we can be radically other than what we are. It is

paradoxical because in the very idea of ‘we can be’ other than what we are lies the idea that ‘we already are’ other than ourselves. Our otherness is always dwelling within us: there is always more to us than we think, so to speak.

The other therefore allows for anthropological critiques, and ghosts, as others, are a useful metaphor for illustrating the ways in which the idea of being haunted by others may be applied to anthropological method, particularly already-haunted audio-visual media, as I will show in the chapters to come. I have explained how ghosts are determined by the culture from which they originate, even as they help determine that culture in the present. In the next section, I establish that ghosts help to determine notions of British heritage. Heritage is linked to tourist sites that function as the “field” for ghosthunters and tourists alike, and I conclude this chapter by introducing the ways in which these “haunted” heritage tourist sites containing ghosts as others from the past are approached by people living in the present, setting the scene for my discussions of ghosthunting and audio-visual media imperatives that make up the remainder of Part I.

**Ghosts and Heritage**

I began my study of ghosthunters by becoming a tourist in Brighton, London and Edinburgh and at countryside heritage estates in southern England, though there are few places in the UK without leisure facilities such as cafes, pubs, inns, and theatres, where the possibility of ghosts is not frequently used to promote and to validate proprietors’ claims of historical ambience and “old world” authenticity. Haunted sites let ghosts perform as “site-specific popular memory” writes Potts (1999: 83), and as I have established, ghosts disturb the present with their hint of some unsettled past. As Potts (ibid) writes, “in this way, prisons, fortresses or castles are often considered haunted, preserving the memory of those who suffered and died unjustly there.”[[51]](#footnote-49) These ghosts exemplify Hage’s understanding of anthropological others: the “radical” others of the past that also dwell within us, representing the past as it opposes the present and possible future, and the paths we have chosen to no longer take.

At sites such as Preston Manor in Sussex and Leeds Castle in Kent, “living history” re-enactments are performed, with ghosts and the “ghastly” nature of their tales used to moderate history in the tourist-dependent heritage industry. It is not just sites that are haunted, but routes; ghost walks, sometimes led by “ghosts” themselves (as actor-guides), re-map and re-negotiate urban landscapes via often gruesome tales of the past. The present topography of urban spaces is linked to previous modes of being, of course, but in central Edinburgh for example, which I will return to in the next section of this chapter, the proliferation of ghost walks and haunted heritage tours gives the impression that almost every imaginable space has been filled with ghosts. In other cities as well, alleyways, old paths, and forgotten buildings and cemeteries have been redefined and breathed new life through the dead in contemporary times.[[52]](#footnote-50)

James Duncan (1990: 17), bringing to mind Clifford’s description of ethnographic surrealism, has likened urban spaces to texts that change even as they are being read; the urban landscape is “an ordered assemblage of objects, a text [that] acts as a signifying system through which a social system is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored.” In contemporary Britain, ghosts facilitate this assemblage, with new myths being created while tales of the past are whitewashed and passed off as consumable tourist experiences of heritage. As “texts” from the past, ghosts are re-assembled and re-imagined for the purposes of the present, in much the same way the others of anthropology were in more racist periods of the discipline, but also potentially in the manner that the primitive was “fetishised” and redefined during the “surrealist” moment of ethnography, the implications of which this thesis argues now be extended to the audio-visual media of anthropology.

Peter J. Fowler (1992) has described how most tourists think of history as a vague “then” embodied in personal and cultural artifacts and characterised by eclecticism; history in this context exhibits the problematic lack ethnographic co-evalness demonstrated by anthropology and noted by Johannes Fabian (1983)--Derrida’s static “category of the past.” Leisure and heritage sites and walks promote this eclecticism of the generalised past, as tourists dip in and out of time periods guided by ghosts. As Mary Holmes and David Inglis (2004: 115), in their study of the growing popularity of Scottish ghost tourism in the early years of this century, have noted, tourist and leisure locations are marked as “authentically ancient” by the presence of a ghost. At sites and facilities throughout the UK, ghosts guarantee the age of a place and the good times to be had there by assuring punters of lurking adventure in a “historic” setting. In Brighton, for example, three pubs in the “historic” Lanes district--the Black Lion, the Druid’s Head, and the Cricketers--compete for the title of oldest pub, and each has a ghost story that attempts to validate its claims of historical authenticity.[[53]](#footnote-51) In turn, the assurance of authenticity is directly related to the aims of conservation, a direct parallel to the “salvage” activities of anthropology in relation to apparently “dying” cultures (such as Mead and Bateson’s early use of audio-visual devices to record aspects of Balinese culture, as discussed in the Thesis Introduction).

Ghosts themselves function as cultural artifacts—“souvenirs” that promote and propagate certain versions of local and national heritage—that are collected by tourists, just as visitors to other countries collect trinkets of “other” cultures. At haunted leisure sites such as pubs and hotels, tourists collect and archive their own eclectic experiences of ghost stories and local history—often creating actual archives and collections of these experiences in scrapbooks and on websites. At heritage sites such as those run by the National Trust, it is the experience of “history” itself that becomes consumable and collectible, just as “culture” tends to be for tourists to other nations and cultures. Paul Greenwood (1982: 27) writes that with tourism “all viable cultures are in the process of ‘making themselves up’ all the time.” Ghosts in contemporary times are therefore used to construct British culture based on notions of “heritage” in the present.

While in traditional cultures, ghosts function to threaten people away from something or some place, Holmes and Inglis (2004) have pointed out that in the UK, the promised presence of ghosts is instead used to attract people and their money and to foster local and national heritage. Heritage was originally used as a legal term referring to an inheritance one might receive from a deceased ancestor, but the meaning has over the last half century been modified to refer to a collective culture inherited from the past, and has been reified into something marketable, consumable and in need of preserving. Martin Crang (1996: 415) has described how the Western heritage industry, in its focusing on an eclectic mix of artefacts and replicas, has merely succeeded in producing a surface of “historicality” rather than an understanding of history. “Preserved buildings,” he writes, “are not seen so much as sites for interpretive practices as façades that represent an appearance of ‘pastness.’” Expressing a concern that visual and other sensory modes seem to be replacing “auratic” or historical modes of authenticating, Crang makes the point that history has much more to do with consumption than with truly engaging with the varying versions and implications of the past. As Arjun Appadurai (1986: 15) has noted, “dealings with strangers provide contexts for commoditization of things that are otherwise protected from commoditization.” [[54]](#footnote-52)

Holmes and Inglis (2005: 119) write that “there have been changes in recent years towards more rigorous and systematic forms of exploitation of ghosts,” and ghost stories themselves function in an Orientalist manner: in addition to drawing people in with the appeal of a harmless but exciting experience of the fear, they teach lessons about the “others” of the past that should not be repeated in the present. Ghosts present the past as worthy of conservation not because of its lamentable passing, as Robert Hewison has argued, but because of the terrible things that used to be possible but have now passed; nostalgia is therefore less to do with sentimentalising the past as it is with comforting ourselves that as bad as the present may be, it is still an improvement upon the past. The past is revealed as something with which we no longer have to live, an “other” way of living for which we are not responsible and which has no bearing on the present except as a contrast.

An appeal of restored heritage sites—as with both many moderated tourist experiences of other cultures, and traditional anthropological ethnographies, which it must be remembered were initially merely an evolved form of travel-writing—is that the past is made more homogeneous and easily comprehendible than the present: it is simply a digestible “yesteryear.” Fowler has described the tendency of both heritage and leisure sites to play up their age to demonstrate “olde world” syndrome: that is, buildings are restored as “Georgian, “Regency,” “Victorian,” or sometimes simply listed as “period” structures. Whatever the label, they are relegated to a homogenous past and restored to perfect prototypes, romanticised versions of the original objects that they are representing. As Robert Hewison (1987: 138) puts it, people have a choice between “the decaying present” and “an ever-appealing past.” Restoration is at odds with deconstruction, and it goes against Derrida’s concept of hauntology as the understanding that the past is not be located in some preserved text, but in that text’s iterations and translations in the present.

Restoration, according to R. D. Sack (1992), freezes sites in time, whereas before they were constantly changing through representations and diverse perspectives on the past. As Adorno (1996: 38) wrote, “Anyone seeking refuge in a genuine, but purchased, period-style house, embalms himself alive.” Heritage restorations, and the re-enactments of history that occur through a resurrection of the dead (who may be ghosts but may also be living actors playing dead people at heritage and other tourist sites), sacrifice contexts and cause history to stand still in the present and in the future. This is on par with the relationship of both ghosts and anthropological others to audio-visual media: both tend to be reified in order to participate in the same repeated narratives for all time, their “secret” revealed. But as I have argued and will show in more detail in the chapters to come, this is not the only possibility of ghosts or anthropological others as “political operatives.”

Ghosts may represent the past as an “other,” undesired mode of being that we are responsible for only so long as we “don’t repeat the mistakes of the past” (without actually needing to address these mistakes). But heritage and haunted tourists sites may have less to do with a desire for historic authenticity that drives people to seek out a past against which to define the present, and more to do with nostalgia for a generalised past that seems much simpler than life in the present, as described above. Hewison (1987: 47) believes that after World War II, there was a break with the past, and that nostalgia is a response to the present and a “denial of the future.” Nostalgia is thus “profoundly conservative,” with heritage a last-ditch attempt to produce a sense of culture and identity in a society that feels threatened or in decline (ibid).[[55]](#footnote-53) As Hewison (ibid) writes, “through the filter of nostalgia we change the past, and through the conservative impulse we seek to change the present. The question then becomes what kind of past have we chosen to preserve and what does that say about our present?” [[56]](#footnote-54) This is of course on par with the very notion of the category of the other, whether as a ghost or living person—whom have we chosen to represent and engage with as such, and what are our motives for integrating, or not integrating this other?

One response comes from Hewison (1987: 135) who states that “the past is not an absolute quantity but a relative set of values” and that “such indeed would seem to be the case if we look at the acceptable pasts portrayed in European literature and art over the last 200 years.” Hewison surmised that defining factor of heritage is that it is under threat, or in a state of decay. Like salvage anthropology, those aspects of culture thought to be on the verge of “disappearing” are salvaged and given added value by virtue of this preservation for all time. As we shall see in the next chapters, this is one justification of people to enshrine and preserve ghosts using cameras and other media equipment, not for the sake of study or critique, but as part of the task of amassing “evidence” to be preserved in the archive. Beyond the ghost stories re-told and re-enacted at heritage sites, photographs and audio of ghosts are enshrined on the Internet because there is little else that ghosthunters have thought do with them—a fate shared by many of the media artefacts of especially earlier salvage anthropology projects.

In many cases, the ghosts by the operators of heritage sites to represent British history are simulacra, objects not representing actual historical events, but fictional versions of events based on some incident in the past that no one can quite remember accurately. As Kevin Walsh (1992: 103) has pointed out, heritage sites themselves are often “spurious simulacrum,” with re-enactments not necessarily giving a sense of the past but contributing to a sense of historical amnesia. Foucault (1972: 146) writes that heritage is not “an acquisition, a possession that grows and solidifies,” but “an unstable assemblage of faults, fissures and heterogeneous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within or underneath.” As with anthropological ethnographic accounts, which say as much about their authors as they do about the others that are their subjects (even when this is acknowledged as discursive practice), the present versions of ghost stories at heritage and tourist sites are what matter, and they say less about history than they do about the imagined present and future being presented. As Holmes and Inglis (2004) note, the past, represented as a homogenous whole, is actually malleable because its inhabitants are no longer here to contest it—it is therefore able to be fixed in the present based on heritage purposes or nostalgic whims.

The flipside of this malleability of ghosts is my argument for the hauntological possibilities of audio-visual media for anthropology: media contain the opportunity to transgress perceived temporal and spatial categories and maintain the secrets of the others of the past because the origins of these others are made indiscernible—just as it is impossible to tell if a ghost is actually an authentic representation of the living person it purports or is imagined to be. As Jameson (1974: 82) has noted, “if nostalgia as a political motivation is most frequently associated with Fascism, there is no reason why a nostalgia conscious of itself, a lucid and remorseless dissatisfaction with the present on the grounds of some remembered plenitude, cannot furnish as adequate a revolutionary stimulus as any other.” I have attempted to establish ghosts as others related to heritage and nostalgia in order to argue that even as they are commodified and reified in the British heritage industry of the past, they may also be “revolutionary,” by virtue of their uncanny ambiguity. Ghosts serve to show just how fragile and contingent our conception of the present is. They denote history, but are constructions that say more about the present than the past, and they therefore undermine the present. In the same manner that the uncanny is a utility of hauntology, so to may audio-visual media invoke the uncanny as a form of critically engaging with others. In the next sections of this chapter, I describe the haunted field sites and ghostly others of heritage and tourism, and introduce the ways in which these sites are approached by the living.

**Delineating the Field: Ghosts and Tourism**

While heritage experiences of ghosts may be had by anyone, they are often a starting place for those practicing more specialised methods of “ghosthunting,” of which audio-visual media practices are part and parcel, as described in the two chapters of Part I. Understanding the commercial experiences on offer is a useful introduction to the ghosthunting methodologies that take place as part of these experiences and at these “fieldsites” of ghosthunters. Likewise, the types of ghosts found at tourist and heritage attractions indicate the ways in which particular versions of the others of the past serve as potential political operatives. Levinas can again be invoked to describe the specific ghostly character types—many of whom it would seem were indeed murder victims--of this form of tourism: “one instantly recognizes the transcendence and heteronomy of the Other. Even murder fails as an attempt to take hold of the otherness.” And yet the other is also always a subaltern that has been written out of the past, usually in favour of the voice of some actor-guide portraying a version of him or her in terms that are favourable (and marketable) in the present. Again, this malleability of the other is both the fact of the other’s “otherness” but also what makes the other uncanny and able to stand as critique when mediated critically and politically. The uncanniness of the ghost exceeds its reification, and therefore works against its subaltern status.

The ghosts of heritage sites and tours are like the others ontologised by anthropology; they serve the purposes of their conjuring. While heritage sites such as restored manor houses may contain mostly “pastoral,” well-heeled ghosts, “theme” experiences are often based upon making a spectacle of the suffering of the less fortunate of the past. Some heritage theme parks, such as the London Dungeons, are solely based upon such tales. Participants at heritage attractions enjoy hearing light-hearted tales of wrongly accused citizens experiencing unthinkable acts of bodily torture and mutilation in prison, accounts of plague-victims suffering mental and physical anguish as they and their family members slowly die, and depictions of the immense poverty and strife of those sentenced to work houses. Jonathan Craik (1997) has described how “artificial sites,” such as theme parks loosely based upon social history, tend to be much more popular than “authentic” sites, which supports Eric Cohen’s (1988) assertion that tourists aren’t necessarily searching for mimetically authentic accounts of history, but merely enough of an experience to give them cultural capital and a sense of heritage.

Urban ghost tours and walks are an example of this emergent authenticity, with cities

packaged and mythologised according to the guide’s narrative. Many foreign tourists I interviewed talked about how their sense of London’s past and present culture has been derived solely from the history and ghost walks they were able to “do” with the Original London Walks Company, London’s largest and (contestably) oldest urban tours company. Those who went on the Shakespeare and Dickens Walk or the Ghosts, Gaslights and Guinness Walk have a different sense of London to those who have gone on the Olde City Pub Walk and the Darkest Victorian London Walk. And yet the “heritage” presented on any given walk remains part of the same discourse that perpetuates a certain homogenous cultural history and identity of the UK. For tourists and locals alike, this heritage is a simulacrum: the UK’s heritage is less to do with the historical events and politics that produced ghosts as it is to with being a generally haunted land full of ghosts who have lost their contexts and referents along the way. Julian Wolfreys has termed this the “London-effect” of haunting: everyday life in London has increased subterranean and haunted meanings.[[57]](#footnote-55)

It is all too easy to make light of the various executions of political prisoners at the Tower of London, or to revel in the gory details of life as a poor Londoner at the Shakespeare’s Globe. At some heritage and leisure sites, stories about ghosts contribute to the romantic vision of a place. At Preston Manor, most of the ghost stories are melancholy, rather than eerie or violent. They deal with separated lovers, loyal servants, and a victim of World War I returning from the dead to comfort his sad daughter. But at others, there is a sweeping trend of painting the past as a violent and bad place. Warwick Castle, which bills itself as “Britain’s greatest Medieaval experience,” premiered its ghost-heritage re-enactment attraction, Ghosts Alive in 2004. Privately run by Tussaud’s Attractions Limited, Warwick Castle does not have the private donations or volunteers of similar sites run by National Heritage, and relies on more than its history to attract paying customers. During the summer, fireworks displays and pop concerts are held on the grounds, while throughout the year, displays of falconry (billed as “Birds of Prey Experiences”) are held on the weekends. The castle also holds regular re-enactment dinners, during which participants are served “authentic” medieval food by employees in period dress.

The Ghosts Alive show, on the other hand, uses the already-dead characters portrayed by living actors to speak about history. According to the promotional flyer for Ghosts Alive:

Warwick’s Ghosts return to haunt the Castle in this spooky, live-action experience. Stabbed by his manservant in 1629, the spirit of Sir Fulke Greville is said to haunt the Castle to this day - experience this terrifying re-enactment of his grisly death that mixes live actors with spooky sound effects and spine-tingling visual trickery. Not for the faint hearted...

During Ghosts Alive, Sir Greville speaks both about his living years, and the events following his death, events to which he, as a ghost, has been privy. As the flyer describes, he also helps re-enact his death with other actors who are playing the parts of ghosts playing the parts of the living. The experience is humorous, not least of all because of its conflation of the living playing the dead, playing the living, but it also contains some frightening moments, mostly produced by sound and lighting effects and unexpected appearances of actors. Peters (1999) has described how history in general is a communication with the dead, but that it is one in which the reception is never perfect. The dead are always speaking through translators—in the case of Ghosts Alive, the writers and actors of the re-enactment.

In Edinburgh, Mary Kings Close, an underground series of streets “buried” under the city during the plague in the 17th century, has been transformed into a heritage attraction that uses ghosts and macabre historical tales to draw in tourists and promote Edinburgh’s heritage. Mary King’s Close is entered through a gift shop selling whiskey and other items associated with Scotland, and visitors await a guide to take them down into the Close itself, a series of winding paths, alleyways, and reconstructed dwellings and shops. The Mary Kings Close guides are actors portraying an Edinburgh resident of some unspecified century past; while not specifically portraying a ghost, the guide is nonetheless a member of the past whose narration implies a temporal omnipresence during various events of the last three centuries. However, the guide also hints to visitors his fear of going down into the Close due to the ghosts that may be lurking there, given his knowledge of the “horrifying events” that occurred there.

As visitors wind through the Close, the guide dramatically relates how in 1645, a year when nearly a third of Edinburgh’s population died of the plague, all the city’s plague victims were quarantined into the Close, where “they were locked in, left to rot and die, their screams echoing throughout the city” (according to the guide on my tour in August 2003). As the corpses of plague victims began to rot, the smell of decay filled the streets of Edinburgh, two butchers were sent in to clean up the mess. Being butchers, the men decided to cut the decaying bodies into sections, sorting heads, arms, torsos and the like, until the Close was cleaned up. Throughout the rest of the tour, the guide hints at the threat of the ghost of one of the butchers lurking in a dark corner. Indeed, towards the end of the tour, a man dressed as the grim reaper emerges into a room, eliciting squeals of fear from the audience. Mary Kings Close, according to guides, was essentially covered over by the City Chambers in the 19th century because it was “so haunted that no one would move there.” Other records show that the dwellings there were merely more trouble to rehabilitate than they were worth at the time (not to mention the city needed a more central location for its law chambers), so it wasn’t until tourism and heritage became a commercially viable prospect for Edinburgh in the latter part of the last century that the Close was uncovered and refurbished as a “period” and heritage location.

Ghost-related tourist attractions run the gamut from innocuous walk to interactive ghosthunt, and perhaps interactive ghost tour experience to be had outside of organised ghosthunting culture is to be had the City of the Dead Tour run by Black Hart Storytellers, an Edinburgh ghost tour company. Black Hart’s City of the Dead tour, which takes in Greyfriar’s Cemetery and its so-called “Black Mausoleum,” is notable because it is an example of emergent authenticity, complete with a mini-industry and archive built around it. The walk consists of a tour of various ghostly places around central Edinburgh, before winding its way to Greyfriars Cemetery, where, after a story about the practice of body snatching, the group is led into the Covenanter’s Prison where the “Black Mausoleum” of Sir George Makenzie stands.[[58]](#footnote-56) Makenzie was apparently a rather ruthless debt collector in life, and according to the many stories of his ghost, he is apparently no less sinister in death. The climax of the City of the Dead Tour is therefore an opportunity to encounter Mackenzie himself in his mausoleum, with the guide performing his or her nightly ritual of locking the tour participants into the windowless mausoleum, after explaining that there is chance of bodily and psychological harm. It is, of course, frightening to be locked inside a dark grave with unpleasant thoughts about the grim nature of the past and the threat of real harm swirling around in your head. But such comparatively intense and threatening brushes with history don’t just propagate the myths of the past, but create new myths in the present.

For example, by 2003 there were four semi-historical books published by Black Hart Storytellers that explore the figure of Mackenzie and the claims of tourists who have been “touched” (apparently literally) by him.[[59]](#footnote-57) Blackhart’s website at that time contained an archive dating back over six years that detailed the claims submitted nearly nightly by tour members about their encounters with the Mackenzie ghost. The following “events” were logged around the time that I was in Edinburgh, and were at the time available on the Black Hart website (www.blackhart.com):

**AUGUST 25, 2003:** Suzanne Clements from California experiences unexplainable electric problems at her guest house, she suffers difficulty sleeping and nausea.

**AUGUST 16, 2003:** Andrea McVeanis knocked unconscious in the Black Mausoleum by an unseen blow to the base of her skull.

**AUGUST 15, 2003:** After the tour Robin Miller has markings on his body and suffers from lingering nightmares.

**AUGUST 13, 2003:** A tour member goes into shock after seeing a ‘ghost’ in the Black Mausoleum. He describes the entity as ‘having blue eyes and wearing a cloak’.

**AUGUST 11, 2003:** A member of the tour feels as though she has been punched in the chest as soon as she enters the Covenanters Prison. She is shaking so badly she cannot write down an account of what happened.

**AUGUST 9, 2003:** Sara Nicholson collapses in the Black Mausoleum.

**AUGUST 2, 2003:** Ashleigh O’Donnell experiences an odd sensation in her left ankle, and loses the feeling in her foot and toes.

AUGUST 1, 2003: In the Black Mausoleum, Aishling Holbrook experiences pins and needles in her left foot, and hears heavy breathing.

Such accounts of actual harm that had befallen certain patrons on each of the recent tours are part of the discourse of surrounding the threat of ghosts as a new myth in the present. Likewise, the following excerpts from letters from former participants, provided to me in 2003 by Black Hart’s guides, are another example of the discourse surrounding the City of the Dead tour and the way in which a new and contemporary myth was being maintained, and of course, sold, in the present:

On my entrance to the Covenanter's Prison, I did not feel scared at all. I am not one to feel 'spooked out' over horror/scary films… However, after a minute of being in the ‘Black Mausoleum’ I felt that something was happening to me… I felt a bit creeped out by the blank space to my right, as if something might be there. I moved my right arm (which was folded) down to the empty space & within seconds felt pins-and-needles moving up my arm. Then I began to feel cold sensations again & began to feel nauseous. I wanted to yell to the tour guide, but felt I couldn't. My breathing got extremely heavy & I dropped to the floor. *Aoife O' Sullivan*

I first want to say how much my boyfriend and I enjoyed your tour…low and behold, when I returned to my hotel that same night, I found a burn mark on my shoulder in a geometrically clean and distinctive pattern of two thin rectangles. I am still trying to figure out how I could have gotten a burn in this shape, when and from where -- without ever feeling it... It's getting darker now; the skin is peeling; so it was definitely a burn... But it didn't hurt when I got it, and it hasn't hurt since. *Stephanie*

The tour was absolutely amazing and the guide that night was excellent… All has been fine until tonight… After taking a bath, and drying myself, I started feeling this burning sensation on the right side of my back. I called on to my partner asking him to check what was the cause of this, and he discovered 15 scratches across the right side of my back all grouped in 5 (as if 3 hands had scratched me)... We went through all the possibilities of the cause of these marks but we could not find one incident that could have resulted in those scratches. *Celine Jacques*

These narrative depcitions of the risk involved in encountering Mackenzie’s ghost on the tour not only serve to create a new myth in the present, but also relate to the way in which Peter Phipps (2001) has described how the threat of danger and death have become commoditised through tourism, with the more risky experiences containing more valuable cultural capital. More than most heritage re-enactments, the City of the Dead tour offers visitors the chance to participate in an actual “dangerous” and contemporary cultural ritual, not dissimilar to the activities of ghosthunting, which I describe in Chapter 3. But as Greenwood (1989: 184) has noted of a voodoo ritual, “while [it is] fun to watch, it is important that nothing stand in the way of a return to suburbia some days later.” This is escape clause shared by the tourist, the ghosthunter and the anthropologist alike: the desired “other” may be encountered as an experience, and even communicated with and captured, but nothing should stand in the way of a return home. A blurring of the boundaries between what constitutes the safety of home and the danger of others is of a course a defining possibility of the uncanny—the unhomely--that I argue constitutes a more ethical engagement with the anthropological other, an engagement the “haunted” nature of media is able to facilitate more readily than written ethnography.

Although ghost stories may be more “grisly” in Scotland, Edinburgh’s past also is whitewashed through the tales; we may delight in the horror at hearing about the plight of plague victims and the in-depth accounts of the “victims” of Sir Makenzie, but few attempts are made to link these events to the political and social factors governing pre- and early-modern urban life. According to Holmes and Inglis (2004: 117), “this omission is not surprising, for the phantom is an emblem that from the 18th century onwards has figured as a means of glossing over the more prosaic aspects of modern, urban, industrial Scotland.” Most of the UK’s heritage experiences are more innocuous affairs than Black Hart’s and are merely designed to promote general historical tourism. Ghost walks are, according to Holmes and Inglis (2004), a way of presenting facilities and conducting tourists around them.[[60]](#footnote-58) But of course ghosts are always more than just a functional way of neatly packaging a site or experience. I have shown that they are “political operatives” that function as the other of the past to define what is considered heritage in the present—and indeed to the future, so that it may be preserved as such; I have further illustrated the ways in which people may engage with these others, but usually in ways that maintain the status quo, and not as a form of critique. Most reified ghosts of the heritage industry serve to reinforce the present, whereas a genuinely uncanny ghost may undermine it, and thereby open the past to critique. In the next chapter, I return to the idea of haunted media as I establish the ways in which the media imperatives of ghosthunting evolved over time from being about communication with others to the pursuit of others in order to represent them as data and evidence.

**CHAPTER 2**

**“GHOSTHUNTING HAS EVOLVED”**

**From “Ghost-seeing” to Committee Based Engagements**

In Chapter 1 I described ghosts as potential political operatives, others from the past that disrupt in order to fulfill some cultural function. This function may be “conservative,” such as for heritage or nostalgia purposes, but I aim to show that it may also be for the purpose of critique, in the same way that anthropology and surrealism came together in an engagement with cultural “others” in order to bring about a questioning of the very concept of the other and of racism and cultural imperialism. I have proposed that such engagements should be part and parcel of anthropology’s audio-visual methodologies, but despite some “experimentation,” the work of photography, audio and video—not to mention the theorising on media methodologies—remains mostly non-critical, when compared to the work of “post-modern” written ethnography. Having described anthropology’s evolution into a discipline of critique in the Thesis Introduction, this chapter establishes ghosthunting’s particular evolution as an organised “discipline” of sorts. I present an account of one of my experiences with contemporary ghosthunting in order to illustrate the ways in which heritage tourism, commerce, and the disciplinary practices relating to the media imperatives of ghosthunting have now merged into a contemporary set of practices that define the ways in which audio-visual media is used. This material sets up my discussion of those specific representative media imperatives that are the subject of Chapter 3, imperatives that determine the media outputs of ghosthunters to which I turn in Part II in order to further my argument that audio-visual media already contain the possibility of a critical hauntological approach as an ethical engagement with the other.

Media-based ghosthunting practices didn’t begin with the American Spiritualists, as is often portrayed in the historic archive. Rather, tensions between communicating and evidence-based, often instrumentally-assisted, representation have been apparent from early spoon-bending phenomena in 17th century Scotland, through well over a century of the activities of the Society for Psychical Research and ghost hunting societies, proliferating today with the myriad of photographic and audio data and other paraphernalia offered alongside spiritual medium readings for sale on the archive that is the Internet today. While there has never been a time when people weren’t “always, already” involved with ghosts in some way or another, the advent of contemporary ghosthunting in the UK may be traced back to the pre-Spiritualist period of the mid-nineteenth century. Shane McCorristine’s (2004) account of the advent and developments of investigative “ghost-seeing” usefully traces the notion of people’s involvement with ghosts as popular and literary culture back to the “romantic psychology” of Germany in first decades of the 19th century. Whereas “ghost-seeing” in the UK at that time was understood largely as a degenerative or negative phenomenon, philosophical strands such as those of Kant and Schopenhauer connected ghosts to productive dreaming and visions.[[61]](#footnote-59) Understanding the ways in which “ghost-seeing” evolved into a more formal and “academic” interest in ghosts, to the ghosthunting clubs that exist in the same realm as the contemporary heritage landscape that I described in Chapter 1 enables an understanding of the issues at stake with both reifying and representing the uncanny in the literal form of ghosts, and lays the path extending the concept of hauntology to the ethical and more radical representations of others within anthropology.

McCorristine understands the “factional” stories stemming from German philosophical strands as the root of the emergent trajectory of the experience of ghosts in Britain from the mid-nineteenth century. During this time Charles Dickens, a staunch skeptic (but nonetheless member a member of The Ghost Club, discussed below) wrote of “phantasmagoric logic,” that period when one is not awake but definitely not yet asleep, as the realm of ghosts and the inspiration for his fiction.[[62]](#footnote-60) And in 1851, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, a member of the London Dialectical Society (LDS), inaugurated the psychic detective genre of supernatural fiction with his “The Haunted and the Haunters.” The LDS is of particular relevance to the history of ghosthunting because it was one of the first formal organisations related to ghosts to be comprised of committees and promoting lectures and debates by its members on various issues of the day. The LDS’s 1871 report on spiritualism was one of the first to question Spiritualist assumptions of a communicative approach to engaging with ghosts.

McCorristine (2011: 14) regards the LDS and other similar spiritual societies, along with new genres of supernatural investigative fiction such as Bulwer-Lytton’s, as precursors to investigative ghosthunting:

This link between the new committee-based ghost-seeing investigative culture and the literary explorations centred on the detection of supernatural forces may be taken as strong evidence that the blurring of the boundaries between eyewitness accounts and fictional stories led to a broader factional framing of ghost-seeing experiences as both were subsumed under the culturally parasitical definition/non-definition ‘investigation’.

Peter Lamont (2004) describes the “crisis of evidence” that would emerge in both fiction and factual investigations, with both modes increasingly modelling scientific methods in their inquiries. By the time the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) was founded in 1882, the notion of investigative psychical research as a “consultative scheme” (see Gurney, Myers and Podmore 1886) defined the organisation of people’s use of technology and methodology in consultation with science and fiction.

McCorrisine (2011: 21) writes that the SPR “sought to play a normative role in the late Victorian scientific community and used scientific naturalism as its foil and its negative, as its starting point and its destination.”[[63]](#footnote-61) The Society’s first major publication by three of its founding members, *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myer and Podmore 1886), aimed to be scientifically valid, yet also used the concept of “crisis apparitions” of living people to challenge the materialism of the post-Darwinian scientific community in order to offer evidence of man’s spiritual nature. This move to legitimate the spiritual via the emergent scientific and statistical methodology of psychical research was met with a critical response that can be taken as the “classic late Victorian rebuff of the scientific ghost” (McCorristine 2011: 22).

The society would next change its focus to the relatively less materialist notion of phantasms of the dead, in line with the popular Spiritualist concerns of the day, but its further reports would be, in the words of McCorristine (2011: 22), left “dangling between the illusory dream-world and the scientific laboratory.” This has been the doubled-edged sword of much so-called psychical research, and it forms the basis for nearly all accounts of “ghost-seeing” today, whether under the auspices of the ongoing SPR, or smaller and varied ghosthunting organisations that have evolved over the last century.[[64]](#footnote-62) By the middle of the twentieth century, the notion of merely communicating with ghosts had been largely subsumed by the notion of investigative psychical research. As the Christian theologian and Reverend Leslie Weatherhead summed up this outlook in the introduction to the Spiritualist Paul Beard’s *Survival of Death* (1966/1988, quoted in Bloom 2000: 238):

‘Psychic Research’ will yield most enriching discoveries if it is explored by those who bring to it the kind of mental discipline and ability to examine evidence which is shown by scientists in material fields like biology, physics, chemistry and astronomy.

With the waning in popularity of ideas about spiritual contact through Spiritualism, “ghosthunting” would increasingly manifest as an investigative and scientific pursuit, not to mention a commercial one, rather than a spiritually sympathetic act of communication.[[65]](#footnote-63)

**The Case of the Ghost Club**

A useful conduit through which to understand the evolution of ghosthunting into the contemporary leisure-discipline that it is today is the Ghost Club, which purports to be the oldest ghosthunting organisation in the UK. Though its origins could be traced to as early as the 1850s, the Ghost Club was founded at Trinity College and officially launched in London in 1862 with some jibing from the press. Along with investigations of popular spiritualist activity of the day, the society debunked a famous traveling psychic act, though did not make its findings public. By the 1870s, the society had dissolved, but in 1882, the Ghost Club was revived by the medium Reverend Stainton Moses. It was delineated from the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), founded that same year, by its secretiveness and its selective membership of firm believers, by the 1920s including Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and W.B. Yeats—prestigious men (women were not allowed) who were not able to pursue their interests through other avenues.

Unlike the SPR, the Ghost Club explored spiritual topics without applying much science, and members’ names—both living and dead—were read out loud each All Soul’s Day as a way of acknowledging that death was inconsequential to Club membership.[[66]](#footnote-64) By the end of the 1920s, the club’s refusal to incorporate contemporary psychical research into its culture had finally become unfashionable. [[67]](#footnote-65) Though Harry Price—by then a psychical researcher famous in the press for his investigations of the supposedly haunted Borely Rectory—joined the club in the

1930s, it was officially dissolved in 1936. However, less than two years later, Price himself revived the Club, this time in the form of an after-dinner society where women were allowed and mediums featured as guest speakers to a more skeptical (and still invitation-only) membership base. The Ghost Club’s activities lapsed again following Harry Price’s death in 1948, but it was re-launched in 1962, this time by Peter Underwood, an author of popular books on supernatural Britain.

Peter Underwood had been invited by Harry Price to join the Ghost Club, and Underwood continued Price’s Borley Rectory investigations, and later became the executor of Price’s literary estate. Underwood claimed to be following in Price’s footsteps when he decided to start sending out press releases detailing the Ghost Club’s investigations and dropped the club’s invitation-only policy. While most long-time members were reportedly satisfied with Underwood’s handling of the “rebranding” of the Ghost Club in this way---and happy about the increase in membership it yielded—Underwood went a step too far for some members in 1964, when in the June edition of *Penthouse* magazine ran a small story penned by Underwood that offered up to £25,000 to anyone who could prove his or her psychic abilities. Underwood would later claim it was not a media ploy, but a genuine attempt to reach a public that would not otherwise have heard of the Ghost Club’s research quests. At any rate, numerous members, including most of the board, resigned, giving Underwood freedom to continue promoting the Ghost Club in a more unchecked manner than before.

Underwood remained president of the Ghost Club until 1993, publishing books (many of which focus on Ghost Club investigations) and engaging in lecture and after-dinner speaking tours. Ghost Club members during this period report that Underwood’s “celebrity” was a boon to the club, which had begun “hemorrhaging” members during the 1960s through the mid-1980s, when ghosthunting and the supernatural waned in popularity somewhat. Underwood’s tenure as president is considered to have been a “quietly productive” time, according to one long-standing council member, with the Club able to maintain a balance between conducting investigations at haunted sites and disseminating that information to the public via the mouthpiece of Underwood’s various publications and public engagements—which in turn allowed members to have greater access to sites and to outlets for their findings.

However, in 1992 trouble began to brew due to some members’ claims that Underwood was “using the club like his own private business.” An explosive argument at the 1993 AGM during which Underwood was criticized by a long-serving council member led to him resigning and promptly setting up a new organisation that he called The Ghost Club Society, which he claimed to be the true heir of the original Ghost Club of Cambridge circa 1851.[[68]](#footnote-66) Council members were invited to tender their resignations to the Ghost Club in order to join Underwood’s group, though few did. Underwood continued on with his publications, and though some non-Ghost Club members (such as the former television medium Derek Acorah) accepted Underwood’s invitations, little seems to have happened with the Ghost Club Society since 1999. Underwood’s career as a ghost hunter was far from over, however. He continued to publish books, attend public speaking engagements and serve as patron of other ghosthunting clubs.

The Ghost Club continues on, and promotes itself as the “oldest organization in the world associated with psychical research” with members now physically conducting field research at haunted locales a few times a year and coming together once a month for meetings in London. In 2003, the Ghost Club was considered “old fashioned” by some ghosthunters who belonged to the more local, grassroots clubs that were its off-shoots; not only did it smack of it its former elitism—something the SPR had shaken off in its early days with its focus on research and publishing and a fair degree of skepticism—but it also had not evolved to be primarily housed on the Internet and remained inaccessible to those outside of London.[[69]](#footnote-67) Nor had it evolved, as perhaps Underwood was trying to direct it, into a modern “super-club,” driven by celebrity figures, media endorsements, and online shops touting ghosthunting methodology books and fieldwork equipment, the subject of the next section. However, the case of the Ghost Club illustrates the issues at play over the last century and half of ghosthunting.

**GhostCon: “Ghosthunting Has Evolved”**

The Ghost Club, it could be argued, ultimately stalled in the face of contemporary ghosthunting imperatives because it was unable to keep up with times, and to become an umbrella organization providing actual access to haunted sites for off-shoot locally based ghosthunting groups, and virtual access to its own digital archives of audio-visual data. Instead, other organizations would step in to fulfill this role of “evolved” ghosthunting. The Ghost Research Foundation International (GRFI) was one of the first of a handful ghosthunting “super-clubs,” and its promotional tagline was, “Ghosthunting Has Evolved…” It makes a useful case study for my purposes not because it has direct parallels with anthropology, but because it illustrates the interplay of various issues at stake when attempting to deal with the other in an organised way—as a discipline of sorts--and the implications of deploying audio-visual media to do so. Despite “evolutions” of theory and method, the possibility for critique--as with many of anthropology’s engagements with media--doesn’t come to the fore.

The GRFI was founded by Jason Karl, an aspiring television presenter, and some friends in Oxford who realised the business potential inherent in amassing a large membership with no geographical restrictions but an interactive website where “meetings” could be held, an online shop accessed, engagement with mainstream media enacted, and celebrity endorsement garnered, in this case, in the form of Underwood, who became “patron” of the GRFI in 2002. The following year, GRFI held its first “annual” (in fact, it was to be the last) “GhostCon” at the Holiday Inn Bestwood Lodge in Nottingham during the Halloween weekend. The conference was billed as a showcase for all things to do with ghosthunting and as a demonstration of the various ways in which one could engage with the newly evolved “psychical research” as practiced by GRFI. GhostCon is a showcase of the landscape of modern ghosthunting, at once married to classical and at times erroneous notions of science and method while all simultaneously drawing on heritage tourism and the rhetoric of popular media and celebrity to stay afloat and generate revenue. Certainly not all ghosthunters in the UK subscribe to all or parts of the GRFI/super-club mandate, but an account of GhostCon provides an opportunity to explore aspects of modern ghosthunting that have, over the last decade, become mainstream alongside the marked increase in haunted tourism and leisure activities that happen each weekend in towns throughout the UK.[[70]](#footnote-68)

The promotional website for GhostCon, which was linked to the website of the GRFI (both now gone), followed the visual rhetoric of most other websites dealing of the time with ghosts, such as *X-Files*-esque illuminated green letters and some clip art of skulls and candles here and there. It advertised interactive ghost hunts, guest speakers, equipment demonstrations, psychic readings, and to top it all off, a “Grand Séance” at midnight. The site also featured links to numerous sponsors, including a couple of television production companies. At the bottom of each page of the site was the same large link to “Jason Karl’s Psychic Liveline,” complete with a phone number and small print advising that calls cost £1.50 a minute, and a glossy staged photograph of a young man attempting to look simultaneously handsome and sinister. One could only assume that this was Jason Karl, and further examination of the website revealed him to not only be the president of GRFI, but also the rising star of Living TV’s *Most Haunted* series, and creator of Talisman Television production company. At the time*, Most Haunted* was in its first couple of years, and had not yet found the viewer numbers success it would when Derek Acorah became a more regularly featured medium. When I rang the booking number for the conference, I got an answering machine and I declined to leave a message. A minute after I put the phone down, I received a call from a woman named Diana Destiny, who sounded flustered and asked whether I needed psychic assistance or wanted to book for GhostCon. I must have sounded confused, because she explained that the number I dialed was also connected to the Jason Karl psychic hotline, and automatically rings back any callers. She told me that she was the secretary of GRFI, in addition to the bookings person for GhostCon, and I inferred that she was also a psychic on the hotline.

I arrived at the conference at the “Haunted Mansion” (as the Bestwood Lodge was continuously referred to by organisers) on Saturday the 1st of November. Below, I have reproduced my narrative account of the event as I recorded it soon afterwards not only to depict the ways in which “others” as ghosts are regarded by the living in pursuit of them, but especially to give a sense of the various elements (many of which parallel contemporary anthropological concerns—tourism, mainstream media, a concern with equipment) at play within contemporary ghosthunting, an activity that has, like any other “disciplines,” “evolved” as a set of activities:

Once inside the hotel, I am given a name tag bearing the label “Day Delegate” (some people arrived the night before) and an itinerary for the day’s events, and am told that I am free to wander about the stalls set up in conference room until the first event begins in the Old Chapel, where all talks are to be held. Altogether, there are about 15 stalls offering a variety of goods and promotional materials. I pass by a couple of tables selling high-priced crystals and pendants, and come to a table being run by a man and woman fussing over a mobile phone. At the table there are photographs for sale that I instantly recognise: black and white photos of haunted-looking British buildings, their surroundings and natural shadows, and sometimes the sunlight and clouds, manipulated in such a way that the structures themselves almost appear sad in some photos, angry in others.

The photographer is Simon Marsden, and his photos have always struck me as uncannily powerful photos of buildings, although more romantic or fantastic than surreal. I knew that in addition to a few books of photographs of “haunted” British architecture, Marsden has also photographed evocative US landscape scenes, and authored a photography book chronicling the forgotten or secret places in East Berlin after the Wall came down; his photographs strike me as at odds with the cartoonish sinister décor and atmosphere of the conference. I soon realise that the man at the table is Marsden himself, and he seems a bit pre-occupied with the mobile phone. As I leaf through a book he tells my partner that he and his wife have borrowed their teenage daughter’s phone for the day and can’t quite seem to work it out; he sheepishly asks my partner if he can help.

A look around the room reveals to me that he is the oldest person in it, though he is probably only in his early 60s. The rest of the conference goers at this point seem to be people between the ages of 20 and 35, and women seem to outnumber men, although I notice the stewards all seem to be rather well-coiffed and manicured men in their mid-20s whose style resembles that of Jason Karl. GRFI’s slogan, “Psychic Research Has Evolved” suddenly springs to my mind, and I feel a tinge of sadness for Marsden; his photographs don’t seem to hold the same sway for people as the interactive New Age and psychical goods and services on offer, such as the popular digital aura photography stall. One of the stalls is devoted to promotional materials of various ghost walks and tours around the UK and Ireland. A few amateur ghost clubs from around Britain have set up stalls advertising themselves. A couple of stalls are selling instructional ghosthunting book titles that I have increasingly seen for sale on the ever-growing number of UK-based websites about ghosts. One stall sells what seem to be the hundreds of DVDs of past editions of the *Most Haunted* series from the UK and the US, plus a series of books to accompany them. Another stall is promoting Spectral Electronics, “the first ghosthunting equipment dealer” in the UK.

The first talk of the day is entitled “Dowsing Using Pendulums and Rods,” and is given by Diana Destiny and an aura artist called Veronica Charles, whose claim to fame seems to be an appearance on a German TV show called *Ghost Castle*. While we wait for them to appear, synthesised music that sounds as if it’s from a *Dr Who* episode circa 1970 is playing over the loudspeaker. The “old” chapel itself is highly refurbished, although it appears the GhostCon organisers have worked hard to give it a “creepy” theme with fake cobwebs and some candles. There are chairs for 50-60 people, and half are filled. Eventually the music fades down and Charles and Destiny appear. They are both larger middle-aged women in floating clothing.

Destiny describes how pendulums (usually a stone or crystal on a chain held between two fingers) and dowsing rods (two metal rods held in each hand) can be used to decipher many things, such as the location of water or body ailments, and especially places with ghostly energy. With both the rods and the pendulums, the user must mentally determine signs that will be positive or negative; that is, the user can decide that a horizontal swing of the pendulum will mean yes, while a vertical means no, or vice versa. Rods will either come together and cross each other, or move apart; the user must decide which event will be a positive sign, and which will be negative. We watch as Charles’ dangling pendulum expertly begins to move rhythmically back in forth, and then in circles, between her fingers. She doesn’t yet ask her crystal to give us any particular signs. I assume she’s just stretching her psychic muscles a bit.

Members of the audience are invited to the front of the room to give it a try with some extra pendulums belonging to Charles. As one worried-looking young man stands facing us with his pendulum hanging weak and limp in his hand, Charles reminds us that individuals may have vastly different experiences with pendulums, and that there’s no set way to make them work, so it’s worth experimenting. “It’s not the method,” she says, “but the result”—a sentiment I’ve heard echoed by other ghosthunters about getting “results” during investigations. Other volunteers are getting some results, although there is nowhere near as much movement with their pendulums as with Charles’. As an apparent afterthought to her comment about method, Charles adds, “Where you think the information comes from is your problem.” I interpret this to mean that results are possible for anyone using pendulums as a medium, whether they believe the message is coming from dead people or something even less tangible. Charles points out that a couple of volunteers “standing stage left,” in what amounts to the corner of the room, are getting better results than others. She tells us that this could be because there is some psychic energy here for some reason or another; she conjectures that someone may have died here, or that there may have been something else—a passageway—at some point in the past.

We move on to rods, and again volunteers are selected to stand at the front and try them out. At first the volunteers are awkward, and the rods go flying right and left in their hands. But in a few minutes, all have got the hang of them. The rods, interestingly, do behave in different ways depending upon where the person is standing in the room. Again, they seem to react most noticeably when the volunteers stand in the stage left corner of the room. Charles and Destiny vow to find out the history of the room, and to report back to us later in the day.

I am surprised at this most unscientific way to gain knowledge—is this what GRFI means by its research “evolving”? To what degree have ghost hunters really taken up science, and where does this merging of science with so-called New Age practices fit in? I had recently been told by a ghosthunter, who also happened to be a physicist, that sometimes a good medium is needed to get results. He was referring to his use of quality recording equipment to capture supposed voices of the dead; but at GhostCon, and at quite a few other ghost hunts I attend, a living, psychic medium seems to be an accepted and indeed sought-after piece of “equipment” to have around, and somehow not at all contrary to the scientifically based methods also being employed.

Following the rods and pendulums session is a talk and screening by Talisman TV, which we learn is Jason Karl’s production company. *Spectre Inspectors* is its pilot series and seems to be aimed at the Living TV market: housewives with an interest in the supernatural, who also love a good game show. Before a screening of a test episode, we are shown a preview of another show Talisman has in the works, *Terror Tower*, a horror game show. Its tagline: “You have to escape from the tower with your life, unless you die of fright first!” It seems to involve the placing of teams into haunted places to see which can make it though the night without leaving in fright.

Then it’s time for *Spectre Inspectors*, which is briefly introduced by Jason Karl himself who has been flitting around the conference, occasionally pausing for a chat and autograph. He is smilier than in his PsychicLive advertisements, although something about his look—extremely neatly dressed, his short dark hair spiked into the style favoured in the style section of British GQ at the time—suggests high maintenance. The show begins, and Karl appears with bleached white-blonde hair and wearing a long black leather trench coat and a good deal of stage make-up. He is Agent 615. His mission: to test real-life psychics’ skills at “actual supposedly haunted locales.” While he deals with these psychic “candidates” “on the ground”, a woman who looks and speaks like a gothic version of Ann Robinson judges their performance; she seems to be called “Spectre Central” and appears on screen floating away from the action as if omnipotent.

The show feels like *Inspector Gadget* meets the *Weakest Link*. We are introduced to the three candidates--one of whom is Veronica Charles, who gave the talk on rods and pendulums—who are taken to a house and to wander around and try to psychically feel out its history and any possible ghostly presences. Of course, prior to their search, the audience has been told by Jason Karl and the owner of the house, in an interview section, what the house’s potential psychic secrets are, ie., someone died in this room, or guests have heard noises from this corner, or felt cold in that hallway. As we view each of the candidates going through the houses we therefore know where they should “pick up” something, and where they shouldn’t. These locations are called “hot spots” (a term also commonly used by ghost hunters), and the psychics get points when they pick up on one. The catch is that they must beat the clock: each candidate has a five-minute time limit. There is a manufactured darkness in the house during the psychics’ wanderings. In fact, night-vision is used to show the psychic’s perspective, just as it is (over-) employed in *Most Haunted*.

In the end it’s down to Spectre Central, the Ann Robnison-like character, who cynically berates each candidate’s performance afterwards and who re-states that she is “the leading authority in the worldwide struggle against supernatural supremacy” before announcing a final round of the top two candidates (the third is dismissed: “no second chance for dimwits”). The final round is a speed challenge. The candidates are faced with some objects on a table, and they must tell the history of the item, deriving their knowledge psychically by handling the object. *Spectre Inspectors* now echoes *Bargain Hunt*, as contestants make guesses as to what each item could be, and whether it has any psychically relevant history. Veronica Charles wins, the show ends, and Jason Karl wants to know what we all thought of the show. Would we watch it, if it were broadcast? Everyone in the room enthusiastically replies in the affirmative, and I see yet another example of how “psychical research” has evolved.

I meet my partner after the screening, and he tells me the bad news that the Time Team, from the BBC television series of the same name who were due to give a talk, have been in a car accident and so their “Geophysics Live” event has been cancelled. They are reportedly doing well, and we hear a couple of psychics say they are going to send some good vibes their way. I can’t help but wonder what would have happened if one of them had died in the crash. Would we have tried to contact them, or would it have been in bad taste? I wonder what the limits are with people and their own experiences of death; my findings at this point have been that most ghosthunters are interested in historical ghosts, rather than recent or personal ones; practicing Spiritualists I’ve met have tended to have lost someone recently, and seem to eschew the science in favour of communications via a medium, as I’ve witnessed at the Brighton Spiritualist Church.

The conference continues with a representative called Richard Jacklin from Spectral Electronics, whose stall I had noticed earlier. Jacklin says that he is a former ESD motor tester, which required him to spark engines. The sparks reminded him of the orbs he had seen on *Most Haunted*, and he says inspired him to come up with the idea for consumer-priced ghost hunting equipment; he says his success is “all thanks to Ford Motors” and it is unclear whether he means the science behind his invention, or the idea to mass market goods, or both. He describes the science behind his invention: sparks are caused by the release of a highly charged negative ion, and when this happens, cooling effects occur that aren’t registered on a thermometer. At this point it becomes obvious that what he’s selling are ion counters, a common device that of course already exists, but which he has apparently tricked out for ghosthunting use.

He shows how his invention needs an earth grounding, and a staticised balloon makes a beep on a device that resembles a walkie-talkie. He tells us ghosthunters have been a hard market to crack (he attributes this to it being a brand new item). However, he tells us, his devices must be useful because he’s had psychics claim to “see” people walking towards them right at that moment the counter starts to beep. Jacklin also has a second product to show us, his version of an EMF meter (other versions have already started to appear on ghosthunting website’s shops). His has an LCD display, for zero light conditions. It also allows users to listen to the EMF spectrum, and it has output jacks for recording electronic voice phenomena. He tells us he thinks it could be useful for background monitoring on ghost hunts, and that it runs at 1Khz, because typical voice ranges span around that point and telephones interfere at 500 Khz, so that’s the safety range for not picking up telephone talk. He says it’s a good product “if you’re really going to dig around in the noise.”

A psychic demonstration is the next activity at GhostCon. The audience is introduced to Marian, another psychic, whom I’ve seen floating around and making jokes between sessions. She is not a member of the Spiritualist Church, but her method is similar to the Spiritualist leaders I’ve observed at services. She walks around the room. She does the usual spiel of walking around the room, asking if anyone knows a “Mary” or a “George.” There is a taker for each of these, and there are messages for them. Some audience members seem amazed while others seem sceptical. When the session is almost over, Marian walks over to my row and stares at me. “I’ve got a Carol here. Does anyone know a Carol?” I know of no women named Carol. I keep mum. She continues to stare at me, making me slightly uncomfortable. I do actually know of a male Carroll. I say nothing. She asks again, looking around the room then back at me, if we’re sure there’s no one who knows a Carol. I finally sheepishly say, “I do.” Marian comes closer and says, “I thought so. Carroll is so proud of the young lady you’ve become.”

I don’t tell Marian that my late grandfather’s name was Carroll. My grandfather and I were very close, and he died when I was twelve. I note that neither Marian nor I mention Carol/Carroll’s gender in anything that we say.

After dinner in the bar, we’re told to divide into groups of 6 or 8 for the “interactive ghost hunt.” My partner and I are joined by two young women who claim to be psychic, a man who is keen to let everyone know he will be our group’s sceptic, and a few others. One woman particularly takes up with me, and is keen to discuss Jason Karl and other “celebrities” related to ghosthunting, and she lets it be known that she is single and tends to feel uncomfortable in her body, but is hopeful about meeting a man at hobby and fan functions such as GhostCon. Our group does ouija boards first, while other groups go round the “Mansion” with Jason Karl. On the ouija board, we “talk” to a dead guy who seems to spell out words about a dead horse and a nasty bow-and-arrow accident. Each group then goes and places a coin on a table in the chapel to see if it moves in our absence (a chalk line is drawn around it). Next we get to play with the dowsing rods. They really do seem to move by themselves, and I get major reactions at stage left corner area of chapel, as does everyone else.

The final event of GhostCon is a “Grand Séance.” Everyone goes back to the chapel to see if the coins have moved. They have not. We all remain in the chapel and are told to form concentric circles. We hold hands, Marian the psychic enters, and we do breathing exercises for what seems like ages. I really need to cough, but it’s so quiet. A dripping noise starts up in the walls behind me somewhere; it’s the only noise to be heard, and I see out the window that it’s raining. Some guy behind me starts making a little noise as well. I noticed him earlier being a real clown, and I think he’s now trying to suppress a laugh.

When it’s finally over, Marian asks what we experienced, especially people with self-proclaimed psychic abilities. The woman next to me, exclaims exhaustedly that she turned so hot it was unbearable (though holding her hand she didn’t seem hot to me); others agreed that the room was hot, though someone did point out that that’s a common occurrence when a hundred people are crowded into a tiny space. Other people reported “feeling a presence” and a few people (who could not see outside) reported a dripping noise, but it was pointed out to them that it had started raining outside. (I kept quiet about the clown).

After the grand séance we’re “debriefed” about our experiences and Bestwood’s haunted past by Jason Karl and other speakers. The previous night the GhostCon delegates in Room 36 heard a knock at the door and found no one there. Additionally, another delegate left a cassette player recording in an empty room and it picked up sounds of china moving about. David Howse, secretary of GRFI, asks how many people have actually ever seen a ghost? About a third of us raise our hands. He tells us more than 10 delegates reported feeling a little girl’s presence or like they’re being watched from above. We are told that the stage-left corner of the chapel where the rods and pendulums seemed to react the most was once used as an old cellar, but is filled in now. And we’re told that Nell Gwynn, Charles II’s mistress, lived here. She used to work with children and sell oranges, so hotel guests now report smelling oranges and hearing ghostly kids. Additionally, lots of horse skeletons were found in the grounds when the property was being refurbished, which members of my ouija board group thought made sense, given the message we “received” about the horse.

Thus ghosthunting has evolved, just as all disciplines do. The narrative above not only points to ways in which ghosthunting has evolved from the committee-based practice that it had been in the past, particularly before it became a popular activity at the turn of this century, but also suggests a few parallels with some of anthropology’s own issues in contemporary times, such as when the lines between tourism and fieldwork are sometimes blurred in certain settings, and especially when there is no consensus on how to best engage with media and take up audio-visual media practices. It is also indicative of the questions of method inherent to any discipline. How do disciplines evolve methodologically? In the case of ghosthunting, this has been the taking up of scientific equipment primarily in the form of audio-visual media, even as it engages with more traditional and non-scientific methodology (psychic mediums, for example) and with popular media culture in order to expand and define itself as a popular “discipline.” Is it also true for anthropology, post-*Writing Culture*, that it’s not the method, but the results that matter, as Veronica Charles stated?

GRFI served its purpose for its organisers and so it evolved too: it no longer exists, and its members were “given” to two other similar clubs, now also evolved or defunct, that sprung up in its wake. Talisman TV was renamed Pure and sold by Jason Karl, who now runs a company that specialises in horror-adventure rides, and he appears occasionally as a television presenter and has published a few books about celebrities’ lifestyles and the paranormal; Karl himself is now advertised by the Ghost Club as a “patron.” Peter Underwood still operates under the GRFI-given moniker “King of the Ghosthunters” and continues to publish and speak on the supernatural. And in the last decade, thousands of British ghosthunters gathered their equipment, studied up on their methodology and hit the field to reap data for the archives. Ghosthunting is always evolving—from a “condition” (McCorristine’s “ghost-seeing”) to a seemingly “magical” communications possibility and finally to a capital-driven “discipline,” bound up with tourism, leisure, and audio-visual media imperatives. In the next chapter, I turn to the question of method, and I return to the idea of media as a “magic” medium, and I trace its evolution from a communication device to one primarily used for recording quasi-scientific endeavors of ghosthunting.

**CHAPTER 3**

**THE MEDIA IMPERATIVES OF GHOSTHUNTING**

**The “Magic” of Media**

In the Thesis Introduction, I described the ways in which the concept of the uncanny is related not only to ghosts but also to the idea of “magic,” with the possibility of the shock of the other being noted by Stephen Tyler (1986) and other arguing for critique as an ethical engagement with others. I have suggested the broad parallels between ghosthunting and anthropology: 1) I established the idea of the ghost as akin to the anthropological other--a political operative that is able to stand as critique but is more often used for conservation purposes--and 2) I have described the historical trajectory of ghosthunting as one in which communication imperatives were subsumed by those of representation, a development that draws ghosthunting and anthropology in line with their respective audio-visual methodologies. In this chapter, I now return to audio-visual media. I establish the “magic” in the form of the spectral other that was at the root of the development of early media and communications devices. I then discuss the ways in which the accessibility of audio-visual media marked the beginning of digital archives, making the Internet a “haunted” repository for the images and sounds produced by ghosthunters, with the digital archive itself functioning as a contemporary form of phantasmagoria, the past practice of archivisation both reified and re-enchanted online. Finally, I analyse the specific methodologies of ghosthunting, and show that they parallel the traditional ethnographic methods of anthropology. These parallels of method allow me to argue for alternative methods in Part II of the thesis, as I focus in on the actual audio-visual representations and evocations of ghosthunters in the form of photographs, audio and finally film.

Eric Davis (1999) has written extensively of the mythologies intertwined with, or at the root of, modern technologies, using the term “techgnosis” to describe the inevitable pairing of science and magic within the technological. Davis (ibid: 78) understands technological imperatives to be nearly always powered by myth or the desire to harness magic: “new technologies of perception and communication open up new spaces, and these spaces are always mapped, on one level or another, through the imagination.”[[71]](#footnote-69) Science, after all, is merely an extension of magic, at least according to James Frazer in his classical anthropology text.[[72]](#footnote-70) Arthur C. Clarke is popularly attributed with saying that “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic,” but the other side of this coin could be observed recently as a t-shirt slogan: “magic is just the stuff that science hasn’t made boring yet.”[[73]](#footnote-71)

Magic is “technology’s unconscious,” according to Davis (1999: 38), and surely “magical” pursuits—or those based on mythological ideas--were at the root of many a “magical” media experiment during the last few centuries. Davis (1999) shows the connection between eighteenth-century electrical experiments to re-animate the dead; mesmerism, Leydon jars, and other electrical “healing” methods; Michael Farraday’s early experiments with radio waves; and finally, the unexplained or unsuccessful scientific projects relating to the supernatural during the last century, as detailed especially by Jeffrey Sconce (2000): Nikola Tesla’s early radio receiver’s seemingly extraterrestrial signals; Thomas Edison’s attempts to build a machine to contact the dead; Upton Sinclair’s telepathic experiments; not to mention the equipment, developed by lesser-known academic scientists such as Raymond Bayless, Friedrich Jürgenson, and Konstantin Raudive to better record apparent “voices of the dead,” discussed in Chapter 6 of Part II.

While mechanical media such as telegraphs were initially uncanny in their capacity to thwart time and space, boundaries were even more totally collapsed when electricity was applied to recording and communication.[[74]](#footnote-72) The “live” qualities of transmission of wireless technologies and telephony played directly into the mytho-scientific notion of some world beyond that of the living, and particularly the notion of what Jeffrey Sconce (2000), in his text on the uncanniness of electrical in particular, has termed the “etheric ocean.” Ether was an important notion to spiritualists as well as scientists, an imagined extension of the known map of the world, with electricity theorised to be the current that could, in rather surreal fashion, overcome its borders. Such “magical” thoughts might have been derived from the gnostic tendencies Davis (1999) believes to be at the heart of all science. But disenchantment and the further erosion of superstitious beliefs were *en vogue* during the advent of media technologies of the late nineteenth century. In such an environment, Spiritualism flourished in the United States and soon spread to the United Kingdom.

Clive Bloom (1999: 239) notes that a spiritualist drive towards empiricism went hand in hand with rampant capitalism after the industrial revolution:

The anti-materialism of the American transcendentalists was a puny philosophy compared to one [spiritualism] which made the very nature of material objects spiritual and thereby reconciled consumption with the religious and scientific imperatives in an age of acquisition.

Davis (1999: 65) calls Spiritualism the “most materialistic and empirical religion imaginable.” As Adorno (1995) wrote, spiritualism was a vain attempt to transcend the exchange relationship that instead just ended up repeating it, under the guise of religion. Spiritualism’s origins and aspirations were in keeping with nationalistic and religious-scientific notions such as divine providence that continued to proliferate in the country as it expanded. As Davis (1999: 62) notes, “spiritualists were united in their rejection of supernaturalism, their belief in natural law, and their conviction that the afterlife was just another frontier to be conquered by the march of progress.”

Spiritualism contributed to the popular drive of many of the imperatives of communications media during the nineteenth-century attempts to “ensoul science,” as Davis (1999: 65) puts it, with devices, from daguerreotypes to telegraphs to phonographs, representing attempts to siphon a bit of the soul into artefact form. During séances at this time, mediums would often claim to receive contact from deceased popular figures such as Benjamin Franklin, offering instructions on how to formulate electromagnetic devices for what Sconce (2000) has called “spiritual telegraphy.”[[75]](#footnote-73) Such mediated input from spectral scientists and engineers, not to mention a general philosophy that communications technologies were potentially unlimited in their spatial and temporal (and spiritual and ethereal) reach resulted in metaphors used to market early telegraphy equipment, not to mention later developments such as broadcast television.[[76]](#footnote-74)

But media was to impact Spiritualism as well, as Connor (1999: 207) traces in his essay on the beginning of a spiritualist concern with producing evidence utilising photography:

With the establishment of photography as the measure of objective truth during the second half of the century, the séance was orientated more and more around the need to produce visible traces, as the reality of manifestation became measured against the possibility of recording. Transient and uncapturable forms of spiritual manifestation yielded place more and more to what could yield unmistakable evidence. The knockings and table-turnings turned into automatic writings; the smells and sounds became the ‘apports’ physically delivered into the space of the séance by performers.

Connor understands Spiritualism to have ultimately been subsumed by the occularcentric developments in representational media technologies at the time, even as the rhetoric of Spiritualism itself was devoted to the furthering of communications technologies, particularly audiological and transmissive ones. With spirit photography, writes Connor (1999: 208), “otherness is made visible and familiar, and the unmasterable event of the manifestation becomes the fixed and manipulable record.” As we shall see, this defining factor of early Spiritualism has be the predominant legacy for “dealing with ghosts” in contemporary times. Connor (1999: 222) wonders at the irreconcilable tension between communications media that are ostensibly spectral in nature and the practices, of Spiritualists, and now ghosthunters. But as Chris Chesher (2006: 125) warns, “to search for relationships between magic, religion, science and technology is to already have begun too late.”[[77]](#footnote-75)

As far as Spiritualism was concerned, an appeal of new technologies was that they could be used to rationalize spiritual phenomena and to bridge the gulf between religion and science that had grown by the latter half of the nineteenth century. Christianity in general eschewed Spiritualism as anti-religious, and indeed Spiritualist séances were often called experiments, with mediums regarded as batteries that stored up electricity or magnetism.[[78]](#footnote-76) In 1864, radio waves were predicted by James Clerk Maxwell and discovered by Henrick Hertz in 1888; the first recording of a voice--proof that voices could be heard after death—was made in 1877. W.T. Stead (1896: 234-5) would postulate that hauntings might be a form of recording: the phonograph coupled with Edison’s kinetoscope could be a “technological parallel that might explain the recurrence of spirits in a particular place.”[[79]](#footnote-77)

By the turn of the century, wireless, telephony, and radio broadcast were all on the horizon, and Frank Podmore (1901: 287), a founding member of the Society for Psychical Research, would write that the wonder of telegraphy had “helped to quicken expectation and generally to induce a mental condition favourable in other phenomena.” Edison would describe his machines for recording dead people as mechanisms through which “cherished loved ones, dear friends, and famous individuals who have long passed away will years later talk to us again with the same vividness and warmth” (quoted in Kittler 1999: 55). Sconce (1999: 75) chronicles later developments with parallels to the supernatural, such as the wireless, which “seemed to provide an empirical foundation for telepathic possibilities,” that illustrate the connection of ghosts to the development of media. The spirit world, like the online world of contemporary times, was understood as the “ether,” with electricity the conduit: an all-encompassing and almost material archive that could be delved into—and added to in the world of the living--using various electronic media.

**“Ghosthunting 101”**

While the Internet functions as the primary repository of the audio-visual media products of ghosthunters—the subject of the chapters of Part II--their secondary field site, where raw data is mined and recordings are created for adding to the archive, remains the purportedly haunted locales of the offline “real” world. So what are the rules for ghosthunters dealing with haunted houses and heritages sites, before transferring their data to the archive? At the beginning of this century, when ghosthunting was gaining popularity as a leisure activity, the most thorough written description of field methods for ghosthunters was to be found on the Shadowlands website (still extant, but updated with regards to “advances” in digital equipment), an early American “amateur” ghosthunting site that was started in 1994 by Dave Juliano of New Jersey, and which now claims to be “the Internet’s original ghost site.” In addition to a shop run by Juliano containing equipment ranging from EMF detectors to “good vibes candles,” Shadowlands today has a section of over 16,000 “true ghost stories” sent in by followers, not to mention huge sections of photographic, video, and sound archives, a self-help section, and a section featuring various articles about ghosthunting. One article in particular, “Ghosthunting 101,” is worth reproducing for analysis here, not only because it has endured as one of the most referenced resources for ghosthunters, but also because it draws attention to the parallels between ghosthunting and anthropological fieldwork. It explicitly describes ghosthunting’s technological imperatives, and it furthermore unintentionally produces the “reverie” that Clifford (1997) ascribes to certain lists of cultural facts and to collected archives. Below I have excerpted parts of the text, taken from a screen shot from 2002. In common with most first-year anthropology courses, it begins with an imploration against proceeding with research without proper training or links to an institution:

Since I started this page in December 1994, I have always been asked how to conduct a ghost hunt, what to bring, etc.  I don't encourage amateurs without any training at all to conduct ghost hunts.  You need some idea of what you are doing before you go off into that graveyard or haunted building.  I do recommend you contact an established organization near you and join them on a hunt/investigation before you go on your own.

As with any fieldwork training, there are also some semantics involved in delineating the object of the study:

Ghost Hunt - going to a place were there have been no sightings of ghosts and trying to catch some on film (video and photos), sounds, eyewitness, etc. (graveyards are the number one place to start, churches, schools and older buildings too)

Ghost Investigation - going to a known haunted place and recording data (video, photos, audio, temperatures), notes, interviews and other evidence to prove/disprove the haunting *and* to assist the owners and the spirits in moving on and leaving the place if they want that.   The assistance can be either you directly assisting the owner with the situation or putting them in contact with experienced groups or individuals that will try to resolve the situation.  Your assistance can be something as simple as educating them on what is going on and their options.

As with anthropology, there is delineation between independent research of a subject and a more thorough “investigation” or project enacted for the benefit of contributing to a larger body of research or for the aid external to the academy. Furthermore, a typology of the subject-matter of the study is offered (though it is kept relatively simple in “Ghosthunting 101”):

What you may Encounter:

There are generally 2 types of spirits you may encounter. One was a human at one time and it has remained on this level for some reason. It may not know it's dead, may be held here by unfinished business, guilt, etc. These spirits are like the person was when they were alive, so they could be good or bad, just like the living, but not normally dangerous. This human spirit is the type you will encounter 95% of the time. You could also witness a residual haunting which is just a playback of a past event. This is just like watching a video from the past playing over and over. The other type of spirit you may encounter were never human and are generally bad news. You must be aware of this type but not obsessed with them, the chances that you will encounter them in a regular ghost hunt are slim. I have experienced both types and I just want to make you aware of their existence. So be aware and protect yourself and you should have no problem.

One could assume this second type of spirit to be a poltergeist, rather than a ghost. In general, ghosthunters delineate between ghosts and poltergeists in the manner above; it is relevant that while poltergeists, who tend to behave in a physically disruptive and malicious manner, have certainly been included in the archive, experiences of them are not often the priority for most ghosthunters; archives of ghosthunters, as we shall see in the next chapter, tend to be photographic in nature, and increasingly sonic—narratives of poltergeists, muchless media representations of them, are rare.[[80]](#footnote-78) Also relevant here is the description of a “residual haunting” as a video playing over and over; as I have described above, media is always already uncanny in this way; the attempts to record ghosts on film and audio is not so different to any non-supernatural media recording.

The investigative objectives and the “other” of the study now having been basically described, some rudimentary tips such as “bring your ID,” do some historical research, inform authorities of your presence, etc., are laid out. Next, a lengthy section detailing equipment to bring along reads not unlike anthropological guidelines for what to take to the while a special section detailing with the audio-visual capture and analysis of ghosts evokes Karl Heider’s (1976) strict rules for creating visual anthropological representations, with its insistence upon unbiased observation and the like. I have included much of the section on “the basics” of ghosthunting technologies, interspersed with my own comments, because it indicates the role technology has come to play in how people “deal with ghosts” in contemporary times, and also gives insight into how people go about using media to capture ghosts (I have italicized passages of particular interest):

What to Bring

The Basics:

* 35mm Camera - Nothing fancy with at least 400 speed film. 800 speed film is also good at night but you'll have to test your cameras flash strength to see which speed works best for you. Even those single use 35mm cameras have gotten good results. If you are more experienced photographer you may want to try infrared film. I have seen results from Polaroids but I suggest you only use these along with a 35 mm camera so you can compare the results. I have used Fuji film primarily but I have also used Kodak and a department store brands with similar results. *When you develop them you don't need to go to a camera shop, the local drug store or department store is fine. Let them know you want all the pictures developed so that you get the pictures that they might think are bad ones. These "bad ones" are normally your best ectoplasm mist photos.*

\* Digital Camera - *Regardless of what you've heard digital cameras are great tools for ghost researchers. Once upon a time they had their limitations and problems but that is no longer the case. Not only do they allow you to see instantly if you have a positive photo, they can also take photos in limited infrared range of light.*

\* Flashlight w/ spare batteries - a common sense item. Remember to bring spare batteries for everything. Due to spirit activity, batteries often run down very fast and you don't want to miss anything because of dead batteries. I recommend using a red lens flash light to help preserve your night vision.

\* First aid kit - just in case, it's very easy to trip in the dark and get cut.

\* Notebook w/ pens and pencils- *you need to write and log in everything that happens. If you don't then you really don't have much research information. An example of this is one investigator gets a EMF reading that's high and never writes it down. Another investigator takes a picture of the same area but is not aware of the reading and gets a anomalous image. Without that EMF reading the picture may be good evidence, but with a report noting the reading, the picture greatly increases in evidence value.* Many investigators use a pocket tape recorder in stead and that is fine, just make sure you have spare batteries and tapes.

\* Jackets or weather appropriate clothes - if you are cold you are not at your best and your observation skill could suffer, pretty common sense.

\* Watch - so you can *log in the times of events and your arrival and departure*.

This list of the basics needed in the field of ghosthunting not only parallels anthropological advice for novices embarking upon their first fieldwork experiences—the need to notate dates and times, take safety precautions, be diligent about notetaking and recording, with the former supplementing the latter in valuable ways as evidence--but is also prescriptive in its advice about the production of images in the field. Developers must not be allowed to hold back the “bad” photos because those are the ones that tend to fit the pre-established mould of what ghost images should be. Digital photography is now “permitted” because of its immediacy. Indeed, more “evolved” equipment was just coming to fore when Ghosthunting 101 was first posted, as this “Advanced and Optional” list of equipment below indicates:

Advanced and Optional

\* Video camera (optional tripod) - Video cameras are an important Instrument for an investigation. *Unlike still cameras they provide us with constant visual and audio surveillance for review and observation.* The video cameras we use are equipped with infrared capability and this is the mode we use. *With video any phenomena occurring can be documented in its entirety. This will show the length of time the phenomena occurs, what is happening, the conditions surrounding the phenomena, and possibly even the cause of the phenomena.* The Sony line of camcorders has an infrared night shot feature that enables you to video tape in complete darkness and see beyond what the human eye can see. You can use these on tripods or walk around with them. You should also invest in an infrared light extender which will help your camera see in the darkest places and make the quality of the video better.

\* Tape recorder w/ external microphone and high grade tapes - *recorders or digital voice recorders are with out a doubt one of the most important pieces of equipment that you should have in you investigators toolbox.* Audio recorders are used for many different purposes throughout an investigation. Recorders are used for interviews, spontaneous thoughts, your notes and electronic voice phenomena (EVP). You have to use a external microphone when recording EVPs (ghosts voices). *If you rely on the internal microphone you will also be recording the internal gears and motors and this will make your tape worthless. Any sound you hear on the tape could not be used as evidence because of this, so use the external mic, they are pretty inexpensive.* The type of tape that is most often recommended is high bias tapes or metal tapes.

\* Digital audio recorders - This recorder is small and easy to carry. You can also use the voice activation feature so there is less audio to review. I use this for my notes as well*. Most units record the time of the recording as well which is very useful. When using audio recorders be sure to state the location, time of investigation, and investigators names. When recording investigators names it would be wise to have each individual present state their own names, which will make it easier for distinction amongst voices heard on the tape during review.* Voice activation mode should be deactivated on tape recorders during use when electronic voice phenomena is trying to be achieved due to the fact that it usually cuts off beginnings of words, sentences, and phrases. This is not necessary with digital recorders and they actual seem to work better in voice activation mode.

\* EMF Detector - The Electromagnetic Field Detector, also known as an EMF, is the modern day ghost researcher's tracking device, a very important piece of equipment. With this instrument it is possible to locate and track energy sources. It will detect fluctuations in electromagnetic fields and low strength moving EMF fields that have no source. It is a common theory that spirits disrupt this field in such a way that you can tell one is present by higher than normal readings with this meter. Before using the EMF as a ghost research tool on an investigation be sure to walk around the area and take initial readings around energy sources such as light poles or electrical outlets to be sure of the readings you receive while scanning the area during the investigation. Most units when purchased come with a manual describing most household and major appliances and their corresponding electromagnetic reading. When using the EMF as a tracking device look for fluctuations of 2.0 to 7.0, this usually indicates spirit presence. Anything higher or lower is normally has a natural source.

\* Cellular phone - if you have one it can come in handy in case of an emergency.

\* A Compass - it's a useful instrument to an investigator due to its compact size and low cost price. When used on an investigation this will indicate spirit presence when the needle cannot come to a precise heading or spins/moves erratically. This works on the same principle as a EMF meter.

\* Candles & matches - batteries often run low during hunts so you may run out of them and still need a light source. Another good idea is a camping lantern that runs on lamp oil. Be careful using the candles around motion detectors, they will set them off.

\* Motion Detectors - these can be used to sense movements by often unseen forces or spirits. You can get battery operated ones for about 20 dollars and they are great for inside but I have seen them used successfully outdoors as well, just watch the placement. You don't want a tree branch setting it off.

\* Thermometer or Thermal Scanner - Thermometers are an instrument that is also very useful There are two types used regular digital thermometers and infrared non contact thermometers. When used on an investigation this will aid as a detection system for spirit presence. Rapid temperature drop of 10 degrees of more could indicate spirit presence. I recommend using the infrared non contact thermometers but cause they react in less than a second to a temperature drop and you can scan a large area quickly.

\* Hand Held Radios - Or Walkie Talkies are very useful in a large outdoor area and a building with groups spread out in various rooms. They could be great in emergency situations or just to rotate groups. Be sure to be aware they could interfere with your EVP recording though.

Beyond the basics of ghosthunting, then, one can benefit from such “advanced” equipment as video cameras, which can record events in their entirety for unbiased analysis later (and “possibly even the cause of the phenomenon”) –harkening back to Margaret Mead’s and others dreams for early visual anthropology. Audio recorders are again important, as is distinguishing between the voices of the investigators so that they can be distinguished later from the voices of any “others.” Other digital and otherwise “advanced” equipment is listed, but so are more rudimentary objects, such as candles and compasses; ghosthunting may have evolved, but there is still a place for traditional practices (compasses as an older method for detecting, candles more for emergency lighting, though they tend to add to the expected ambience of the field as well).

In addition to equipment, the rules for using technology are particular, to be sure (it is important to remember a jacket, for example, because shivering may effect the images one produces with a camera), but interestingly, few rules if any exist for interpreting or otherwise using the products of technology. Images, sounds, EMF readings—all become part of the archive, ostensibly created as evidence, but actually evidencing nothing besides the drive to use technology to represent that which ultimately doesn’t lend itself to traditional scientific methods of representation. Finally, step-by-step guidance is given in Ghosthunting 101 for how to ghosthunt once out in the field:

Step by Step Procedures

1. Have everyone meet near the location and decide who will work each piece of equipment and divide into teams if necessary. Pick a person or leader that will talk to anyone who comes in contact with the group (i.e. Police, Reporters, etc.)

2. Enter the site and either privately or as a group ask for blessing or protection for the duration of the hunt. You can use this time to put yourself in a positive frame of mind. It does not have to be a religious thing so everyone can do this in some way. I do encourage everyone to take the 10 seconds this takes and do this. What can it hurt? It's better to be safe than sorry. Many experienced groups believe that there are evil spirits in many areas such as cemeteries and by saying a 10 second prayer or making sure you are in a positive frame of mind you can safely go about your business without worrying about them. An experienced demonologist will tell you that by doing this in the name of God or whatever good deity you worship, you will keep any non human spirits at bay since they have to leave you alone when told so in this manner.

3. Walk around the area to get a feel for the surroundings and allow the spirits to get a feel for you. Do this for about 20 minutes. Log in your start time and weather conditions and any other relevant information. You can also begin to set up any stationary equipment like camera on tripods or motion detectors. Make note of any areas that may cause you to get false readings or false positive pictures.

4. Now go out there and get some pictures and recordings. Be sure to note anything unusual that happens especially meter and temperature readings, visual sightings and strange sounds. Also make notes of any feelings or emotions you feel that may be odd or out of place. You can compare notes after the hunt and look for similarities in readings and feeling in certain areas or at certain times.

5. Whether you stake out a spot or you walk around try to give everyone the opportunity to try everything and be everywhere. This keeps every one fresh and at attention. Rotate a few times during the investigation.

6. When you are done have everyone meet in one spot and ask the human spirits here not to follow you home and to remain here. Tell the others they must remain here in the name of God (or other good deities). Again this takes 4 seconds, it's simple and it can save you some problems down the road. If we are wrong about these prayers at the beginning and end of the hunt and they are not necessary then you wasted 14 seconds of your time. If we are right about them, you saved yourself from allot of problems and grief.

Some additional steps are offered, such as the recording of temperatures at various times, formal interviews with any witnesses one comes across, and recording data in throughout the entire field site.

Next, locations for fieldwork are suggested; as with anthropology, certain locations are historically and culturally ripe for research, but ultimately ghosts—like culture--can be found anywhere:

Where to Look

These are some places you can start your ghost hunting at. These are suggestions and you should not limit yourself to just these, spirits can be anywhere. Don't let the age of a building or area fool you. The house I lived in for 29 years which had ghostly activity in for 26 years is only 70 years old but it is built on land that was settled and lived on in 1685. Also, remember, do not trespass.

The description further suggests cemeteries (“the age of the cemetery doesn't matter but the older it is, the more time it has had to accumulate restless spirits”), schools and theatres (because of psychical energies that have built up on emotional places), battlefields (“many violent deaths in one area will always hold some spirits and psychic energy there”), not to mention churches, hotels/motels/boarding houses, and any generally historical site. Ghosts seem to be bounded by sites and to some degree determined by history and time, but particularly by emotion—both emotional events from the past, and the emotions of researchers in the field. The last section of “Ghosthunting 101” offers some final advice regarding the weather (you can’t do a proper outdoor investigation if it is raining, snowing or foggy), emotions (negative feelings might drive spirits away and also show disrespect), skepticism (you’ll get stronger proof if you employ it), whispering (it taints recording results), the use of smoking, alcohol and drugs (don’t do these things, “for mostly obvious reasons”), and even perfume (don’t wear it, as it could be mistaken as supernatural).

Clifford (1986: 2) reminds us that ethnography is “an ideology claiming transparency of representation and immediacy of experience: writing reduced to method: keeping good field notes, making accurate maps, ‘writing up’ results.” The same may be said for the media work of ghosthunting: it is akin to the ethnographic methods of anthropology, and even its post-modern forms, where attempts are made to convene with ghostly others even in the midst of more empirical directives to “capture” and reduce them to data using recording devices. The contents of “Ghosthunting 101” would be reprised on various websites, and increasingly expanded upon in books (Warren’s 2003 *How to Hunt Ghosts: A Practical Guide* was perhaps one of the first of a burgeoning genre). Among the at times surreal listing of tips of “Ghosthunting 101,” what is particularly notable about these methodological rules and guidelines and lists of equipment are the discursive rules that aren’t stated, but which are as apparent on actual ghost hunts as they are at heritage sites: ghosts look vaguely like the ghosts already contained in archive. They will always appear under certain sets of circumstances (nearly always at night, and in a historical or “traumatised” place, despite statements above about keeping an open mind about context and locale). Anything that doesn’t fit the unspoken criteria is often not included in the audio-visual archive, or simply not noticed or recorded at all.

Just as anthropology has traditionally had its own unspoken rules about what constitutes “the field” and criteria for who may and who may not be valid subjects for study, so have ghosthunters defined their discipline and their subject matter by what it is not. In ghosthunters’ rush to demystify, to promote and maintain the sheer existence of ghosts as collectible objects, a mythology is being created. Although their stated intentions are good—to promote the understanding of a different world—their resulting use of representations undermines the uncanny nature of the experience, and leaves out all those experiences that cannot be made to fit in the archive. The flipside of this is that “Ghosthunting 101”—much like the photographic archives discussed in the Part II—itself functions as an unintentionally “playful museum,” full of categories, lists, and pseudoscience, intent upon revealing the “secret” of the ghost, but all the while creating something itself uncanny in the meantime.

In Parts II of the thesis, I argue that any form of audio-visual media channels the uncanny even as it is itself uncanny. Davis’s (1999) notion of techgnosis as a popular impression of a spiritually imbued technology remains a popular trope today, but it doesn’t override the belief, central to most contemporary ghosthunting practices, that media equipment is merely an unbiased medium that conducts evidential and material science.[[81]](#footnote-79) There is a tension between “techgnosis” as clouding scientific truths in favour of *techne*, producing the spiritual, and Heidegger’s question concerning technology as a too-revealing mechanism. Terry Castle (1995: 143-4) writes of the uncanny in relation to the phantasmagoria shows of post-Enlightenment times, discussed briefly in the Thesis Introduction: “…even as it supposedly explained apparitions away, the spectral technology of the phantasmagoria mysteriously recreated the emotional aura of the supernatural. One knew ghosts did not exist, and yet one saw them anyway, without knowing precisely how.” During the initial heyday of Spiritualism, whole technologies and sets of activities were enacted to explain and bridge the knowledge gap of the “how” of observing and communicating with ghosts.[[82]](#footnote-80) Already, though, the notion of capturing and archiving was coming to the fore in the pursuit of the spectral.

As Adorno (1946: 177) stated of Spiritualists during the mid-20th century:

They inveigh against materialism. But they want to weigh the astral body…the same rationalistic and empiricist apparatus that threw the spirits out is being used to reimpose them on those who no longer trust their own reason.

The embracing of science by Spiritualism into the 1950s, and the technological capture and archival activities of ghosthunters today, are akin to the need to reveal Derrida’s “secret”—to unveil and make canny rather than “maintain the specters.” In the end, it matters little, because as Derrida (1999: 17) states, “the archivization produces as much as it records the event”; the fluid relationship between the archive and what it archives means that “the archive cannot remain outside what it memorializes.” Such a critique is valid for ghosthunters as well as most anthropologists who primarily understand audio-visual media to be useful for little more than salvage purposes, or at best, as ethnographic experiment. Whether the ghost--the “secret”--is revealed by ghosthunting technologies or not, it is maintained by the very fact that it debuts and repeats (and thus survives the “death” those capturing it would impose upon it). Any end to haunting is not of haunting, and there is nothing outside of the text. This is not to say, however, that ghosthunting deserves no critique from an ethical-hauntological standpoint. Rather, the results of contemporary ghosthunting are dialectical—within subjugation also lies the potential for subversion and critique.

**The Internet As Media Archive**

At the same time that anthropology began to take up audio-visual media as tools for the salvage of “disappearing cultures,” in the 1930s grassroots ghosthunting clubs began to adopt such media as well. This coincides not only with the waning of Spiritualism but also with the greater accessibility of cameras and other recording equipment: no longer were cameras spiritual mediums for the conjuring of ghosts for those who could afford to pay for the service, but rather consumer tools that could be wielded by anyone for less “magical” purposes. Accessibility to media equipment plays a big part in the way in which audio-visual media has been utilized within anthropology (see Chris Wright 1999), and also underscores my argument that it be taken up and utilized to produce critique: as Sarah Pink (2013) argues, the proliferation of all media forms means that both anthropologists and “others” have access not only to media recording devices but to the means of electronically disseminating it on the Internet, and that has radical implications for the notions of discourse and critique for media that were previously argued for as a form of critique specific to ethnographic writing.

While I have established that the field of ghosts in contemporary times ranges from heritage sites and routes, the primary location of the archive of ghosthunting today is the Internet. Like any archive, the Internet is in many ways an extension of the “techgnosis” Davis (1999) describes. Christine Hine’s (2000) account of creating an ethnography using the Internet inadvertently points out that it is a surreal invention: certainly the innumerable array of websites, discussion forums, newsgroups, and pages of digitized photographic, video and audio archives devoted to ghosts turns time and space on its head, with any web search producing an anarchic jumble of temporally and spatially disparate results. The effect is reminiscent of James Clifford’s descriptions of surreal ethnography and of *Documents* described in the Thesis Introduction: “timeless time” and a “temporal collage” (Hine 2000: 85). Harvey (2004: 85) notes that the Internet is was “predicted” by telepathy and séances during the nineteenth century by a metaphorical combining of technology and spiritualism:

At the time, information exchange and creative interplay of this nature and complexity was without precedent, and attempts to elucidate it severely strained even the most serviceable analogies with modern scientific discovery. Today, we readily concede the existence of a realm without physical identity or specific location, linking remote intelligence (either human or artificial) to facilitate collective and decentred authorship.

Websites today span the range of gallery archives, communication portals, and “shop fronts” that make the spirit world of the Internet a true phantasmagoria, with ghosts and the marketplace going beyond co-existence to co-dependency: the storage capacity of the spirit world is determined primarily by capital. But the Internet is also a haunted house, one in which captured ghosts are “housed” when ghosthunters return from the haunted field in the “real” world. Houses, of course, are the opposite of the uncanny (or the “un-homely”); this is why the realm of ghosts is the haunted house—an unhomely home because of the interruption of the ghost.[[83]](#footnote-81) Scott McQuire (1997: 685) has written that modernity has been “haunted by the specter of the loss of home,” with media images, virtual reality, and online experiences all affecting “the homeliness of our homes.” The Internet thus abolishes the spatial continuity that had previously framed social contexts.

Margaret Wertheim (1999) has described the ways in which the Internet today serves as a space of longing, opening up communities and experiences away from the increasing materiality of the offline world. But what is at bottom of this uncanny and dematerialised space? Christopher Johnson (1999) has written about the increasingly uncanny nature of the IT programming: with more and more delegation of vital

functions to programmes, it becomes difficult to locate the programme itself. And yet outside of these programmes’ technological structures and digital activities that maintain the archive, there remains a physically real world.[[84]](#footnote-82) And of course, what is found on the Internet in general--not just on ghosthunting websites—are un-homely archives that are “intermittent, discontinuous, fluctuating” (McQuire 1997: 691). Wikipedia entries, for example, can read like the anthropological lists that Clifford writes about when he refers to the unintentional ethnographic surrealism, with all sorts of disparate facts and “evidence,” borrowed from various sources, only sometimes cited, and many times out of context, with anonymous real-world contributors’ various opinions and political biases left unstated in favour of presenting everything as “fact”--making for entertaining reading, if “dangerous” for actual research purposes.[[85]](#footnote-83)

Archiving is not always an act that results in the obliteration of the subtle uncanniness of the ghost; as Kittler (1999: xl) further wrote, “what remains of people is what media can store and communicate.” Indeed, citing websites in academic research raises temporality issues. Traditionally, academics cite the dates of the texts, and when a newer addition of an iconic old text is used then both dates are stated. The reader needs this context, the context of the work and its translations, its republications and updates. But when an author gives the date he or she “accessed” an undated work found online, then a whole new context is revealed to the reader. The work is given an arbitrary date, but by the time a reader re-accesses it, there is every possibility it could have been edited or have disappeared entirely. In this way, web sites are vapourous and ghostly. Without electricity and technology—our archiving angels, to borrow Eric Davis’s (1999) term—they would be exorcised for good. They multiply, they change, they return again and again each time they are accessed. They are potentially everlasting and yet ephemeral. It is therefore perhaps appropriate that websites are where so much of ghosthunting and archives are housed.

John Potts (2006: 85) has analysed ghosthuning websites and believes that “the status of sites varies widely,” with the more “sober” end of the spectrum represented by academic research initiatives and other professional research organizations that “operate with strict adherence to scientific method, eschewing unfounded speculation.” Today, these could be exemplified by the SPR, the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit at Goldsmiths College and the Koestler Parapsychology Unit at the University of Edinburgh, or the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP), which operates as a charity and holds training days for those interested in investigating paranormal or anomalous activity. While Potts (ibid) writes that such sites are the minority of ghosthunting websites, and “offer a cautious voice of science of science overwhelmed by voices from the other end of the spectrum,” he neglects to mention that these types of sites represent the organisations that many ghosthunters aspire to emulate, though geographical, monetary, and expertise constraints often mean they’re relegated to local organizations or to consuming and participating in much more accessible websites. Potts (ibid) places “the ghost hunters and merchandisers eager to sell ghost-hunting equipment to amateur enthusiasts” at the other end of the spectrum of his content analysis, and believes that such sites “exploit belief in ghosts for profit.” Although such sites are pre-disposed to the conviction that ghosts exist, as Potts notes, it is not belief that inspires the production of these “amateur” ghosthunting websites and their associated shop fronts and archives. Rather, as has already been discussed, the drive to produce evidence that fits the archive using audio-visual media contributes to a fairly diverse range of attitudes presented on the sites, but all ultimately conform to the general remits termed “ghosthunting.”

Potts (2006: 85) admits that alongside the “many thousands of photographs posted on sites” that are “in massive supply across the Web” a diversity of approaches to dealing with them has sprung up; in more recent times, for example, ASSAP has specialised in offering an analysis of ghost photos emailed to them, archiving both the apparently “authentic” and the debunking ghost photographs it receives.[[86]](#footnote-84) Other sites, however, are up-front with their drive for evidential “proof” of ghosts, and showcase their most apparently convincing ones as evidence. Potts (2006: 87) writes of the online ghosthunting archive taken as whole:

The criss-crossing of these diverse modes makes for a curious discourse: an amalgam of the pseudo-scientific, the mystical, the sensationalist, the hopeful, the fraudulent and the fanciful. Its blend of mysticism and rationalism, like that of its more elevated 19th century predecessors, spiritualism and theosophy, concocts some interesting methodology.

Photographic archives lead to scientifically-inspired typologies of ghosts, which Potts likens to the “psuedo-science” of Michael Shermer (1997). The ghost is thus “encrypted” in the archive—it is both converted to data that ultimately produce and maintain ghosthunters’ ideals of ghosts, and it is kept “alive” as an object that is other, as Abraham and Torok write of Derridean encryption—as a whole, the archive maintains the secret of the ghost, even if the intention is to reveal it. Ghosthunting today exemplifies Derrida’s (1991: 95) conception of archive fever:

It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.

Beyond the empiricist drive of ghosthunters to “capture” ghosts is the basic drive to archive, to contribute to the source from whence, in contemporary times, so much of ghosthunting and hence notions about ghosts, springs.

Despite this apparent repression of the ghost—not to mention the “repression” of the “other” of the ghost, the living ghosthunter—it nonetheless keeps up its uncanny haunting, and this is due to the drive to archive, and the subsequent non-revelation of the ghost. As Walker Sampson (2011) writes of Derrida’s analysis of the drive archive, “entwined in this desire is a repetitive force, the retention of a specific origin through repetition…the One cannot distinguish itself from the Other without a constant reiteration of itself.” Beyond the ethics of representing anthropological others, and the repression of ghosthunters in their adherence to pseudo-scientific methodology and collecting and archiving as a leisure activity, what is embedded in the archive is the potential of maintaining the secret of the ghost. But as Derrida states, in the ceaseless work to retain one memory at the expense of another the archive not only maintains and curates memory, but buries it as well. The twin acts of maintenance and burial create something new and uncanny: the archive itself as a strange figure between the living and the dead, just as Clifford pointed out about the archives and ethnograhies of anthropology.

Again, a “crisis of representation” may be invoked; material archives such as colonial-era Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, knowingly function as “surreal anthropology,” their objects juxtaposed in festishistic ways to evoke a sense of “all times and all places” of *Documents*-era surrealism. Other archives, such as the Mass Observation Project, its outputs now housed at University of Sussex, have at their methodological core an acknowledgement of the power relations inherent in collecting and the subjectivity inevitable in representing others. Foucault (1966) addresses the uncanny nature of the archive and the emancipatory possibilities of taxonomy when he discusses “a certain” Chinese encyclopedia’s otherness and the way in which it underlines the limitations of our own classificatory systems:

In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*.

Such foreign systems are heterotopic spaces (Foucault names the cemetery and the ship as other examples, but also includes the museum), places between where otherness is allowed. The archive, in various ways, may be said to be intrinsically uncanny and may be said to exemplify Clifford’s (1981) concept of a “playful museum,” a collage of past times and places. Archives of collected representations and data about ghosts may be assessed in the same way, but the audacity of the archive must go beyond the tendency to sometimes be passively provocative in allowing those who access the archive to “play” with its contents as a form of continued maintenance of the status quo.

**PART I CONCLUSION**

The three chapters of Part I have laid out the idea of the ghost as one that can be taken as a metaphor for the others of anthropology, a connection I’ve demonstrated in order to ultimately draw parallels between the audio-visual methodologies of ghosthunters and those emoplyed by some anthropologists. Ghosts are a presence from the past that disrupt the homogeneity of the present; I have shown that ghosts may be manipulated by the living--usually in the process of promoting some tourist or leisure site--and primarily by homogenizing the past into a non-specific sense of “pastness” in order to promote particular versions of “heritage.” Ghosts help to establish what constitutes the geographical and ontological field of ghosthunting (and the related activities of the tourist and heritage industries), just as anthropology’s others establish the delineate anthropologists “field” of study, both geographically and ontologically.

I have further established the evolution of ghosthunting as a discipline that has developed from an activity concerned initially with communication using technology into one shaped by the various representational imperatives intertwined with media. My case study of The Ghost Club served to illustrate the ways in which the organised practices of ghosthunting originated and evolved over time, while my ethnographic account of contemporary ghosthunting through the lens of GhostCon served to illustrate the various practices and issues at stake in ghosthunting as a “modern” discipline on par with anthropology: both disciplines have developed methods of dealing with the other as the primary focus of study—including the establishment of various forms of “fieldwork.”

Finally, I have illustrated that ghosthunters’ emphasis on fieldwork is very much defined by media imperatives, including the establishment of the Internet as the disseminator and archive of collected audio-visual “data.” Using the canonical “Ghosthunting 101” document, I suggested that the rules and regulations of ghosthunting are nearly identical to the advice laid out in undergraduate introductions to anthropological fieldwork. As I have argued, following the “crisis of representation” in anthropology, there has been a move from representation to more discursive forms of critique, engaging “with” the traditional others of anthropological study, but this has primarily been applied to ethnographic writing, while media remains prescriptively utilized in ways similar to those laid out in “Ghosthuting 101.” Audio-visual media within anthropology has tended to serve as critique in the form of “experimental ethnography” in the form of film, not as a mainstream way of engaging with others.

The ghosthunting archive described in Chapter 3 is not just the archive of data produced by the practices of ghostunters, but the archive of ghosthunting as well, which I have summarized in Part I, just as so much of anthropology’s own archiving has been as much to do with anthropologists as it has been about the others they are seeking to engage with. Anthropologists and those who have engaged with cultural others have so often been taken as ghosts—see, for example, the Leahy Brothers in the film *First Contact* (1983), or the example of Captain Cook’s second voyage to Hawaii, when he and his men were taken for spirits or gods, before demonstrating their mortality when one died. Even Clifford Geertz, like so many anthropologists, is initially ghost-like—present but absent--in his account of Balinese life that I cited in the thesis Introduction. Ghosts are very much a useful classificatory mechanism for what Derrida, playing on the similarities between the words *host*, *guest* and *ghost*, has suggested, in his memorial lecture for Levinas (1999), is a welcoming of strangers as guests. *Totality and Infinity*, writes Derrida (ibid), is actually a treatise on hospitality, whereby to receive is to welcome, and the host who receives the guest is actually a guest within his own home. There is a risk adherent in this receiving of the uncanny other, but the unknown is “the element of friendship or hospitality for the transcendence of the stranger, the infinite distance of the other” (ibid: 8).

And yet ghosthunting, as I established it in Part I, does not tend to welcome ghosts in this way and may be more usefully understood as part of Adorno and Horkheimer’s culture industry. It is infected by “sameness” as ghosthunters use cameras and other recording devices to create media data that fit in with what is already in the archive, for only then can the archive be maintained as such. In a passage that echoes the parallels I’ve drawn between ghosts and the cultural others of anthropology, Adorno and Horkheimer (1944: 131) write:

Today aesthetic barbarity completes what has threatened the creations of the spirit since they were gathered together as culture and neutralized. To speak of culture was always contrary to culture. Culture as a common denominator already contains in embryo that schematisation and process of cataloguing and classification which bring culture within the sphere of administration.

I have shown that the pursuit of ghosts, like the pursuit of cultural “knowledge” via academic anthropological fieldwork is handled administratively. According to Adorno and Horkheimer (ibid: 129), “the producers are experts,” and “imitation finally becomes absolute...Having ceased to be anything but style it reveals the latter’s secret: obedience to the hierarchy” (ibid: 131).[[87]](#footnote-85) It also skates dangerously close to revealing the secret of the ghost, and as I have described, this type of revelation and end to haunting is not proper to haunting.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1944: 139) further write that “the promise, which is actually all the spectacle consists of, is illusory: all it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu,” and that this “aesthetic sublimation” is actually a form of repression for those involved. There is not an option for those dealing with ghosts to imagine their subject-matter in any way other than the what is already laid out in the archive of Internet media “data,” which I will return to in Part II. Ghosthunters are part of an industrially produced culture that means people no longer need to imagine; their only task is to collect and consume. All is homogenized, and what remains of diversity is trivial at best. As with Adorno and Horkheimer’s example of the predictability of the ending of films (because of the existence of prior films which follow the same pattern), ghosthunters always already know what data they will be taking from the field and placing in archives—the ghost is encrypyted on the Internet, but it is a open secret. As has been shown by the examples of the GRFI and GhosthCon, not to mention the leisure and tourism industry based on ghosts, the aims of the culture industry are always to some degree economic in nature.

Spiritualism’s inevitable succumbing to the imperatives of producing material evidence (rather than communicating with the dead, itself a capitalist enterprise, of course) has implications for the ways in which audio-visual media is now used to engage with ghosts. There is validity to Heidegger’s warning that dependence on technology hides all other possibilities. As Chris Chesher (1996: 135) writes, “a blacked out city has greater dangers than a city accustomed to the dark.” It is possible that the media methodologies of ghostshunters may shed too much light on ghosts, illustrating that the origin of the desire to pursue ghosts in the first place--to transgress boundaries in order to communicate with other worlds, with longed-for absent others-- has been forgotten. This desire, though, is still part and parcel of the uncanny, of the inevitability of ghosts to keep haunting, of others to keep provoking us to take a risk, to be hospitable, because they constitute ourselves.

Peters (1999: 31), in the introduction of his book on the history of communication and technology, notes that “the requirement of interpersonal mimesis can be despotic. Ralph Waldo Emerson and William James struck the right note: acknowledging the splendid otherness of all creatures that share our world without bemoaning our impotence to tap their interiority.” As the late psychical researcher and ghosthunter Ralph Noyes (1999) remarks, the darker a place, the more opportunities exist for that which should have remained hidden to appear. If we embrace the dark as that which maintains the secret of others, then perhaps we reduce the danger of missing out on the illuminations of others: suddenly emergent dialectical images—uncanny representations--forming constellations of ghosts that transgress perceived borders and boundaries.

As Heidegger described, the essence of technology contains the extreme danger to humankind of threatening the loss of what is most essentially human, our capacity for new revealing; ghosthunting methodologies exacerbate this danger in that they are used expressly for the purpose of revealing the secret of the ghost, risking its potential to debut as something uncanny. Having professed faith in the revelatory capacities of representational media, ghosthunters return again and again to their methods and media in order to archive—not for the sake of revelation but rather to confirm what has already been revealed, and to add to it in volume, as we will see in the Part II of the thesis, which furthers my argument that contained in media is both the potential to maintain the false dichotomy of the other/the West of anthropology, but also the possibility to stand as critique because of the ongoing relationship to ghostly others of media.

**PART II: GHOSTS AND MEDIA**

**INTRODUCTION AND OVERVEIW OF PART II:**

**REPRESENTING THE INVISIBLE**

Having established ghosthunting as a metaphor for anthropology, replete with audio-visual methodologies that are less discursively critical than they are traditionally ethnographic, I now turn to audio-visual media as it relates to and “produces” ghosts, with the aim of ultimately suggesting some media methodologies for anthropology that may function as a form of critique. Media representations of ghosts—bringing to light the uncanny figure that should have remained hidden--are essentially about representing the invisible, whether these representations are image-, sound-, or text-based. I begin Part II with two chapters on the connection between ghosts and photography; Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 show this to be a connection that points to the possibility of engagements with others that serve as radical and ethical engagements with photographs and their archives, with the “dialectical images” produced by historically “haunted” media standing as an ethical injunction towards others. Even in the contemporary marketplace of commercial tourism, in online scientific archives, and cutting edge museums of ethnology, ghosts will always appear and disrupt the rational order of things; they shed light and provoke the suspicion that the categories and borders of time and place, and particularly self and other, are not as rigid as we may think they are. Chapter 6 then considers non-photographic audio-visual methods of engaging with others to represent the invisible, specifically sound recording and film, in order to argue that the haunted provenance of audio-visual media enables it to engage with others via critical media methodologies that differ to ethnographic writing.

I first turn to photography as it relates to ghosts in order to lay out some suggestions about the use of visual media in particular as a form of critique within anthropology, where the visual has come to signify that which supplements, or sometimes stands in opposition, to the written. Before more recent debates concerning the place of media in general within anthropology, photography and film had already come to constitute the sub-discipline of visual anthropology, and photography in particular has a long and problematic relationship to cultural others, in the context of images produced under the auspices of colonialism or early forms of ethnology; see for example Christopher Pinney (2008) on how photography has functioned as both a cure and poison in India, but ultimately constitutes a disturbance, as I have argued is the nature of ghosts. Photography has also been a cornerstone of earlier forms anthropological critique, with the photographs of Margaret Mead in Bali or the Dakar-Djibouti expedition to colonial Africa, discussed in the Introduction, offering enlightenment about the manifestations of cultural others as a form of relativism.

Eduardo Cadava, in his text *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (1998), evokes Walter Benjamin’s (1931) understanding of photography as a metaphor for history and a requisite of philosophy itself. For Benjamin, the connection is ultimately to do with light, recalling Henry Talbot Fox’s (1844-1846) understanding of photography as writing in light. Cadava writes that this photographic light, for Benjamin, is not just about bringing things to light in a revelatory manner, as Heidegger described, but about the flashes that both blind and illuminate simultaneously – or as Benjamin describes “profane illumination” in the *Arcades Project* (1995: 256), knowledge that “comes in lightning flashes.”

In order to assess the usefulness of photography as a mode of critique within anthropology, Part II of my thesis argues that photography of ghosts has both “blinded” and “illuminated,” and like all audio-visual media is dialectical. Chapter 4 discusses historical spirit photography, and the ways in which the initial mysterious appearance of ghosts in photographs quickly became a matter of trickery for profit. Older forms of photography, however, stand in contrast to the newer digital forms practiced today. Chapter 5’s focus is on the ways in which the contemporary digital photography practiced by most ghosthunters and many anthropologists today tends to be “blinding,” rather than illuminating, in its attempts to reify others as data or knowledge for the archive. However, inherent to both photography and its archives is their historical relationship to ghosts, which constitutes their potential to engage with the other in a way that is more akin to illumination. This critical capacity of photography likewise illuminates the potential of audio-visual media to stand as anthropological critique.

Photography’s relation to ghosts is connected to its relation to death. Cadava (1998: 8) writes that “the home of the photographed is the cemetery,” and this was of course Barthes’ (1980) realisation about the uncanny temporality of recorded audio-visual media that I introduced in the thesis Preface: that the people in old photographs are already dead, but are also going to die. As Cadava (1998: 8) writes:

The photograph tells us we will die, that we will no longer be here, or rather we will only be here the way we have always been here, as images. It announces the death of the photographed. This is why what survives in a photograph is also the survival of the dead—what departs, desists, and withdraws. [[88]](#footnote-86)

There can be no image that is not an image of death. Heidegger (1929: 64) likewise writes that what links death to photographs is their capacity to reveal the process of image in general—the death mask, for example, is like the photograph of a dead person and a corpse: both show how something appears (even as it departs), “in general.” Ghosts, in the most classical sense, are first and foremost appearances—that is, they are apparitions, experienced visually, and “apparently” outside of oneself.[[89]](#footnote-87) Certainly audio, tactile, and other sensory phenomena may be attributed to ghosts, and the voices of ghosts that may seemingly be “revealed” by audio recordings is a topic in the next part of this thesis. But ghosts have more generally and historically been associated with the perceived *appearance* of a person who has died—“the dead can become visible as spirits,” as Freud (1919: 242) put it. The complete “exteriority” of the other that Levinas noted, ghosts, like the others of anthropology, can be nothing else except exterior, as appearance*.*

An examination of the roots of the English word *ghost* underscores the relationship between ghosts and image-based media. Ralph Noyes (1999: 245) has pointed out the richness of European terminology of ghosts, “particularly as we come further north into regions of extended darkness” (alluding, perhaps, to increased opportunities for ghosts to “come to light,” as Freud described the process of the uncanny).[[90]](#footnote-88) Obviously, the English word *spectre*, as derived from the Latin and the 16th Century French *spectrum*, denotes appearance and vision, as does the word *apparition*. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary entry for the English word *ghost*, many words related to the contemporary words *soul* and *spirit* are based on a sense of the visual. For example, the Greek *phantasma*, like the Polish *widmo*, derives from Old Church Slavonic *videti*, meaning “to see;” the Old English *scin* and the Old High German *giskan* both originally referred to “appearance” or “apparition,” and were related to the Old English *skinan*, from the Old High German “to shine.”[[91]](#footnote-89) Similarly, the notion of returning is suggested by the etymology of *ghost* (*revenant*, related to the French *revenir*). The emphasis is on appearances and repetition--ghosts are representations of something that has already happened, though even as they debut and “appear” they remain secretive and obscure.[[92]](#footnote-90)

As we have seen, to resolve a haunting is not of the concept of haunting; to reveal the secret of the ghost, as Colin Davis (2005) describes it, in order to assimilate the ghost into an established order of knowledge--to render it “canny”--denies the ghost its very ghostliness. This is the hauntological strand of Derrida, rather than Abraham and Torok; as with Freud’s concept of repression, what is forgotten or repressed may be revealed but not resolved. Rather, it circulates free of its original meaning, “debuting” endlessly. In the case of ghosts what is revealed are appearances, apparitions.[[93]](#footnote-91) Though they are “unconcealed,” their origins are never properly remembered, which is what makes them uncanny. An apparition is therefore defined by the experience of this revealing, by its appearance: the sudden illumination of the ghost, but not necessarily the ghost’s secret; the experience—and appearance--of secrecy, of the uncanny other itself. In Part II, in order to ultimately draw some general conclusions about visual methodologies of anthropology –as well as to set up my contrasting of the non-photographic media discussed in Chapter 6--I outline the ways in which this secret may be kept by ghost photography, but also the ways in which, more often than not, it is revealed.

Shawn Michelle Smith (2013) has written that photography’s origins lie with making visible what was once impossible to see with the human eye, and that the question must be asked: what fails to register and what remains in the frame? With the photographs of ghosts discussed in the chapters of Part II there is a need to ask an opposite question: what registers that shouldn’t and what is absent in the frame that perhaps should be seen? Chapter 4 discusses the history of spirit photography as the root of ghosthunting practices today. For spirit photography, what is absent from the frame is the preparation and development processes, during which ghosts were superimposed or “developed” onto the plates or film--sometimes in “error,” but oftentimes manipulated by the photographer, who was often a psychical medium working in conjunction with the medium of the camera (as I have noted, mediums often accompany ghosthunters because it’s believed they may be able to “sense” more than the non-mediums; this is along lines of El Guindi’s (2009: 63) assessment that an anthropologist immersed in a culture will be able to take a photograph that “tells more”).

Chapter 5 turns to contemporary digital photographs, where it is the editing and dissemination processes that are invisible, as well as the inner workings of phone cameras--not to mention the particular lenses and apps that produced them--that are absent from the frame.[[94]](#footnote-92) Paolo Favero (2014(a): 14) has written of the ways in which digital phone photography has fundamentally changed the notion of the photographic “frame” by finger-tip zooming: “highlighting the mobility and liquidity of contemporary frames, smartphones…urge us to acknowledge the changing meaning of visibility and invisibility in the context of image-making.” Smith (2013) also asks the following of photography: what is hidden by design and what is obscured by cultural blindness? As Chris Wright (2008) has argued, photography can only ever be understood as a series of local “photographies” that come to be because of the metaphysics of the technology of photography and the local ontologies in which photographic practices occur. With the contemporary photos of ghosts, created to be shared on archives such as ghosthunting websites or people’s Instagram accounts, the many localities of photographs within social media archives result in the creation of meta-pictures (Favero 2014(a)). In this way, contemporary forms of photographs have seemingly less authorial agency at their root than other forms of image making or writing.

Beyond these contexts of photography, the technology of photography--the camera--was once understood to be a transparent conduit that merely inscribed the image in light, but as Ariela Azoulay (2013: 70) has argued, “it rapidly became apparent that the camera possesses its own character and drives.” It generates events that aren’t necessarily anticipated or intended by the photographer, and functions as an opaque tool; the camera is indeterminate and even ghost-like in the uncertainty of whether it is on or off, hiding, or present or absent. Azoulay (ibid) writes of the camera that it is “no longer just seen as a tool in the hands of its user, but as an object that sows powerful forms of commotion and communion.” With historic spirit photography and the contemporary photography of ghosthunters, as well as with photography in the context of anthropology, the camera can conjure events just by being there, and it can draw events to it--or it can prevent events from happening. It is a mistake to understand the photographic event as standalone, with an inside and outside of the frame because, as Azoulay (ibid: 77) argues, “the photographic event is never over.” This is what I have tired to argue about haunting itself: the end of haunting is not “of” haunting, and to try to reveal the secret of the ghost is try to end the haunting.

While in many ways ghosthunting photography effaces the uncanny, my engagement with photography in Part II seeks foregrounds the uncanny and the ways in which it is therefore of relevance to anthropology. The camera both reifies and is resistant to that process, as I will show.

Like ghosts, photographs are only suspended in anticipation, not something that can be pinned down with certainty. As an event, photography is imbued with a temporality that is made up of an infinite series of encounters. As Azoulay (2013) puts it, the photograph continues the event of photography that happened elsewhere. Traces from those present in the encounter of photography are present in the photograph--“that which is seen, the referent of the photograph in other words, is never a given but needs to be constituted to precisely the same degree as the interpretations which have become attached to it” (ibid: 77), but with the photographs discussed in Part II, these referents are ghosts. The concept of traces therefore takes on different meanings, depending on whether the context is historical spirit photography (where the ghostly traces that appeared on photographs were often the result of trickery or else because of something happening within the “opaque” camera itself) or the contemporary digital photographs of today (which are easily manipulated both before and after the photographic event, intentionally or not). As Azoulay (ibid) writes, the camera and photography implicate “a certain form of human being-with-others in which the camera or the photograph are implicated,” and for this reason “the ontology of photography is at base a political one.”

As John Durhan Peters (1999: 139), in his own study of ghosts and their relation to modern communications technologies, has noted, “every new medium is a machine for the production of ghosts.” As discussed in Part I, towards the end of the nineteenth century, when photography and telegraphy became more commonplace, media technology developments were as much about the expansion of scientific knowledge as they were about communication; the two, of course, are hardly mutually exclusive, with the quest to communicate over time and space not just about transgressing the boundaries of the physical world, but the spiritual one as well—different forms of Azoulay’s “being-with-others.” As Eric Davis writes (2002: 22) “new technologies of perception unfold new worlds of sublimity and threat, worlds which challenge us to reconfigure the limits of ourselves and to shape the meaning of the new spaces we find ourselves in.” In this way, audio-visual media have always functioned as an opening for engaging with the others of different worlds in ways that ultimately help have bearing on our own world, which is why they should be of particular value to anthropologists.

According to Peters (1999: 180), “spiritualism, and its later scientizing offshoot, psychical research, is a chief vehicle for the formation of ideas about communication in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” Not just the desire to gaze upon or speak to physically absent loved ones, or the quest for visual evidence of spiritual contact at séances, but also the need to hear ghostly others rapping back to our taps on the wall: these imperatives to communicate beyond boundaries have facilitated the production of technologies that allow us to do so. Having discussed the ways in which the occularcentrism inherent to the development of spirit photography led to on-going imperatives to archive contemporary ghost photography, the remainder of Part II focuses on other media forms in order to argue that the desire to communicate with others is part and parcel of the radical alterity that ultimately makes us responsible for the other, and that audio-visual media is hence placed to critically placed to “communicate” with rather than just represent, its others as anthropology.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I posit that the iterative and mimetic qualities of photography, particularly in its digital form, allow it to function dialectically: it both reifies and freezes others in time and in the frame, but may also call into question the notions of linear time and a bounded frames themselves. While a concern with the ethics and politics surrounding anthropological texts and temporality emerged in the wake of Johannes Fabian’s *Time and the Other* (1983), anthropological conceptions of time have not been viewed in light of the deconstructive possibilities of the uncanny. The uncanny as a form of critique facilitated by the relation of media to time (both its haunted history and its technical relationship to it) remains underexplored within anthropology.

In Chapter 6 I therefore explore two ways in which audio-visual media—as both a tool of communication and a recording device--may function as critique by virtue of its relation to temporality and its related ability to represent the invisible in the form of ghosts or the uncanny in general. In particular I focus on the iterability of digital media texts through time, as with sound recordings, and the dyschonric temporality of the edited images and soundtracks of films. While both ghosthunting and anthropology have tended to be occularcentric in their use of audio-visual media, Chapter 6 first focuses on the role of audio in ghosthunting, in order to contrast the critical possibilities of sound with visual techniques. Some of the most paradigm-changing technologies, such as the telephone and later audio recording and transmission, have been those that implicate sound. The need for disembodiment—the separation of the body from the transmitted message--to enable communication over a distance or physically impossible border means that sound is essentially an uncanny medium; like ghosts, it can even travel through walls. But while photography has been understood as “writing in light” (Talbot 1844-46), sound likewise evokes the notion of communication.

According to Steven Connor (1999), in his study of the direct voice phenomenon in Spiritualist circles (whereby a voice or sound would seem to manifest from a distance at a séance), such technologies were preceded by what Alexander Graham Bell’s father, Alexander Melville Bell, termed “visible speech” inventions: technologies that rendered sound visible, much like a written letter; the phonograph, for example, is a means of writing, of inscribing and copying.[[95]](#footnote-93) Of the near-simultaneous invention of phonographs and the telephone Connor (1999: 212) points out that “the effect was both to further ‘materialize’ spiritualism itself and to highlight the ghostliness of the new technological power to separate the voice from its source, either in space, as with the telephone, or in time, as with the gramophone.” Of phonography, Peters (1999: 160) likewise comments that it is defined by its “fidelity, manipulability, liberation from origin, and the overcoming of time and death.” This description applies to the uncanniness of media in general, with the ghostly other maintaining its secret not by virtue of its absence, but by its conjuration as a longed-for disruption and breach of perceived borders.

This first part of Chapter 6 is concerned with sound as it is manifested by the act of recording the invisible in the form of disembodied voices via electronic voice phenomena (EVP), the apparent recording of voices of the dead which are then translated and transcribed as usually cryptic messages from some “beyond.” Steve Feld’s (2015) ideas of acoustemology, the theoretical conjoining of “acoustics” and “epistemology” are a useful for analysing the method and outputs of EVP as a concern of media anthropology; Feld has called for an anthropological engagement with sound, beyond the too-human-centric “anthropology of sound,” that may entail finding ways of knowing and hearing that are experimental in method, like the methods of EVP described in Chapter 6. Engagements with the sonic realm, he reasons, should be expanded to include studies beyond existing anthropological concerns with soundscapes, encompassing the non-human and the fact of technological mediation.

Recording technologies, whatever the type, are reminiscent of John Potts’ (2006) idea of the ghost as a text, discussed in the introduction of the thesis: a figure of the dead returning to the world of the living, that in many ways mirrors the media that ultimately now records and reproduces it. A ghost functions like any media recording: once recorded, it is able to “debut” repeatedly in the present and in the future.[[96]](#footnote-94) Audio-visual recordings of others can function as a sort of “death” of the other, with a recording reifying and freezing the other in time and in the space of the archive. But recording doesn’t necessarily have to entail an “exorcism” of the ghost or the other that is the subject of anthropology. With the EVP, and potentially within audio engagements within anthropology, recording is the initial act that tap into the potential uncanniness of sound to float free from its origins and to haunt and challenge in the present, with recorded messages functioning as an uncanny

communication with the other.

Virilio (1997) writes of “chronopolitics”—the way in which social relations are increasingly based upon the relative speed and technological control of time--and it is this understanding of time and its relation to film that is the subject of the second part of Chapter 6, in which I move beyond the media engagements of ghosthunters and into the realm of “experimental ethnography” as a critical anthropological engagement with film. Film’s relation to time constitutes its relation to haunting: not only is it a recording from the past, projected in the present and future, but in its fabrication as a montage of cuts, juxtapositions of image and sound, and, in cotemporary times, its capacity to be frozen, fast-forwarded, or rewound. The fact of its “motion” is what differentiates its meaning from a still photograph. Rupert Cox and Chris Wright (2012) have written of the relevance of this “motion” in their comparison Steven Feld’s (1990) juxtaposition of two photographs from his fieldworks during the 1970s among the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea. While one photograph appears to be an in-focus, ethnographic photograph of a man in traditional dress, the other photograph is intentionally blurred, apparently more evocative than evidential, but these visual anthropological categorisation, this blurring, for Feld, constitutes an engagement with the “other” based less on occularcnetric rhetoric and more on the senses, particularly sound and the sense of motion, of the event.

Like Feld’s blured photography, film is therefore not necessarily a fixed text, but one comprised of recorded visual and audio elements debuting as something new, with their meanings and messages changing because of the editing process and then suspended in time like Feld’s blurred photograph. I conclude Chapter 6 and Part II by expanding upon the connection between representing the invisible, temporality and film, and discuss ways in which anthropology has, via “experimental ethnography,” and more recently, “sensory ethnography” experimented with various forms of audio-visual media in order to produce ethical engagements with others that acknowledge the uncanniness of this act of communicating across space, time and culture--essentially representing the invisible as an audio-visual media methodology indicative of Derrida’s hauntology, the lens through which I suggest anthropology view its future engagements with media as a form of critique

**CHAPTER 4**

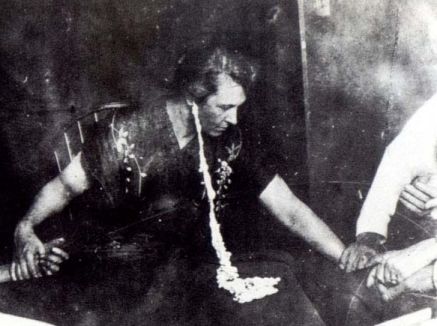
**SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHY AND ITS OTHERS**

**Occularcentrism and the Revelation of Others**

Steven Connor (1999) has written convincingly of the ways in which Spiritualism was ultimately subsumed by the occularcentric developments in representational media technologies during its heyday in the latter-half of the nineteenth century, even as the rhetoric of Spiritualism itself was devoted to the furthering of communications technologies, particularly audiological and transmissive ones. In the spirit photography of that time, writes Connor (1999: 208), “otherness is made visible and familiar, and the unmasterable event of the manifestation becomes the fixed and manipulable record.” This defining factor of early Spiritualism has been the predominant legacy for “dealing with ghosts” in contemporary times, and forms the basis for contemporary digital photography and archivisation practices, discussed in the next chapter. In Chapters 5 and 6, ghosthunting is established as an occularcentric discipline with photography serving as the basis from which to contrast the ways in which audio may be used to engage with others, and finally, to expand upon the radical possibilities of the visual in the form of film in Chapter 6.

Ariela Azoulay (2011: 67) has stated that “the many users of photography…never ceased from inventing new forms of being with others through photography.” In Chapter 4, I discuss the ways in which Spirit Photography emerged and developed as a form of being with others through the medium of the camera. Indeed, as soon as photography was invented, it was used to conjure otherwise invisible others at a distant--as portraiture of the recently deceased that functioned as a memorial or form of communion for those survivors left behind, or as a document of the cultural others of faraway lands, functioning as a warning, a temptation, or a re-assurance for those in the West about presumed racial and cultural hierarchies. Understanding the ways in which photography has dealt with ghosts historically, and how its very development as a technology was bound up with the drives to communicate with and to produce evidence of others, both underscores my metaphor of ghosthunting and anthropology and sheds light on the ways in which photography, as medium, may facilitate engagements with others that function in different, potentially radical ways.

With the establishment of photography as a “record” and the measure of objective truth, the séance was orientated increasingly around the need to produce visible traces, as the reality of manifestation became measured against the possibility of recording. Transient and ethereal forms of spiritual communication gave way to those forms that were more recordable; wall-rapping and trembling tables were replaced by automatic writing, for example. Organising a séance around the expectation and possibility of a photograph hence obscured the dominance of the séance’s non-visual experiences, according to Connor (1999). Even ectoplasm—that material manifestation of ghosts (transformed into the ultimate trinket for the ghosthunters in one of the more popular fictional filmic accounts of ghosthunting, *Ghostbusters* (1984)), is less a visceral experience than a visual one, ripe for photographing by Spiritualists or for gross-out moments in a more contemporary feature film. Photograph 1, below, depicts the medium Mina Crandon with an ectoplasmic manifestation.[[97]](#footnote-95)



**Photograph 1: Mina Crandon with ectoplasm, Boston, USA, circa 1923**

As Walter Ong (1981, 2002) has noted, the difference between a visual-typographic perspective and an oral-aural perspective is being in front of the world versus being in the middle of it. Vision always “situates man in front of things, and sequentially,” according to Ong (1981: 28). Prior to the emphasis on the evidential-occularcentric modes of conduct among those concerned with ghosts from the 1850s there was a

growing emphasis on visual scrutiny as new forms of scientific illustration and printing techniques made closer and more various forms of inspection of the natural world possible.[[98]](#footnote-96) This conceptual re-organisation made natural history "nothing more than the nomination of the visible," to use Foucault’s (1966: 132) phrase, with early optical technologies used by scientists to capture previously unseen worlds such as outer space and microscopic biological worlds. And as John Harvey (2004) points out, the first radiograph in 1895 occurred forty-five years after the first incidences of apparent spirit photography. X-rays, of course, show the unseen world inside the body, and William Crookes’ discovery (using the concept of “effleuvium”) led to the search for other invisible and so called “vital forces,” such as the promotion of animal magnetism by Hans Mesmer, and later the Od force, k-rays and n-rays, not to mention ether, all eventually scientifically disproven.[[99]](#footnote-97) Crookes’ photographic breakthrough stood as proof that the invisible—and the effects thereof—could nonetheless be made to manifest visibly, and were thus scientifically verifiable and potentially identifiable.

Later photographic developments such as Kirlian photography during the early 1980s continued to contribute to the notion of photography as a somehow visually revelatory technology. When an electronic charge was applied to a leaf, part of which had been amputated, an aura of the missing part still glowed on film, raising the question of whether spirit photography was caused by similar residual emanation; aura photography, a regular feature at many contemporary ghosthunting events and psychic shows, is enacted in much the same way as historical spirit photography, with the photographer-medium “laying hands” on the Polaroid camera, but with the hues of a client’s “aura” in the resulting photograph analysed and psychic-counseling offered to the client.[[100]](#footnote-98) The camera has thus been taken up as a technology that can yield scientific veracity, as it reveals unseen forces, faces, and auras, not to mention symptoms.

John Rajchman (1988) points to Foucault’s hypothesis of the "positive unconscious" of vision that determines not what is seen, but what *can*be seen; not all the ways of visualizing or making visible are possible at once, as any period of time allows some things to be seen and others not. This is certainly the case with spirit photography, where ghosts had never appeared on the early daguerreotypes and only emerged when methods were developed that required adjustments to plates and chemicals by the photographer prior to or during the photographic shot. Gary Beegan’s(2008) analysis of the “mass image” traces the origins of modern visual culture to the illustrated journalism of the 1890s. Photomechanical reproduction, rather than clarifying printed images or bringing greater neutrality to journalism, produced a confusing landscape of fragments of hand-drawn and photographic imagery. Examples of images in print media during this time parallel the production techniques of spirit photography of the same period, such as a collage-like cutting and pasting of mixed media (seen below for a later example of this type of “collage” in Photograph 4) and illustrate the ways in which seeing and thinking are thus historically determined.

The very concept of the image, as hypothesized by Jacques Rancière (2007), is that it originates in the brain, rather than the retina. To see is to think and what we think is structured by what we see: ghosts—whether observed or recorded by visual technology—are only meaningful in conjunction within specific historical and cultural contexts. This is what Barthes (1977: 157) calls the ‘lexicon of a person’s idiolect’.” Harvey (2004: 157) elaborates:

In the context of photography and spirit this lexicon includes the iconographic codes governing the representation of supernatural beings in Western religious art, and certain pre-suppositional beliefs regarding the scientific credibility of the means of recording, the survival of the soul, and the possibility of communication between the living and the dead.

As with anthropological museum archives, which, in the words of Scott McQuire (1997: 704) “enabled the division of foreign bodies into purely visual categories, allowing the insertion of different peoples into pseudo-Darwinian hierarchies of human development,” so too has the occularcentrism inherent in the pursuit of ghosts determined (and been determined by) the primarily visual technologies, methodologies, and categories of apparitional experience and evidence.

**The Development of Spirit Photography**

According to John Harvey (2004: 157), in his wide-ranging survey of spirit photography (particularly within the British context) “the diversity of spectral form testified not only to varieties of idiolect but also to developments in the visual language and technology of representation; photography revised received pictorial models for rendering ghosts, in accordance with its medium and technical characteristics.” Harvey’s particular narrative of spirit photography—a genre that enjoys an extraordinarily rich and convoluted history told through numerous primary, and sometimes conflicting texts--is worth discussing in some detail here because unlike other accounts, he understands the genre as an evolving continuum towards the digital-consumer/collector activity that it is today. His text traces the usual links between visual ghosts, religion, and science, but Harvey’s subject necessarily requires an emphasis on the recording, rather than the general act of seeing them. He begins his history with the graphic illustrations of fairies, spirits, and devils included in Protestant and Catholic publications in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that were primarily created to prepare people for death and ward off atheism. Harvey notes that such accounts were often so complicated that the accompanying images were partial and lacked any nuance of the text. Such engravings were not evidential, auratic or spiritual in nature. Rather, their inclusion was supplemental to the text, with proof coming from the testimony of witnesses, rather than any murky image.[[101]](#footnote-99)

The perceived substance of ghosts changed over time, as determined by developments in artistic medium. Crude woodcuttings would give way to fine-line engravings by the 1820s. Likewise, ghosts in the form of decaying corpses in the Middle Ages would come to wear flowing clothes, until they were eventually portrayed as more solid, if somewhat luminous, figures resembling the living in the spirit photography of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Harvey draws parallels between religious “visions” of Jesus and the Virgin Mary—events that have their own photographic history, usually involving a re-staging of the circumstances of the “vision” in order to portray it photographically. By the time Spiritualism and séances gained popularity, photography democratised the experience of spiritual manifestations, with all being able to witness the vision of the spirit. Photographs were the “visual propaganda” of Spiritualism, confirmation not only of ghosts but also of the movement’s own achievements. Like Medieval religious artefacts, spirit photographs, according to Harvey (2004: 30), “served to fortify the faith of the faithful and to disarm the doubter’s disbelief.”

Furthermore, the appearance of ghosts in this earlier spirit photography is reminiscent of the representation of spiritual beings in traditional Christian art and visions, with luminosity and vapourousness appearing like the aura found in much religious iconography. Photograph 2, taken by one of the first well-known spirit photographers, Frederick Hudson, evokes the shrouded Medieval apparitional type. Harvey (2004: 26) points out that both photography and spiritualism shared the common goal of creating “an enduring image”: one a permanent print, the other a permanent paranormal object standing as evidence. Collaboration between the two required “a Spiritualist sensitive and a light-sensitive plate” (ibid), a connection the recalls alchemy, a chemical-spiritual quest that would spawn the invention of photography. As with the clothes-of-ghosts debate, spirit photography raised the question of whether the manifestation was produced by the photographer—as medium—or whether other, supernatural, forces were at work in or beyond the camera. As with the Turin Shroud and the Veronica Veil[[102]](#footnote-100), many believed the images in spirit photography originated externally to the camera, with the camera acting as medium to record and reveal the message of truth in the form of a “vision.” It is for this reason that Andrew Glendinning (1874), in his edited text on Spiritualism, championed the term of “spirit photography” (implying the spirits were at work, with the camera as medium) over “psychic photography” (implying the spirit-image was produced by the photographer acting as a medium).



**Photograph 2: “Mr. Raby with the Spirits ‘Countess,’ ‘James Lombard,’ ‘Tommy,’ and the Spirit of Mr. Wootton's Mother.” Frederick Hudson, circa 1875**

As Connor (1999) describes, unlike the earlier raps, voices, and other un-authenticable spirit manifestations, spirit photography offered “an enduring and reviewable and expression of disembodied consciousness,” according to Harvey (2004: 27). Even before photography, images were a way of re-embodying the dead; Hans Belting (2011) points out that death masks and early funerary rituals served the purpose of representing the missing bodies of the dead, and making the absent present again. And yet, as Kaja Silverman (2015) has written, early photographs weren’t really fixed. Indeed, before chemical fixing was invented the photographic image emerged very slowly, and sometimes it even retreated back in to darkness. Silverman (2015) points out that photography used to be associated with the verb “to receive;” it took half a century for it to become “to take”, “shoot” or “capture.” This of course links with Levinas’s quote, underscored by Derrida in his memorial for him, about “receiving” the other as a guest. As Derrida (1999: 25) reminds us, Levinas’s opening pages of *Totality and Infinity* tell us that to welcome the other is to:

…welcome his expression…It is therefore to *receive* [Levinas’s emphasis] from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity.

The other always brings to us something “more” from the exterior, something extra or surplus, that we receive. On the one hand, photographs themselves may be viewed as “supplemental” to text and this has certainly been the case within anthropology. On the other, it is meaningful that the ghostly others that appear in spirit photographs and contemporary digital photos alike are often referred to as “extras,” the unexpected others that potentially evoke the non-linear and infinite nature of time and space. Photography’s historical capacity to “bring to light” and reveal those otherwise invisible others whose “extraness” illuminates the political possibilities of questioning temporality and distance and is a good starting point for understanding the “haunted” nature of all audio-visual media, and particularly the ways in which visual media functions in ways that differ from audio and other non-photographic media. Below I delve into this history in some detail, focusing on the ways in which spirit photography developed as a “medium,” and the ways in which its the occularcentric rhetoric surrounding spiritualism would come to influence the appearance and development of the others that were subject-matter.

**Function and Theories**

Spirit photography served the tri-fold purpose of providing proof for Spiritualism, consoling the bereaved, and providing “evidence” of the afterlife. The setting of spirit photographs is often indicative of this, the neo-Gothic aura of the photographs counter-balanced by the quasi-scientific studio setting, an arrangement Harvey claims was borrowed from early anthropological photography of others. Indeed, as Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor (1997) have pointed out in their accessible manual on ethnographic filmmaking, photographers and filmmakers always bring with them the a knowledge of “style” that informs their practice and media outputs. In some cases, the connections between organized religion and spirit photography were obvious in the photographs themselves; Ada Deane’s *Armistice Day* series (the last of which was taken in 1924—see Photograph 3) bears a striking resemblance to popular composite photographs of preachers of 19th century (and was later revealed to be comprised of clippings of newspaper photographs of regional boxers).[[103]](#footnote-101) As for its function as a tool for mourning, Spiritualism waned from the 1890s, but a resurgence occurred following World War I, with many people feeling that standard Christianity simply could not sufficiently address life after death after close to a million war deaths and countless casualties.

Harvey understands spirit photography to have added to the existing “ritual and professionalization of bereavement” (ibid). As with the popularity of death-bed photography, spirit photography, as a commercial activity, was the equivalent of the eighteenth century style of theological reassurance. But rather than focusing on Christ to allay fears of death, spirit photographs had an anthropocentric focus on self and survival of self. Spirit photographs, like any trinket or souvenir, weren’t without propaganda. Religious hegemony was often a “cause” featured in the photos (and in general at séances)—the spirits pictured were often leaders from across religions, or “primitive Spiritualists” such as Native Americans.[[104]](#footnote-102) Ghosts, as a primarily visual phenomenon, offered credibility to Spiritualism once they were recorded in photographs. At séances, manifestations of ghosts were vulnerable to being exposed as fake and even accosted by members of the circle. Once exposed as photographs, however, they became unverifiable and untouchable (at least until they were publicly debunked, but even then they usually had their defenders, such as Doyle in the case of Deane and several other well-known photographers).



**Photograph 3: “Armistice Day.” Ada Deane, 13 November 1924**

The evolution of spirit photography may be summed up as follows: during the 1860s, ghosts in the photos usually advanced forwards between the sitter and the lens as if superimposed; usually, the spirit’s face was as clear as that of the sitter. By the 1880s, which Harvey marks as the beginning of the “second phase of spirit photography,” the spirit no longer appears on the same scale or as a complete figure; the American spirit photographer William Mumler’s use of the wet collodian process during the 1870s constituted a technical revolution of sorts, with the sitter and the ghost appearing more elegantly superimposed together. By the late 1880s, the dry gelatine process was in widespread use, entailing plates that could be prepared in advance, so that it was possible for the photographer to manipulate them ahead of a sitting.[[105]](#footnote-103) By the 1890s and up until 1940, spirit photography was “marked by a coarsening of effect” (Harvey 2004: 89). Enlarged lanterns, faster shutter speeds, quicker silver printing papers with enhanced contras led to invention and variety on the part of photographers, which made some viewers suspicious: as with any “natural” phenomenon, ghosts were expected to appear the same each and very time. As Harvey (ibid: 89) puts it, “manifestations of the eternal soul (if authentic) ought not to be subject to the vicissitudes of fashion and style.”

The American psychical researcher Hans Holzer would write in 1970 that most spirit photographs aren’t faces of the dead but “faithful reproductions of photographs or paintings of them while in the flesh [and] this is so universally true that one would have to condemn almost all psychic photos taken over the past hundred years” (ibid: 92). Despite the fact that by the turn of the nineteenth century it was obvious to most observers that many of the ghosts of spirit photography were derived from other representations—other photos, engravings, paintings—spirit photography continued on in large part because the question remained whether the photographer or medium surreptitiously altered the photographic plates or neglected to clean them, or whether spirit photography was truly a spiritual intervention or imprintation. Vignetting and retouching were well-known “tricks” used for entertainment in Victorian *carte-de-visite* that featured “resurrected” celebrities seated alongside the living, or the doubling of people and the splicing of backgrounds. So although there was an awareness of the possibilities of photographic manipulation, the question of spirit photography remained open because of uncertainty surrounding the ghosts’ origin and what they represented. The photographs of ectoplasmic collages that emerged during the 1920s and 1930s, such as Photograph 4, may have looked “fake” even by the standards of the time, but many were willing to give such images the benefit of the doubt, attributing spiritual transference to the cut and paste nature of some photographs, echoing the Surrealists insistence on the automatism of collage techniques being practiced at the time.[[106]](#footnote-104)



**Photograph 4: “Conan Doyle's Return” (enlarged detail). Dr. Thomas Glendenning Hamilton,** **circa 27 June 1932**

Harvey writes that by the end of the nineteenth century, spirit photography took the opposite trajectory to most other art forms of that time: rather than becoming more refined and sophisticated, it looked increasingly “cack-handed” and unpersuasive. This might be the case with regard to spirit photography as a scientific or classical-art medium, but its not hard to see that spirit photographs of the twentieth century actually resembled the collages being made by the Surrealists and their predecessors at a similar point in time. Traill Taylor, one photographer who experimented with spirit photography, noted in 1893 that some of the ghosts in spirit photography looked like an “atrociously badly vignetted portrait, or one cut oval out of a photograph by a can opener, or equally badly clipped out.” As W.J.T Mitchell (2011) writes of the cloning of images, the fusion of the older spectral life of images with new forms of technical life constitutes the modern mode of image-making and consumption; this has certainly been the case for both spirit photography and surrealist techniques of collage. From the point of view of photographs as an art form, spirit photographs resemble cut-and-paste mixed media experiments, and if anything, this lent credence to the authenticity of the photo--just as surrealist collage techniques relied upon a delving into the subconscious and automatic modes of transference to produce often rough-hewn but authentically surrealist images and texts. As Rachel Moore (1999: 16) has noted, primitivism is “…a projection of one’s own fears onto unknown cultures” but “as a form of projection is just as readily deployed, however, to express the leisure and play so repressed by the authority of culture that emerges, for example, in the Dada movement.”

However, as Harvey (2004: 85) writes, “those who regarded spirit photography as a branch of psychic science often conceived theories of transference in technological terms, using scientific paradigms.” One theory, advocated by Doyle (1922), was that of “psychic transparencies” coupled with glass-plate positives, with spirits using “small projectors” in the unseen ether to produce images to be recorded on the film. The idea that spirits could “choose” to photograph things in the physical world as well as the psychical one was another way of accounting for the odd ectoplasmic muslin cloths, the badly-collaged cuttings from magazines, and other less than realistic features of spirit photography. Representational issues plagued spirit photography: was a spirit in a photograph an actual lost loved one or a mere representation of them? Or were the spirits simulacra, a Rorschach test for their audience who imbued them with new origins and personal memory or meaning?

Doyle’s Society for the Study of Supernormal Pictures had long been interested in the fine-dot aspects of some photographic “extras”--an aspect that didn’t exist in spirit photographs prior to process printing. Though it now seems obvious that such images were clearly clipped from printing press sources such as newspapers, the respected photographers James Coates and F.W. Warrick, who would lead countless experiments in spirit photography in the early twentieth century used this “mystery” as the basis of their “plastication” theory: the theory that the ghosts in the spirit photos are objects, not souls. Plastication theory postulated that spirit photography doesn’t produce images of discarnate spirits, but rather supernaturally produces *images* of the deceased. As Harvey (2004: 98) describes it, “the [spirit] was a prepared and mediated simulacrum of the deceased.” Warrick further conjectured that since many of the spirits in the photographs were obviously representations or pictures, perhaps they were conjured from the memory of the operator, or from some discarnate spirit. The image is fixed in some substance or other and is thus somehow accessible to the spirit. Images of the deceased that are already attached to certain photographic images are burnt into the memory of the bereaved or the deceased, and so the images of the spirits in photos look as if they are already photos. With the plastication theory, spirit photography is therefore similar to automatic painting, where a medium receives images from spirits and paints them in a trance-like state. Harvey (ibid: 100) writes, “accordingly, fake and authentic spirit photographs were rendered indistinguishable in the absence of evidence or deception on the photographer’s or medium’s part.”[[107]](#footnote-105)

Spirit photography would decline in popularity towards the end of the nineteenth century amid several high-profile accusations of fakery (such as that of William Mumler) and then experience a revival in 1920s, amid much critical scientific scrutiny, such as that precipitated and documented by the SPR. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Coates and Warrick would set about testing dozens of mediums and photographic techniques and materials; Coates’s *Photographing the Invisible* (1911) is a technical bible of photography, and includes thousands of experiments, such as his and Warrick’s collaborations with Ada Deane. From the turn of the century until the mid-1920s, a proliferation of reports, illustrations and examples were disseminated in an attempt to “establish a tradition of expectation and representation and a degree of stylistic continuity” (Harvey 2004: 115). Although spirit photographers were never bound by any code of practice or overseeing body, much less any tacit agreement on the iconography of the photos, which might have allowed for the emergence of varying methods and modes of representation, there is a surprising uniformity and eschewing of invention, with particular forms and motifs repeated with “exasperating constancy” (Harvey ibid). Spirit photographers seemed to demonstrate an acute lack of imagination, and a willingness to stagnate, but it must be remembered that spirit photography, like most forms of portraiture in the West, adhere to this business model. There was simply no reason for innovation among spirit photographers unless competitors were doing so.[[108]](#footnote-106) As with the natural world, where “there is no outside text” (Derrida 1974: 163) only the replication of previous results could imply authenticity.

While the popularity spikes in spirit photography corresponded with the U.S. Civil War, and then later with World War I in the UK, the need for the solace of portraiture of this type lessened with time after that. Harvey (2004: 141) thus describes the consequences for the general photographing of ghosts: “relieved of the burden of consolation, the genre could now relinquish the burden of representation.” As with modern painting, relieved by photography of the need to mimic and represent reality, spirit photography could now “pursue a purer path.” As Berger (1972) wrote of photography in general, the early images of ghosts were made to represent something that wasn’t there and then outlived it. The waning of spirit photography as portraiture and the advent of the pursuit of the image of the ghost as a scientific endeavor was co-terminus with the waning of studio photography and of the popularity of Spiritualism, with a new emphasis on leisure photography that would eventually comprise one of the main activities of ghosthunting as a hobby in recent times.

With the rise of leisure photography—and indeed leisure time—there emerged different types of activities for capturing ghosts on film, and hence different types of photographs of ghosts. With the democratization of photography from the 1930s and 1940s, came an increase in the forms that ghosts could take on film. Harvey (2004: 144) writes that “while photographic methods became increasingly standardized, the larger pool of practitioners spawned an unprecedented stylistic diversity in the rendering of ‘extras.’” By the time Warrick began experimenting with the disgraced Ada Deane, following the debunking of her Armistice Day photos, a new iconography of visual representations of ghosts was beginning to emerge with the figure of the ghost looking less and less solid or corporeal.

The photo of the “Brown Lady of Raynham Hall,” published in *Country Life Magazine* in 1936 (see Photograph 5), continues to be iconographic in contemporary times not because its alleged production exemplifies the ideal type of ghostly image (the ghost was actually witnessed by the photographers, not just apparent upon the development of the film, plus it vaguely resembles a human figure, and was taken in a context and at a site that was “known” to be haunted). Its context has now been largely forgotten by the general public, but it is nonetheless digitally multiplied and disseminated around the Internet because the image is a visual match for others in the general popular cultural archive of ghosts, a subject I will now turn to in Chapter 5.



**Photograph 5: “The Brown Lady of Raynham Hall.” Captain Hubert C. Provand and Indre Shira, Norfolk, 19 September 1936**

**CHAPTER 5:**

**CONTEMPORARY DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY:**

**MIMESIS, ITERABILITY AND THE ARCHIVE**

**Photography Has Evolved**

Having described the development of early media representations of ghosts, I am now able to move on to contemporary ocular-and techno-centric contexts that have led to representations of ghosts that no longer resemble humans at all, and that exist as digital images, as audio, or are conjured by the editing processes of film or multimedia. In this chapter, I focus on the digital images that comprise the ever-growing archives of digital photographs of ghosts. Kittler (1998: 11) has described photographic albums as the realms of the dead and in Chapter 3 I discussed the fact that photographic albums depictingthe dead in the form of ghosts now tend to be digital and housed online. Looking at the vast online photographic archives created by ghosthunters would seem to be an exercise in “inane illumination.” That is, rather than producing the sensation of uniqueness--the “aura” that Benjamin perceived in classical works of art requiring the restrictive ritual of hierarchy to invoke their magic—the contents of photographic archives--in their sameness, repetition, and existence as mass object—in fact tend to do the opposite. Of course, contemporary photographs of ghosts are not meant to be works of art, but rather pieces of evidence.

They sit uneasily between entertainment, fraud, and science, with the latter function resulting in complex classification systems and endless digital archives.

In this chapter, I discuss the digital photography and the way in which it seems to stand as evidence (its representations are mimetic, and there’s a certain faith in iterability that the evidence stays pure and doesn’t erode), but also the ways in which it may function dialectically, as a hauntological medium that represents the invisible because of the fact of its uncannienss. I first illustrate the ways in which the technologies of digital photography may produce mimetic copies (orbs look like orbs that look like orbs). I then argue that the digital is dialectical in that it also allows for the uncanny to manifest. Frames fall away (see Favero 2014(a)) when photos are produced and edited and passed around using mobile technology. And archives (whether photographic or the subconscious of one’s mind) are dialectical in that they can be mined and used in radical ways--see for example Paula Amad’s (2010) concept of the “counter-archive” as discussed in the next chapter, and the similarities between WJT Mitchell’s (2011) clonology and Warrick’s plastication theory for spirit photography, as discussed in the last chapter.

Photographs in general are often considered--by both ghosthunters and anthropologists--to be mimetic and hence transcendent of the subjective and limited scope of representational writing. Of course, cameras and other recording equipment are wielded by individuals as much as writing instruments are. The appeal of audio-visual media for many anthropologists and most ghosthunters today has to do with its perceived capacity for recording some visual or sonic reality “as it happened,” apparently unmediated, or perhaps mediated by the independent pull of the technology itself rather than by the person operating it. Just as visual anthropology seemed, for a time, a salve to some of the problems of representational writing, so too has photography been the savior in the drive to record contemporary encounters with ghosts, with various types of medium—primarily photography and video, but increasingly sound recording, not to mention the electronic dissemination of media outputs online—seeming to lend credence to apparently less verifiable data such as collected oral or written accounts of ghosts.

While photographic “evidence” is a dubious concept at best in this context, presenting a visual still recording of a ghost does confirm the existence of something in time, and perhaps more importantly, it evokes the existence *of* time. Photographs by their very nature, as Barthes suggested, evoke the uncanny in the form dyschronia—as do ghosts. And yet the mass of collected contemporary ghost photographs—collected, sorted, and rigorously classified—seem to disavow the uncanny. Each image seems to strive to resemble the one before it, and in most cases the “ghost” in the image seems to be nothing more than a smudge, or small dot of light. But there are lessons to be learned from this evolved form of spirit photography. From the automatism, decoupage and collage of spirit photographs of the past, to the now the generally uncanny fact of the digital archive itself, photographs of ghosts should be viewed as images with the potential to blend times, places, and subjects seamlessly into something new: a visual remix and rethinking of representations of the uncanny and of otherness.

The category of analogue (from the word *analogous*, meaning “like” or “akin,”) is considered, in contemporary media terms, the near opposite of the category of digital, a mode that so often seems to be without a referent and that is prone to being simulacrous in its manner of production and repeatability. Elizabeth Edwards (2005) has argued that analog photography may be better placed to produce the materiality necessary for photographs to move beyond their visuality, and to function as audiological and tactile engagements between the subject and viewer, but Paolo Favero (2014(b): 14) believes that “certain new digital technologies, while acting on the boundary between virtuality and simulation, do also contribute in blurring the distinction between the material and the immaterial.”[[109]](#footnote-107) The particularly mimetic capacity of contemporary media, whereby origins, history, and limits are thwarted via digital recording, transmission, production, and proliferation, is at the heart of its uncanniness, and hence why digital photography—despite the arguably inane examples of endless orbs housed on Internet ghosthunting archives—may nonetheless constitute a hauntological media practice.

Representational mimesis is as much an attraction of media for ghosthunting as it is for anthropology, or indeed any scientific discipline. Anthropology has engaged with photography as a way of salvaging and supplementing evidence (as well as an experimental avenue for attempting to redress some of the issues of postmodern ethnography), but Kirsten Hastrup (1992) has criticized, photographs always go beyond this, and frame only what the anthropologist wants us to see, as well as conjuring up things that weren’t meant to be seen or placing undue emphasis on them; nonetheless, the notion that photographs can mimetically represent and supplement textual accounts of experiences, is shared by ghosthunters, who employ cameras primarily in order to turn personal experiences and observations and fictional and folkloric narratives into infallible data.

Fewer and fewer corporeal and contextually situated photographs of apparent ghosts such as the Brown Lady of Raynham Hall, discussed at the end of Chapter 4, would appear, despite a growing sub-culture of “ghosthunters” increasingly wielding cameras in pursuit of such images on their field site visits. The “best” of the analogue photographs during the latter half of the twentieth century would originate from similarly known-to-be-haunted contexts and sites, and show vaguely human figures, but increasingly the spiritual was moving away from the figurative; Photograph 6 (below) is an image of my mother with a vaguely corporeal figure superimposed over her in the mirror, and is an example of the arranged realism that was by the latter quarter of the 20th century.[[110]](#footnote-108) The formerly solid and clear figures of early ghost photographs eventually gave way to corporeal mists, which would soon evolve into figures such as orbs or abstractly shaped mists. Harvey (2004: 141) writes that:

The defiguration of the spirit of the ghost in spirit photography…reintroduced a sense of the spirit’s strangeness and apartness, depersonalizing the apparition by the removal of traditional signifiers of identity and personhood, and emphasizing instead its status as a phenomenon.



**Photograph 6: “Mirror Ghost.” Stacy Clanton, Allan House, Monticello, Arkansas, USA,**

**circa 1969**

As with the anthropology’s depictions of the others if its study, the evolution of the figure of the photographic ghost is determined by the technological medium that produces it. As Christ Wright (1998) pointed out about anthropological filmmaking, the change to the Sony PC7 camera of having a fold-out screen allowed users to have “split vision”—a change that has resonances of Margaret Mead’s statement in the Introduction about seeing versus looking and anthropological photography. At the present time, the cameras of mobile phones and their attendant settings and apps tend to influence the appearance of the ghost, whereas until the turn of this century, most ghosthunters were still using analogue film cameras, albeit ones whose film, settings and development processes had evolved significantly through the decade. People’s faith and expectation in the authenticity of the ghostly other of photos is therefore determined by the technology that happens to be in use at the time. As was the case with spirit photography by the late nineteenth century, those photos that resemble the original iconography of a ghost too perfectly—the Caspar-shaped, ethereal beings that still find their way into many mainstream horror films (though increasingly less so, as modern horror tropes have also evolved and often involve reflexivity or the guise of “found footage”)[[111]](#footnote-109) are the ones that are most unbelievable and obviously fake. Those that are obviously both unmediated by digital technology but enabled by the immediacy of the technologies are the ones that are held up as being authentic.[[112]](#footnote-110)

**“After” Photography: the Digital**

Fred Ritchin, in his *After Photography* (2009), has attempted to theorise the possibilities of what he considers both the end and the expansion of photography in the face of the digital. We don’t realize, of course, that we are in many ways living in a post-photographic world because (ibid: 1) “digital photography has been configured as a seamless more efficient repetition of the past.” It is both easier to sell the media relating to it, but it also part of the “revolution.” It is also less transparent, as Azoualy (2013) has noted, particular the accompanying technology such as the computer editing suites. As I have noted of ghosthunters, Richtin states the digital makes everything data, just waiting to be reconstituted. It “inhabits the land of in-between, and beyond” (Richtin 2009: 1), and this is certainly evocative of the online archives of digitial photographs of ghosts that I have described. Richtin cautions against viewing digital photography as merely an extension of analogue photography, because each constitutes a different reality and contains different implications: while the digital is glitches and pieces, analogue is continuity. Analogue fades and changes over time, while the digital means the copy is indistinguishable from the original. As Richtin (ibid) writes, “once the images replace the world, photography loses much of its reason for being.” This is one of the dangers of contemporary digital photographs of ghosts that try to shed too much light on their subject-matter by being prescriptive about appearance: photography is no longer a way of “being with others,” to evoke Azoulay’s (2013: 67) statement from the last chapter, but rather a merely tool for data collection.[[113]](#footnote-111)

While one of the major effects of the rise of digital consumer-level cameras has been the change in the appearance of photographic ghosts, another has been the proliferation (and resulting archivisation) of these photos. John Potts (2006: 85) refers to the “many thousands of photographs posted in sites” that seem to lend themselves to indexicality.[[114]](#footnote-112) Indeed, since 1981, ASSAP (the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena), contributing to this drive for classification even as it attempts to debunk common “mistakes” of interpreting ghosts and other anomalies that have been witnessed and especially recorded, has carried out hundreds of studies of apparent photographs of ghosts, and offers various services and advice to help people determining whether an anomalous “extra” is a actually “photographic artefact” or something unexplainable.[[115]](#footnote-113) Maurice Townsend (2010), writing on ASSAP’s webpage concerning photographs of ghosts, addresses the reason for the proliferation of ghost photographs in contemporary times:

The most likely reason why there are so many photographic artifacts is that most people don't realise how significantly cameras differ from ordinary eyesight. Modern digital cameras are highly automated ('point and shoot') meaning that it is possible to take acceptable photos without any knowledge of how photography works. This may well explain why artifacts come as a surprise to many photographers and are sometimes interpreted as paranormal.

Townsend elaborates on the specific ways in which digital cameras produce the particular “classifications” of ghost photos as phenomena; for example, the increased depth of field tends to cause orbs and mists (see Photograph 7, below), while specific modes of photographing built in to the camera, such as “Night Mode,” give rise to unintentional flashing and long exposure resulting in superimpositions, while zooming in or out can often cause certain shapes to be blocked resulting in the appearance of anomalistic shapes.



**Photograph 7: “‘Mist’” Near Ghost Town Along Route 66. Carrie Clanton,**

**Arizona, USA, circa September 2004**

Nonetheless, ASSAP and countless other less skeptical organizations’ websites publish thousands of photos online each year, and a quick web search, particularly for ghosthunting websites, shows that most photos posted are of orbs or mists. Mists, as depicted in Photograph 7, above, tend to occur in night photographs or when there is moisture on the lens due to cold, or if the photographer is smoking near the camera (though none of these conditions were present when I produced the photograph). As is likely obvious to any user of a film or digital camera, orbs, which resemble circles of light and may be various colours or sizes, occur when dust, water droplets, or insects in the air are caught in the flash of the camera. This is not always necessarily the case, according ASSAP and to the many submitters of orb photographs to websites, who claim that a flash was not used or that there were no contaminates that could have caused the orb. Nonetheless, Townsend (2010) maintains that “the very high proportion probably reflects both the popularity and relative novelty of orbs…People are 'discovering' orbs all the time and turning to paranormal societies for help.” The ASSAP website speculates that of the photographs submitted to them since 1981, where the usual moisture and contaminate causes have been ruled out, the majority are photographic “artefacts” in the form of orbs caused by the camera being out of focus or beyond resolution, or by long exposure; a sizeable minority are misidentifications (that is, “simulacra” or objects photographed from strange angles); and a small number are real objects not noticed at the time of the time of the photograph, fakes, or else unexplained.

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**Photograph 8: Orbs in a Cemetery. [Photographer unknown; retrieved from defunct ghosthunting site’s photographic archive circa 2005]**

**Digital Iteration**

Scott McQuire (1997: 689) writes of the “unnerving instability” of digital images, and digital ghost photographs in particular unnerve for any number of reasons, but it is the unstable tendency of the digital to repeat that especially lends to its uncanniness. Digital photographs of ghosts are simulations to be sure, and they are also, as ghosts, simulacra: orbs, as an object, have no real discernable mythical origin, so one is assigned to them so that they may fit into an archive. Ghost photographs, as Townsend notes, also stupefy, as evidenced by the countless photographs uploaded by apparently surprised leisure photographers. But it is the iterablility of ghost photographs that is perhaps most unnerving. Derrida describes iteration as repeatability, elsewhere; there is no such thing, in fact, as a text that cannot repeat. This is the same with images of ghosts: if we don’t already know what to look for, then we can’t identify them when they happen again. Iterability is not just confined to written texts, explains Derrida (1977): iterability, citation, and grafting are found in all signs, which essentially makes them writing.

Ghost photographs, like the concept of any written text leaving its author as presented by the example of the Phaedrus, are a type of pharmakon, and can never actually be signatory, authentic copies. Rather, they are all essentially counterfeits—un-authored simulacra based only on what came before (and what will come after) them in the archive. The iterability of ghost photos does not stop with attempts at translation and authentication. As Harvey (2007) points out, camera phones, offering such a limited degree of control over automated exposure and in-camera (and now, “in-app”) processing, also operate as a dual “medium,” defeating distance and space, with no further need for a spirit medium or traditional photographer. Smart mobile phones furthermore offer “dual verification” by providing what spirit photography used to: connection across a great divide, but also limitless connection and iterablity—elsewhere, but also everywhere.

Iterability is the precondition of contemporary ghost photographs, and represents the impossibility of its rigorous purity, as Derrida (1977) puts it. Analogue photos such as the Brown Lady of Rayham Hall and earlier spirit photographs are now disseminated as digital copies; there is no longer any meaningful original, and the subject-matter of the photo itself functions in uncanny presence-absence terms—half remembered, half forgotten, with new narratives supplied across the digital ether along with each new copy. Digital photos in particular parallel ghosts; their secret is always maintained because their origin is eventually forgotten or else was never revealed or known in the first place. Unlike other “supernatural images,” such as the Veronica Veil, there exists no indexical link to an object of provenance, much less an original analogue photo. This is the case with any non-figurative photo, but perhaps equally so for the few figurative images that still crop up.

For example, Photograph 9, in which a face seems to be visible between the legs of the second and third women from the left, has been “doing the rounds” of the Internet for several years; numerous websites feature the photo, which inevitably draw comments from hundreds of people who claim to be connected to the image and provide various differing narratives of its provenance (see Wiseman 2009a). In some instances, particularly high profile photographs are picked up by British tabloid newspapers, such as Photograph 10, in which the image of a ghost seems to resemble a face or body and occurs at some historical leisure site; in such cases, attempts at re-enactment demonstrate futile attempts at rigorous purity (see Wiseman 2009b), but as with any ghost photograph, the tendency towards iterability through testing and re-staging is already inherent the image.

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**Photograph 9: source unknown**

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**Photograph 10: “Tantallon Castle Ghost.” Christopher Aitchinson, 26 May 2008**

**The Hauntological Possibilities of Photography**

Derrida’s comment that “mastery by reflexivity, mastery by reproducibility and iterability, is also mastery of a future neutralized by calculation and foresight” (Derrida and Stiegler 2002: 102), however, does not necessarily mean that there is not more to be said about and done with photography than the concept of “technics.” The photographs of the archive, taken as a whole, complete with their ascribed multifarious narratives and meaning and the inevitable iterative intertextuality —is hauntological by virtue of being dialectical. Foucualt (1966: 18) writes about suspending the proper name of an object as a method of looking closer: “representation, freed finally from the relation that was impeding it, can offer itself as representation in its pure form.” W.J.T. Mitchell’s (2011: 22) writing on terrorism and cloning link iterability to picture making, with cloning having been “remetaphorized as a figure of speech for all kinds of processes of copying, imitation, and reproduction—as, in other words, an ‘image of image-making,’ or what I have elsewhere called a ‘metapicture.’” Mitchell describes the metapicture as a figure that helps explain the uncanniness of images, “their tendency to look back at the beholder, or seemingly to respond to the presence of the beholder, to ‘want something’ from the beholder” (Mitchell in Grønstad and Vågnes 2006).

Certainly the early spirit photographs, particularly ectoplasmic collages and Warrick and Deane’s collaborations in which “plastication” causes photographs composed of other already-extant photographs, are imbued with this particular type of uncanny spectrality. Such composite images were already metapictures, copies of copies repeated over and over again in such a way as to mix up times and contexts to create a new representation that appeals to the viewer to see—indeed, experience--it as more than a phenomenon. If photographs of orbs and other digitally produced ghost images are inoculated against this radical alerity in the same way, can they offer a different representational possibility of the uncanny appeal of the other—a method for thinking through the ethical hauntology that I am attempting to formulate throughout this thesis?

As I discussed in Chapter 2, Shane McCorristine (2010) has insisted that “seeing ghosts” is indicative of modernity itself. His analysis of the debates surrounding the clothes of ghosts showcases the key questions emanating from the fact that ghosts are primarily visual manifestations.[[116]](#footnote-114) McCorrisine uses this concept of ghosts as stemming from “the minds eye” in his attempt to extend cultural studies of ghosts beyond the non-critical historical narratives such as that of R.C. Finucane (1996) and expand upon newer critical histories of ghosts such as those of Owen Davies (2007), by way of offering connections between what he terms “ghost-seeing” and the beginnings of contemporary thinking on psychology. But his text downplays any technologically determined factors in the production of visual ghosts, not to mention the consequences of contemporary digital iterations in actual ghosthunting archives, and their implications for photography of non-ghostly others. Digital photography constitutes an endlessly repeating cycle mirroring the ghost itself. To trace the visual-technological history of the production and maintenance of visual ghosts is to also explore the representational and hauntological possibilities of recording, of visual representation , and of the uncanniness of others in general.[[117]](#footnote-115) To again invoke Levinas, visual ghosts, if indeed projections of one’s own mind, as McCorristine argues, are also always a projection of the other; critically, within photography these others no longer wear clothes, much less resemble humans, and are technologically determined.

Although personal accounts of ghost-seeing continue to abound, it is in visual recorded form that ghosts mainly proliferate today. While a friend may *tell* us a personal narrative of seeing a ghost, people tend to collectively experience ghosts as a visual *recording* of some form or other—whether as a recorded textual or visual narrative (or one performed “live,” as with the living history re-enactents at heritage sites), or as a photograph shared on a ghosthunting website. Ghosts are certainly inextricably bound up with vision, but it is the recorded representations of ghosts, more often than not in the form of photography, that keep circulating and underlining the general experience of ghosts, particularly in contemporary times.

Georgina Banita (2011: 99) has described how photographs of the missing dead were taped to telephone poles in New York City following the attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001, describing the act as “an injunction to vision as a way to counterbalance the physical disappearance of the missing.” In this way, the public display of photographs of 9/11 victims function similarly to the death-bed photographs that were popular in the earlier half of the nineteenth century, prior to the growth in popularity of spirit photography. Although death-bed photography depicted the still-present, though deceased, bodies of loved ones, like the photos of missing 9/11 victims, the visual corporeal (or facial) presentation of the dead appeals to memory as a form of visual resurrection and piety.[[118]](#footnote-116)

The desire to see again, and to keep seeing, what was once there—to visually remember, or to visually project our memories, as McCorristine describes—inspired historical analogue spirit photography. But it is the evolution of spirit photography as a digital practice –with the disappearance of any recognizable corporeal memory offered for the viewer--that throws into question the relationship between vision, memory, and ghosts, and that raises the hauntological possibilities of digital representation in general. As Alfred Gell (1988: 9) writes of technology and enchantment, “it is technology which sustains magic, even as magic inspires fresh technical efforts.” Photography, of course, has always been perceived as “magical” technology because of its ability to alter temporality and freeze the living (and the now-dead) in time. Furthermore, as Susan Sontag wrote, “images are indeed able to usurp reality because first of all a photograph is not only an image, an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real.” Images of the “living-dead” (for example, Roland Barthes’ old photos, or the photos of missing 9/11 victims) contain a resemblance of the real, with the photo becoming an extension of the subject—much like a traditional ghost.

And yet Eduardo Cadva (1998: 10) has written of there being “no photograph without the withdrawal of what is photographed. The conjunction of death and the photographed is the very principle of photographic certitude: the photograph is a cemetery.” What was actually real prior to the photograph has often been forgotten, with the still image now standing as both monument and memory. Photography is thus reminiscent of Joseph-Benoit Suvee’s “Butades, or the Origin of Drawing” (1791), described by Derrida (1993), wherein Butades traces the shadow of her lover upon facing separation from him. Butades is blind to him and only focuses on the shadow and the canvas of the wall before her. All artists—like contemporary ghosthunters shooting their digital cameras into the darkness of a haunted house—are perhaps blind to what is before them; rather memory is drawn upon, with the artist ignoring the object that is there “in the flesh” in the present. Drawing and ghost photography rely on the trace, on presence and absence. Seeing and making visible is to do with blindness—double blindness, because the blindness isn’t even recognised. Ghosthunters wielding cameras are no different to artists tracing a shadow. What appears in the photos of ghosthunters is only recognised when it is compared to what was in previous photos of the archive. Ghosthunters may see a ghostly presence in their photographs, but only afterwards in the alchemically produced digital representation, not in the digital flash they project into the apparently empty dark shadows before them.[[119]](#footnote-117)

Recent photographic archives certainly don’t seem to effectively transcend the need to homogenize the contents of categories. David Simpson (2008) has asked “where are the ghosts of 9/11?” and proffered that the victims of the attack on the World Trade Centre tend to be offered up as homogenously happy and non-other, with no room for outliers. For example, in Diane Schoemperlen’s book *Names of the Dead* (2004) victims’ stories and portraits are lumped together in a “spectral vacuum” as “indefinable and unnameable” (Banita 2011: 59)—accounts are made up, flights of fancy are taken, and the book functions more as “a reflection of the minds which they are haunting” (ibid), not the actual or spectral profiles if the dead. This is one way of maintaining the “secret of the dead,” and though it is not unlike the treatment of the photographs in online digital archives with attached comments offering made-up and composite provenances of the images, it is not the same thing as maintaining the secret of the ghost.[[120]](#footnote-118)

It is tempting to deny ghost photographs—or the ghosts of photographs--any possibility of transcending of their status as “artefact” of the cultural industry—material phenomena that are fun to capture, collect, and possibly make up stories about, but which are ultimately meaningless in the scope of linear history and to the history of political representation. Online ghost photographs are, in the words of Adorno and Horkheimer (1944: 125), always “cyclically recurrent and rigidly invariable types.” As soon as you begin viewing an archive of ghost photographs it is clear what will precede and follow every photo, just as it is clear what stories will be offered to accompany them. Ghost photos, “[leave] no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience,” because there is no requirement of the photographer to be imaginative; this is true of classical spirit photography as well as contemporary evidential photos such as orbs. Because all ghost photography stems from scientific aspirations, “...sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts” and “a constant reproduction of the same thing” is the result. As with the rest of the culture industry, the photographic work of ghost hunters confirms “that its characteristic innovations are never anything more than improvements of mass reproduction is not external to the system [and] it is with good reason that the interest of innumerable consumers is directed to the technique and not the contents—which are stubbornly repeated, outworn, and by now half-discredited” (ibid: 134 ).

Jeremy Stubbs (2005), in his review of the an exhibition of spirit and occult photography at the *Maison européenne de la photographie* in Paris in 2005, points out that even in older spirit photos, the rhetoric of science is apparent and that the images serve as a set of icons created by believers for believers, and in this way, are an act of both creativity and protest. Like the Christian icons of visual piety that David Morgan (1999) has described, archives and public displays of digital photographs are also vessels into which contemporary ghost hunters and others can pour their beliefs and their doubts. It is not just faith in the existence of ghosts that is at stake, but a belief in the veracity of supposedly scientific representation. Could it be that ghost hunters, in their insistence on the necessity for capturing, collecting, and archiving are also lodging a form of protest and disturbance through images, in a sort of inversion of surrealism? Harvey (2004: 149) believes that despite contemporary disbelief in spirit photographs, they can still be appreciated:

They conjure up a surreal poetic, born of the juxtaposition of the commonplace and the incongruous: stiffly posed sartorial propriety, aspidistra and black velveteen pose alongside vaporous swirls, floating faces and furniture, ethereal figures stained upon the backcloth of the photographic studio like faded images of Christ on holy relics, and distressing evacuations of copious dun-colouted substances from the mouths of mediums.

For Harvey (ibid), the enduring legacy of historical spirit photography has not been to prove the existence of anything ethereal, but rather to “re-enchant a reality that has been reduced by the materialist sciences to only that which can be perceived.”

However, viewing photographs of ghosts at hanging in art gallery, or even carefully displayed on the Thanatos site (see footnote 107), is a very different experience to that of viewing them in the numerous digital photographic archives to be found on the Internet on the various websites promoting ghost hunting as a discipline. The activity of archiving represents the pinnacle of the scientific practices of ghost hunters. More than the symptomatic readings from electromagnetic devices, and more than field notes, digital photographs of ghosts stand as data—“phenomena” rather than representation. The archives are collections of data and are categorised and catalogued and left to grow as such. But as I discussed in Chapter 3, archives are themselves imaginary and spectral. Any concept in the process of being formed, of being archived, “always remains inadequate relative to what it ought to be--divided, disjointed” (Derrida 1996: 29). In the case of ghost photographs, ghost hunters, through their use of pseudo-scientific representations produced by digital cameras and their ordering and archiving of images, are attempting an ontology of something that isn’t, creating a sort of inverse to Derrida’s deconstruction and his proposed hauntology.

Archives involve the constant recursive embedding of the present in the past. We can’t return to the past, to the source of the data in the archives, so the contents of the archive are constantly being re-written and conjectured upon in the present. Like the digital copy, the source is long forgotten (or never existed anyway). This is the more radical potential of contemporary ghost photographs, and of the iterative digital in general, that I want to suggest anthropology embraces. Of course the figure of the ghost, a dead person from the past who appears in the present, already turns time on its head. As Derrida wrote, “haunting is historical, to be sure, but it is not dated, it is never docilely given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of the calendar.” Nor are the photographs of ghost hunting archives usually dated—often neither literally nor figuratively. Like all other digital forms of representation and discourse on the Internet, they are copied and circulated, their origins are forgotten, and they stand outside of real-time and space in the “temporal collage” that is the Internet.

Does being part of such a collage have a “liberating” effect on images of ghosts, returning some of the uncanniness through eternal virtual copying and a position outside of the stagnate real? Instead of the emphasis on manifestation and materialisation (that is, the making-real/creating-truth that photos—even digital ones—are expected to do), it might be preferable to re-acknowledge the indeterminance of the ghost, given that its very existence is dyschronic. Could there be something to Heidegger’s solution for confronting the dangers of technology, that is, to return to art as the harbinger of truth through beauty, the classical essence of art, even in digital form? Could Heidegger have ever had in mind the beauty of surrealist art, or the ectoplasmic collages of earlier spirit photography, with its emphasis on getting at deeper truths, deeper “beauties” of human subconsciousness through the disturbance of the status quo of objects, space, and time?

Dario Gamboni (2004) has proposed that we view certain images as potential images: they gain their power not in being analysed, categorised and archived, but rather through people’s subjective viewing of them. This was the goal of so much of surrealism, and it was the promise that surrealism saw in the practice of anthropology: to create the momentary shock and surprise of the uncanny, to “make strange” the things we think we know, is to liberate the act of creating representations. It is possible to view photos of ghosts—even contemporary digital images in which the so-called anomalies are pre-determined-- as potential images, with digital technologies bringing about momentary surprising presences of a sort, but also maintaining (through the replicating nature of the digital) the indeterminate, unfixed qualities of the ghost. However, this is only possible because the photograph has always inevitably become disconnected from its origins and pre-determined, imposed category. An approach to maintaining the uncanny secret of the ghost is to understand the online photographic archives produced by ghost hunters as a remix—a step beyond surrealist collage--of the individual juxtapositions that confound temporal conventions and replicated images.

**CHAPTER 6:**

**AUDIO AND FILM - BEYOND ETHNOGRAPHIC “EXPERIMENT”**

**Hearing the Invisible: Other Voices**

The amplified hiss of static is interrupted suddenly by a distorted, electronic whine, which rises and falls in tone like human speech before abruptly giving way to the initial static. I am playing back the audio recording I just made of my empty and silent living room in Brighton using a basic sound recording application on my laptop. I find it difficult to discern whether the interruption I have just heard is a voice or some other manifestation of the invisible, perhaps a car driving by outside, or a seagull crying past—a sound I didn’t notice while recording, but amplified and in some ways brought into existence by the act of recording. I can “see” the disruption in my recording when I import it into a sound editing application that tranlastes the recording to animated soundwaves. Later I will play this recording to friends and family, who come the consensus that the glitch is a human voice uttering the name “Carroll.”

This was one of my experiments with Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP), a ghosthunting method that differs from the otherwise occularcentric, and which I will here use to introduce media methodologies of representing the invisible—of engaging with the uncanny—before concluding this chapter with a discussion of method as it relates to recent anthropological media “experiments” in the form of film. I will argue that beyond “experimental” methodologies, anthropology must engage with media in ways that incorporate audio-visual methodologies as a mode of critique—capable of the ethical of representing the uncanny as an ethical injunction towards the other--as a matter of course. My discussion here of EVP argues that while audio recordings are capable of functioning dialectically, as with digital photographs, they are perhaps most notable because they return the pursuit of the other from a drive to produce and archive knowledge into a form of communication. I close this chapter by looking at the ways in which audio and visual media come together in film, a medium not often taken up by ghosthunters, but through which the themes of Part II—the occularcentric rhetoric inherent to media engagements with others, the digital as dialectical, and the issues and possibilities of focusing on the recording of sound—come together. I argue for anthropological media methodologies that are not so much experiments within the accepted framework of “knowledge production” as they are hauntological engagements with the uncanniness of the medium of media and the subject matter of the uncanny other, that which is always “invisible” but also capable of being conjured by media.

I have described how the history of ghosthunting has been occularcentric, with spirit photography and its more recent digital forms making the “unmasterable” other somehow fixed and part of the record through the “writing in light” of photography. But Derrida (1981) has written that all texts are originally phonocentric—writing merely represents speech. EVP is audio recording that seems to reveal speech sounds that are assumed to be voices of the dead. The “messages” are recorded, then often digitally manipulated to make them clearer, and finally translated and archived for guesses at interpretation. In some ways, EVP, follows a similar history to that of spirit photography: both are part of the technological imperatives that furthered, and were furthered by, a sense that emergent communications and recording media around the turn of the last century were connected to supernatural worlds not yet harnessed by science: the spiritual as merely an extension of science, although in some cases imbued with mediumistic capabilities. The sonic realm of ghosthunting suggests the radical possibilities for the role of audio in anthropology, with the example of EVP raising questions about the related representational acts of speech, transmission, and translation, and the provocative possibilities of recording, remixing, and sampling. EVP may be an accidental and experimental uncanny practice, a modern day surrealist exquisite corpse, evocative poetry that maintains and illuminates the other.

While photography has tended to dominate the media-practices of ghosthunting since the early days of Spiritualism, the actual beginning of Spiritualism is often traced back to America, where the two young Fox sisters seemed to be a conduit sonic communications form the dead in the form of rapping and knocking sounds at their family home. The Fox sisters toured around the US, and would eventually share their “gift” with England, where Spiritualism would become an established set of practices that are still common throughout the UK today. It seems a logical segue from the raps of the Fox sisters to the taps of Morse code, and subsequent audio communications technologies such as the phonograph and the transmissible media enabled by electricity, such as the telephone and radio. Thomas Edison’s phonograph, invented in 1877, seemed in particular to be an uncanny device for channeling the worlds of others via the words of others in the form of their recorded voices. Indeed, phonograph literally means “voice-writer”, and Edison understood his invention to be a “salvage” recorder, at one point writing the following:

Centuries after you have crumbled to dust, [the phonograph] will repeat again and again to a generation that will never know you, every idle thought, every fond fancy, every vain word that you choose to whisper against this thin iron diapragm [quoted Douglas (1999:46)].

The use of audio-visual media as a salvage device of course has parallels with anthropology, where it recordings were made to document “disappearing” cultures on the verge of “dying” out. The difference between the phonograph and other related technologies that developed alongside it (such as the telegraph and telephone) is that the phonograph was designed for archival purposes, and to function without a specially trained operative. According to John M. Picker (2003: 11) the phonograph “offered a form of preservation through direct, immediate interaction with its audience.” As Evan Eisnerberg (2005: 46) describes it, “record listening is a séance where we got to choose our ghosts.”[[121]](#footnote-119) As with the recorded media produced by anthropology, we are able to select and conjure the images and sounds of the people we have chosen to study as cultural others at will.

However, audio recordings are uncanny in ways that differ to audio transmission. According to Erik Davis (2002: 19) Edison was “something of a techno-spiritualist”-- after inventing the phonograph, he wanted to build a radio to transmit voices of the dead.[[122]](#footnote-120) It’s not a huge jump from a reality in which voices could become disembodied and outlast death to imagining that voices of the dead could be transmitted by radio or telephone. Jeffrey Sconce (2000) has described how the concept of ether as a conductor of the supernatural came into popular usage in the first quarter of the twentieth century, citing audio technologies such as wireless radio and the telephone as changing people’s views of space and temporality.[[123]](#footnote-121) With such inventions, voices existed both out of body and out of time, lending audio technology an uncanny and ethereal quality. David Hendy (2013: 283) writes of how listening to the radio was initially an even more uncanny experience than listening to a gramophone: “It had been strange enough to hear someone’s voice coming from a disc; for it to come out of thin air seemed…*incredible*.”

Thomas Watson had earlier commented upon being drawn in by the mysterious bird sounds, crackles and pops that cropped up in his and Alexander Graham Bell’s telephone system late at night.[[124]](#footnote-122) Later, during World War II, code breakers and other military radio operatives would document hearing unexplained voices amidst the usual chatter and radio interference. Following the sinking of the Titanic, there were tales of drowning victims communicating via radio. Similarly, after WWI, stories emerged of dead soldiers calling loved ones on the telephone. Avital Ronell (1989) describes how PT Barnum refused to feature a telephone in his circus act shortly after its invention, claiming it would be too unbelievable and shocking for the audience. There was clearly, even at the turn of the century, a sense of the supernatural of media that allowed users to hear the voices of others from afar, disconnected from bodies and being transmitted over space, and in some cases, time. Below, I describe EVP as a media practice that exists somewhere between a recording and a transmission in order to then suggest ways in which the outputs of this practice may provide lessons for the ways in which media in general may be utilised as a critical forms of communication between the “others” of anthropology.

**The Message of the Other as Glitch**

The “discovery” of EVP has been described in various ways on different ghosthunting websites. The story recounted most often is that Fredrich Jürgenson, a Swedish film producer, had in 1959 been in his garden recording birdsong, and was surprised to find on his tape recording some strange imitations of birdsong, and then a Norwegian male voice speaking quickly of “nightly bird voices.” Jürgenson’s “tape voices,” as he called them, would increasingly manifest on his recordings. In the early days, he hypothesised that the voices were transmissions from beings in space, but later he came to believe that they were the voices of deceased people. The Latvian psychologist Konstantin Raudive, a former student of Jung who collaborated with Jürgenson and further refined the refined the recording techniques, dubbed the occurrences Electronic Voice Phenomena, a name that has stuck. It was Raudive who popularised EVP in the UK when an English-language book, *Breakthrough*, was commissioned by Colin Smythe, a small publisher of books ranging from the supernatural to Irish poetry. The company had picked up the rights to the book at a trade fair in Germany, and wanting to make sure the phenomena was “real,” Smythe and his publishing partner Peter Bander invited Raudive to England to demonstrate his methods. They were duly impressed, particularly Bander, who himself began experimenting with EVP and published his own account of the phenomena (see Bander 1972).

Other factions in the UK were more sceptical. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Society for Psychical Research conducted EVP investigations, and ruled that the voices were not of interest. While in more recent years, some SPR members have published on the phenomena (cf. Browning 2013 on directing recent EVP experiments, and Colvin 2010 on the related acoustic properties of unexplained rapping sounds), the feeling among EVP researchers seems to be that the SPR is not interested because the EVP is too technical and not “psychic enough.” Despite scepticism from the UK’s leading paranormal research body, EVP has managed to produce its fair share of international “stars.” Raymond Cass, a spiritualist medium and retired hearing-aid technician from York who died in 2001, has been the figure most associated with EVP in the UK. Cass logged thousands of hours of EVP samples that he recorded in his home recording studio. Towards the end of his life, Cass reported losing his psychic powers and stopped recording. However, a compilation of his EVP samples and his spoken theories is available on the CD *The Ghost Orchid*, distributed by the Parapsychic Acoustic Research Collective (PARC), a non-experimenting group who collect anomalous sounds.

Cass’s particular EVP methods bring up the question of whether psychic powers are necessary for capturing EVP samples. The American Association for EVP (AA-EVP), the largest organisation concerned with EVP during my fieldwork (it has since “evolved” into the Association TransCommunication), maintains that anyone can get results from experimentation because the audio recording equipment itself is a “medium” comprised of technical properties that make it difficult to research as psychic phenomena, an argument that echoes the ways in which the camera has been perceived as “opaque” and hence somehow able to mysteriously conjure the appearance of ghosts on film. Indeed there is much emphasis in the EVP literature about the recording technology itself. Jürgenson and Raudive had originally proposed three main recording methods: through a microphone, through a radio, and with a diode creating background noise. Raudive found that the diode method worked best because, he hypothesised, the generated background noise gave spirits “material” with which to work. His theory was that the spirit voices cannot physically manifest out of thin air, but rather must work with the material already to hand, and today, background noise in the form of white noise or recorded crowd babble is often used by researchers to supply the voices with “material” through which they can manifest.[[125]](#footnote-123)

An EVP event manifests as of a disruption--a glitch--in the white noise or other otherwise undisturbed background “material.” As with the digital photographs of ghosts, these audio samples are archived online. There is a seemingly occularcentric tendency among ghosthunters to try to make the EVP samples more “material” by translating them into viewable soundwaves using audio-editing computer programmes that can visually “prove” the existence of the glitch in the audio, with the ghost being made visible and manipulable in this way. EVP samples therefore essentially exist as digital data, and they are categorized as such, but there are also interpretive interventions involved in the aftermath of cataloguing these data, with the content—the message of the glitch—functioning to maintain its secret. While photography produces ghosts as objects and evidence, with EVP, ghosts manifest as messages, as communication. Even when a transcription of the audio glitch is written down, it functions in a way that differs from the materialism of writing; it is rather a communication with a radically alterior other that literally tells us more about ourselves than about the other, and idea I will return to below. First, however, I will describe some aspects of EVP that are of relevance to my argument for their uncanniness.

**The Sound of the Other**

In *Breakthrough*, Raudive created a typology of EVP, organising samples into categories based on content, such as “Their Encouragement,” “Their Warnings,” and “Their Gratitude.” But it was Raymond Cass, whose work in England refined these categories based upon the physical qualities of voice samples, and who began to address some of the issues of ambiguity associated with the voices. On PARC’s *The Ghost Orchid* recording, a number of Cass’s voice types are identified and illustrated with haunting, and sometimes humorous, examples (most of which were recorded by Cass himself). Interestingly, not all of these categories are comprised of human voices; there are categories for animals and aliens, determined by the particular sounds of the voices. In the human voices category, one category is polyglot voices, voices comprised of a number of languages, while another is the category of singing voices, which Cass suspected had long been overlooked as radio interference. Examples of the latter on *The Ghost Orchid* are particularly uncanny: choirs of voices sing non-grammatical phrases such as “we speak radio,” “listen tune heaven;” in another sample an operatic lady’s voice sings “I will see you no more” to a strange tune. All of the samples on *The Ghost Orchid* seem to have been digitally “cleaned up,” and with the singing voices samples, this gives them the quality of seeming even more disembodied and disconnected from the popular music of this world. This is the case with many of the clearer voice samples of all “types” that I have heard, and it is this physical attribute of the voices—their weird disjointedness and deviation from the sound of normal speech—that, beyond their manifestation as a glitch--mark them out as something seemingly paranormal.

The AA-EVP website contained page after page of information on the nature of the voices and how to identify and categorise them, but they do not have the monopoly on the dissemination of such information. Konstantinos, an author of “how-to” books concerning what he terms “black Paganism,” is a “gothic” New Yorker whose website, replete with stylised photos of himself, was enjoying particular popularity among teenage girls in the US and the UK when I was conducting my fieldwork. His writings on EVP offered some of the clearer information and advice on experimenting techniques as digital technologies were enabling more widespread audio experimentations. In an online article for *Fate Magazine*, Konstantinos (2001) offers the following description of EVP:

Most notably, EVP do not sound like normal speech. They vibrate rapidly, as if the phantom ‘voice boxes’ producing them are being jiggled hundreds of times a minute. You’ll notice this tremolo quality first-- it affects each word spoken by a voice entity. The entire sentence rhythm of an EVP also has a paranormal speed about it. Without sounding high pitched, EVP tend to be faster than normal speech. It ’s almost as if each word is spoken quickly, yet the pauses between the words are of a natural length. Another general characteristic of all EVP is the monotony with which sentences are delivered. Rarely will you hear true cadence or pitch variances in a message.

The AA-EVP(a) (2001-2005) concurred with this, but noted that despite the monotonous pitch of voices, experimenters may still be able to identify the gender, age and identity unseen owner of the voices:

The voices can often be recognized as male or female, young or old. Messages usually last two seconds or less and are most often two to four words. The words may be spoken very quickly, and there is often a distinctive cadence to EVP voices.

EVP recordings do tend to sound like robots or synthesised speech, halting in pace and dipping up and down in an unnatural, monotonous tone. It is these characteristics of sound that experimenters refer to as they sift through background noise, static, and the inevitable radio interference, looking for the “genuine article,” as one ghosthunter called the incidences of EVP she had recorded. According to Stephen Connor (1999: 218), “it is as though the orderly traffic of previous spirit communications had now become subject to the pressures of late-twentieth-century communications, with the airwaves thronged with messages of different kinds from different cultures and languages.” This is the modern post-*Writing Cultures* world that anthropology itself must deal with now in the 21st century, with the messages of all kinds others mediated by digital technologies in particular with consequences for the ways in which anthropologists themselves are able to critically engage with others via audo-visual media.

**Rorschach Audio: Learning to Listen**

I have posited that EVP is about the two-fold act of recording and transmitting.[[126]](#footnote-124) The consensus among EVP researchers, whatever their beliefs about the source of the phenomena, is that supernatural voices are transmitting from some place in space or time and shaping available sound in order to form new sounds that are brought into being by the act of recording.[[127]](#footnote-125) Two further acts involved in EVP are the playback of the message, and the interpretation (and sometimes translation) of it. I will argue below that EVP, like photography, may function dialectically; on the one hand it represents the other manifesting as a voice, as a communication across time and space. Its message hints at its secret—the secret of the other—but the cryptic message usually says much more about the listener. On the other hand, Chris French, head of the Anomalistic Psychology Unit at Goldsmiths College has used the case of EVP to illustrate “bad science” and the problems of subjective interpretation.[[128]](#footnote-126)

Referring to an EVP sample that I presented to him, he told me, “There’s just no way of knowing what’s being said without being told beforehand.” The sample, which I had retrieved from an online archive of samples, was interpreted and labeled by the person who recorded it as saying “I died there.” Chris heard it as “Uh, a chair.” We asked a passing student for her verdict, and the reply was that the message was simply gibberish. The SPR had, in the 1980s, conducted a similar and more extensive test of EVP, playing a panel a selection of Raudive’s English language samples; no one came up with Raudive’s interpretation. EVP has therefore been dubbed “Rorschach audio” by sceptics, who believe that researchers are hearing what they want to hear, and that what they hear might actually say more about them than about any dead person. This is of course the case with any attempt to interpret and “bring to light” the other, whether as ghost or as anthropological other, and whether as the subject of writing or audio-visual media.

EVP researchers have attempted to turn the sceptical connotations of this so-called “Rorschach audio” critique on its head, creating a whole methodology around the subjective nature of their techniques of listening. Sterne (2004: 194) has written of a similar adaptation of methods of interpretation to technologies of hearing in his study of stethoscopes as “artefacts of techniques.” He claims that stethoscopes require an epistemology of mediation, and function as a means of providing scientification through technology. The same could apply for EVP experimenters. Whether or not their concern is with authenticating the technological phenomena of EVP, or authenticating the belief in life after death, EVP recording technology requires mediation by the operator. For EVP researchers, the recording device may function as both a physical and psychical medium for relaying data, but it is up to the experimenters to interpret and translate this data, just as it is for anthropologists in the field.

As with the advice of “Ghosthunting 101” that I documented in Chapter 3, advice on how to become an “expert” listener abounds in the EVP literature. The AA-EVP website (AA-EVP(b)) claimed that, “The recorded voices may be very quiet and are often difficult to hear and understand at first. Most EVP experimenters say that they have developed an ‘ear’ for the sounds, after learning to distinguish them from background noise.” Konstantinos (2001) describes how the familiarity with the hiss of tape is very important, so that any slight change will jump out at the researcher. The protocol of keeping recordings short also helps with the mediation and listening necessary, since, according to the AA-EVP, since every click and syllable recorded must be listened to many times, bringing to mind Margaret Mead’s instructions for viewing her salvage film footage in the archive.

Perhaps one of the most revealing pieces of advice concerning techniques of listening in the face of sceptical claims comes from the AA-EVP’s frequently asked questions page (AA-EVP(c)):

In effect, the words are being pronounced by someone from an unfamiliar culture. This is true even if it is a loved one because that person is obliged to use whatever sounds are available. That is why we talk about people needing to train themselves to hear the words in EVP, and why a perfectly clear Class A to you might sound like loud noise to someone else. However, once you tell the listener what to look for, that noise will often become obviously the words you said they were. Then later, you or that other listener listen to the EVP again and do not hear the same utterance. It has not changed, but your reference has.

The AA-EVP acknowledged the possibility and problems of hearing being pre-determined by labels, but it also asserts that researchers may be trained out of this if what they are looking for is also pre-determined.

Of course, this is the way with any research, “scientific,” anthropological or otherwise. Listening is a mediating activity. Ian Thompson (2005), an EVP researcher writing on the Mostly Haunted ghosthunting website, prescribes specific methods for protecting the “validity” of EVP experiments that again echo the fieldwork techniques of both “Ghosthunting 101” and anthropology:

On completion of the recording it is then good practice to listen to the tape shortly afterwards and complete a transcript of what is heard. The tape should not be used again for any recordings. Other people should be invited to listen to EVP recordings but prior to this they should not be informed whether there is any EVP sound on the tape or not. The listener should inform the investigator of two things. These are; was there any evidence of EVP sound on the tape, and what was the EVP sound heard by the listener? The investigator should then ask a large number of listeners to examine the recording, noting their answers to the two questions above. The results would normally be collated and the most prolific answer given by the listeners would be the most probable.

So the mediation of an EVP sample comes down to democracy, if Thompson’s advice is to be taken. Thompson does admit that what he is prescribing is not perfect science, but that it’s all that EVP researchers can hope for at this point in time. Like anthropology, EVP research, for all its advice on methodology and identification, remains somewhere between science and the art of interpretive listening to the and revealing the voices of un-seen others.

**“Breakthrough”: Communicating With Others**

Peters’ (1999) historical account of the concept of communication likens history itself to communicating with the dead. Because the dead tend to communicate through texts and never directly, there is a breakdown; there is never harmony between the living and the dead. But with EVP, the goal has always been to rectify this communication breakdown, to allow the living to experience a break*through* of the world of the dead into the world of the living. Audio-visual media is always tinged with the possibility of reconciling self and other, conscious and subconscious.[[129]](#footnote-127) Sconce (2000) has drawn parallels between psychoanalysis and EVP: both Freud and Raudive were looking for “voices from the void” in their own highly interpretive ways, deciphering the language of ghosts, whether metaphorically or of the spirits in some shared afterlife. Raudive, for his part, dismissed Freud, calling the notion of the subconscious “scientific fiction” (1971: 6).[[130]](#footnote-128) But both Raudive and Freud sought to repair a decisive and related moment of separation: the founding moment of psychic repression and the moment of death “that left conscious subjects abandoned and alone” (Sconce 2000: 91). Just as dreams are the data of psychoanalysts, voice samples are the material of analysis and, I have argued, constitute a sense of self found in the other for EVP researchers. Reading Raudive’s extensive analysis of each of his voice samples in *Breakthrough* is not unlike the experience of reading Freud’s (1900) *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In Raudive’s case studies, individual words and phrases uttered in the samples are broken down, meanings analysed, and real-life anxieties scrutinised. EVP, despite the best efforts of experimenters towards “scientific” analysis of their subject-matter, remystifies the concept of the self via the other through the validating authority of audio recording media and editing equipment.

Unlike the cataloguing of digital images of apparent ghosts in the form of objects such as orbs and mists, discussed in Chapter 5, with EVP researchers are attempting to listen to what the voices of the dead have to say; as Veit Erlmann (2004) has written, anthropologists must cultivate the “ethnographic ear” in order to understand the ways in which the senses beyond the eye constitute the culture of others. As the sceptics of EVP point out, in “giving voice” to the dead, researchers are actually saying much more about themselves than about the ghosts or the world of the past that they represent. As with anthropology, it may never be possible for EVP researchers, or for that matter, psychoanalysts or anthropologists, to come up with a technique of listening and a method of translating what is heard that doesn’t define the researcher as much as the subject/object of research. But the practice EVP reveals the ways in which media in general may—oftentimes unintentionally—constitute a radical engagement with others.

With ghosthunting, as with anthropology, audio-visual media may fail at producing the kind of scientific data their users sometimes strive for, but EVP in particular opens up the door for “breakthroughs” of a more uncanny kind, ultimately functioning to produce texts that are more closely aligned with James Clifford’s examples of anthropological surrealism discussed in the thesis introduction. Sound recording may act in opposition to occularcentric remit of photography—that is, to document the existence, the fact of the ghost. With EVP, there is a return to the communicative imperatives at the root of audio-visual methodologies, with the voices of ghosts functioning to disrupt the notions of space and linear time with their messages, sometimes even seeming to refer to the technological mediality of EVP and to the surpassing of geographical and temporal borders.[[131]](#footnote-129) Below are some of the translated message titles of the EVP samples found on the *Ghost Orchid* CD:

Not Enough There To Copy

All Your Sorrows

Out of This World

We Can See Edith By Radio

So Strange I Remember You

I’m Joined To Many Countries

Likewise, the following examples show the ways in which the apparent voices of the ghostly others of EVP are interpreted as providing cryptic messages with those reaching out to them with recording devices:

1. From the *The Ghost Orchid* CD: a robotic voice seems to say, “dead machines.”
2. From a ghosthunt in the Missouri in the US, found online at a now defunct website: the voice of a ghosthunter says, “Amos, is that you?” followed by a distorted and raspy voice that seems to say, “you’re all wrong!”
3. From the *Ghost Orchid* CD again: a woman’s voice that seems to sing in a slightly operatic way, “only Sonja will make it.”

Examples of electronic voice phenomena transcribed into text bring to mind Derrida’s (1976) notion that speech always requires presence and writing absence. Speech implies iterablility, the repeatability of writing with regard to recording and translation. All writing, of course, can be cut up and grafted; the author may remain absent and other, but a ghostly sense of the origin lives on, albeit re-interpreted, and “no context can enclose it” (Derrida 1977: 65) While I have argued that audio-visual media present the possibility of anthropological forms of critique beyond writing, EVP also presents the possibility that audio-visual media suggest that there is the potential for radical ways of representing the invisible through the of transcribing and writing texts. Certainly there have also been supernatural and transgressive aspects to writing and the instruments related to it; Ouija boards and automatic writing, for example, have been as celebrated by Surrealists as they have been by Spiritualists. John Posthill’s (2009) thinking of writing as an early media that needs to be evaluated as such is likewise related to Avital Ronell’s concept of “haunted writing,” with EVP invoking a transgressing of borders and categories that in turn leads to a questioning of hierarchy. The translations of the EVP voices, particularly the polyglot voices recorded by Raudive, are not copies but new texts seemingly produced as a dialogue between self and other, living and dead. As Benjamin (1923) wrote, translation may be understood as an art form along the lines of poetry, in that it is concerned with what emerges with the passage of one language to another. Could EVP have ended the search for what Derrida (in Kearney 1984: 112) has termed “writing that makes the limits of our language tremble”?

James Clifford, in his introduction to *Writing Culture* (1986: 12), suggests that “once cultures are no longer pre-figured visually—as objects, theatres, texts— it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances.” For Clifford, this would constitute a discursive, rather than a visual, paradigm, in which the “dominant metaphors of ethnography shift away from the observing eye and toward expressive speech (and gesture)” (ibid). With EVP, not only are the audio glitches more evocative than the visual ones of the digital and indexical photo, but they also offer the possibility of an engagement with the other. This engagement is discursive not in that it is conversant, but in that it constitutes a communication with the category of the other that maintains the secret of the other even as it transcends temporal and special boundaries to make this engagement. Drawing upon Levinas, I have argued that this engagement is ultimately ethical in that it “welcomes” the other, as a guest for whom we are responsible, because the guest—the other—ultimately allows us to define ourselves.

The translated “texts” of EVP perhaps constitute *brisure*: they bring together and yet separate and cross a divide of the world of the living and the dead without ever belonging totally to either side. Such representations come close to the Levinasian ethics of the other as described throughout this thesis: because the other remains wholly separate and exterior, it can never quite be totally conjured and exorcised into some archive; it remains familiar and provocative and just out of reach. EVP is hence an admittance of the uncanny—of the cryptic nature of the message shrouded in suggestive secrecy, its source and meaning never quite revealed, but the other from which it emits is always accepted as an unseen guest that we take the risk of welcoming these strangers, as others, regardless.

Critical anthropology must take risks, according to the Michel Rolf-Trouillot (2003). According to Greg Becket (2013: 180-181), in his assessment of Trouillot’s legacy of critical anthropology, “the first risk is to treat others as interlocutors and subjects and reassess the epistemological status of the ‘native voice.’ This is perhaps his clearest statement on the need to think with others, rather than merely thinking about them.” This is the risk that Derrida notes in Levinas—the risk of receiving strangers as guests. As with anthropology, so many of the media representations produced by ghosthunters tend to eschew the uncanny in favour of maintaining the specific empirical, and usually occularcentric, requirements of the archive. I have used the example of EVP to illustrate that an alternative to occularcentric media practices may lie with audio recording. Rather than just producing an artefact for the archive, the sound recording is transformed into something new--a translated message that brings about a sort of care and concern for the unseen other even as it says more about those translator, signaling a return to writing as way of engaging with others, but one in which the uncanniness of media facilitates a translation that is more akin to “poetry” than it is to fact.

**Temporality and Film as a Mode of Critique**

Having suggested that the audio-visual media forms of photography and audio-recording may function dialectically—that is, they contain both the potential to “reveal the secret” of the ghost and to maintain it—I now want to conclude Part II with a discussion the medium of film, in which both image and sound come into play via motion and editing, in order to suggest particular media methodologies for anthropology. While temporality plays a part in the haunted nature of photography and audio, I will argue that film is able to function as critique in its conjuring of the otherwise invisible specifically because of its relationship to time. Giorgio Agamben (2000) has written that film has its centre the gesture and not the image, and therefore belongs to the realm of ethics and politics. The “moving images” of cinema constitute modernity for Agamben, but with cinema, the movement is less to do with the images (or sounds) of cinema themselves, and more to do with the critical act of editing: the process of juxtaposing media in ways that call into question notions of temporality and space and allow time not just to be suspended but to come into being as something altogether new that is able to stand as a critique. Film in this sense is less aligned to the methods of observational realism that the *Writing Culture* debates were eschewing, and more akin the ethnographic surrealism that I described in the Thesis Introduction.

Ghosthunters tend to focus on audio-visual media that most easily produce stand-alone and static “data” that lends itself to archiving, without much processing after the act of recording, aside from the translations of EVP that I discussed above. Certainly some spiritualist photographs were doctored or unintentionally came about in the chemical development process, and are imbued with the uncanniness as described by Jeremy Stubbs (2005) in Chapter 4. Furthermore, the digital images and audio samples of ghosthunters discussed in Chapters 5 and this chapter are often highly manipulated in computer editing programmes to allow for deeper analysis (as well as for the purposes of fun or trickery), with the archive itself uncanny in its simulacrous iteration of its subject-matter. But to edit and combine these data in order to conjure something new has not been the point of audio-visual media for ghosthunters, or for those anthropologists who primarily use such media as a supplement to written methods of observation and for cataloguing aspects of a culture.

Focusing on film means diverging from my metaphor of ghosthunters as anthropologists, but it also means applying what we have learned of ghosts as metaphors for cultural others who bring into question time and space to methodologies that might offer the greatest possibilities for a radical use of audio-visual media as a mode of critique within anthropology: I have shown the ways in which photographs and audio-recordings are both related to ghosts and used to pursue ghosts, and so here I focus on temporality as the basis of critique enabled by the ghostliness of audio-visual media that specifically lends itself to methodologies of film that bring to light the invisible. In the Thesis Introduction I introduced the importance of the relationship between surrealism and anthropology to those who have argued for audio-visual media as a form of critique. “Experimental ethnography” represents a way in which this connection has been taken up as a media practice within anthropology, as it emerged as a loose genre of anthropological film in the wake of the publication of *Writing Culture* (1986). It is hence a good starting point for thinking about media engagements with others that take seriously the notion of audio-visual media as being always already haunted, and I conclude this chapter with a discussion of media methods that may engage with the uncanny in the form of the “haunted” temporality of film.

As with photography and audio technologies, the invention of cinema further altered the ways in which we think about time and space. Bliss Lim’s (2009) study of time and cinema discusses Benjamin’s notion of modern time as homogenous and empty—that is, neutral—with the past and other forms and categories of time being superseded. But cinema facilitates the questioning of homogenous time via a medium that is able to do so through the movement and gestures referred to by Agamben (2000). As Jean Epstein (2014) has pointed out, time should be regarded as the first, not the fourth, dimension, because cinema for the first time allows us to manipulate it in any direction. Gilles Deleuze (1986, 1989) has likewise conceptualised film as an ontological practice about movement and time, and indeed the montage in film is often a statement that time is passing. But it is not just the passing of time, but rather that the order of linear time has been altered, with events re-assembled through editing in a way that creates the new temporality of the film. Laura Mulvey(2006) has written of the ways in which new media technologies allow viewers to control both image and story, so that films meant to be seen collectively and followed in a linear fashion may be manipulated technologically, yielding unexpected and even unintended pleasures. Favero (2014(a)) has more recently discussed such possibilities in terms of interactive online documentaries–and indeed, the return to different forms of collective experiences via the social media aspects of such technologies.[[132]](#footnote-130) Yet the simple fact that digital filmic media may not only be copied (as I discussed in previous chapters) but may be radically altered at the touch of a button—frozen, fast-forwarded, or rewound—touches upon the uncanny temporality of film, and hence its capacity as potentially critical medium.

Mulvey’s text is ultimately concerned with frames, and with the digital capacity to freeze the movement of film into a singular distilled moment that may function along the lines of a fetishistic engagement reminiscent of the “primitive” engagements of anthropology that Hage (2012) and others have argued may also be the basis for anthropological critique. But an additional uncanny aspect of film is that it is generally constituted as montage, with elements that might be disparate outside of the context of the film coming together create something new. Echoing my argument that ghosts always constitute a disruption by virtue of the ghost’s radical alterity--its otherness--Christian Suhr and Rane Willerslev (2013) have conceived of montage as “disruptive” in that this juxtaposition of elements outside of homogenous time may stand as a form of social and cultural critique. While montage has often been viewed as a “threat” to the order of scholarly engagements, as a way of destabilizing, it brings about a transcendence of social and cultural categories. Surh and Willerslev, echoing Clifford’s discussion of ethnographic surrealism as related to college, write that when different elements are brought together in montage something “extra” is produced. We have seen that the ghosts that appear in photographs are sometimes termed “extras; for Surh and Willerslev this "extra," like the ghost, stands as a disruption to the accepted order of things. Lim (2009) understands film as being able to depict the coexistence of other modes of being alongside and within the modern present, underscoring the variant temporalities that actually make up apparently homogenous time. These more ethical representations of time refuse to domesticate difference as anachronism. Lim writes that this relation of filmic time to the supernatural (and to the depiction of the supernatural in film)---while it is often disparaged as a vestige of primitive or superstitious thought, like ghosts themselves—serves as a starting-point for more ethical temporal imaginings and engagements with others.

**Experimental Ethnography and Hauntology**

I will return to the idea of anthropological film as a medium that is inherently uncanny because of the technicality of production, editing and consumption processes that invoke radical versions of temporality within its engagements and depictions of others. But in order to discuss the concept of experimental ethnography as film, I first want to posit that anthropological films can evoke the uncanny in ways that are less aligned with specific techniques than with the ways in which they, as a “occult documents” (to invoke Stephen Tyler’s (1986) imagining of post-modern ethnography that I discussed in the Thesis Introduction), depict the alterity of cultural others for whom we are ethically responsible. An early example of experimental ethnographic film that I consider to be “hauntological” in this way is Jean Rouch’s *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955)*,* which documents a West African Hauka ritual in which participants foam at the mouth, slaughter and barbeque a dog, and don effigies of French colonial figures, with Rouch’s complicit subjects hoping their film would stand not just as a document, but as a sort of disruptive warning to both colonial viewers in Paris and mainstream Ghanain society. The film was met with derision by both the Africans who viewed it at home and by audiences in France (where it was indeed banned), with the former horrified to see themselves portrayed as savages and the latter appalled at the seemingly primitive behavior and treatment of French authorities by the colonised natives. The film engages with the “primitive” in a radical way that suggests that the experience of other cultures is not unlike the experience of being haunted or possessed. As Anna Grimshaw (2001: 101) notes, “In the dark cinema space outside of space and time, the Hauka ritual is recreated over and over again, and we have to surrender conventional patterns of thought.”

Film may entail an engagement with the culture of others that acknowledges that the ghost-like others will always haunt and possess us, but if we give ourselves over to this haunting, then we are forced to re-evaluate our rankings of both ourselves and of others, acknowledging power and fear where it’s due, even as we come to understand that that the ghosts that disrupt are ultimately guests that we should receive and host. Anna Grimshaw (2001: 101) further comments of Rouch’s use of film to create *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955) that he “takes the Hollywood model of cinema—a dark place filled with magic, fantasy and fear—and, into this space, he violently inserts the traditional concerns and subject matter of anthropological inquiry.” Films such as *Les Maîtres Fous* introduce an understanding of the other without recourse to the “violence of comprehension” (as Peter Mason (1990: 2) puts it), resulting in the other being reduced to self, “deprived of the very alterity by which the other *is* other,” as Michael Renov (2004: 217) writes in his text on documentary film and its subjects. Rouch’s film has been much-discussed, along with the rest of his canon, and others followed him to create films that I consider to be “hauntological” in their invoking of an other that haunts. The Australian documentary filmmaker Denis O’Rourke’s films *Cannibal Tours* (1988) and *The Good Woman of Bangkok* (1991) particularly bring to mind Levinas’s (1978) sense of alterity as a function of desire (as Russell suggests) that is related to the “absolute exteriority of the other” for whom we are ultimately responsible. Likewise, Chris Marker’s *Sans Soleil* (1983), offers an attempt at video travelogue, but here the author is haunted not so much by the places he has visited, but rather by the experience of travel itself—of conveying one’s journeys in across the borders of foreign land to someone back at home.

Catherine Russell (1999) describes the bringing together of experimental cinema and ethnography as entailing both aesthetics and cultural representation. Experimental ethnography is thus a way of bringing together experiment and theory. As with ethnographic surrealism, it resists closure and remains open to re-readings and possibilities—not to mention the technical manipulability described by Mulvey (2006). Experimental ethnography essentially depicts others moving through historical time; it thus historicises its imagined other, and both demonstrates the other as a fiction, and reifies the other as ethnographic inscription. It is for this reason that Schneider and Pasqualino (2014) argue that the notion of experiment is important to both visual anthropology and anthropology in general: film is both a material object and experienced time—or both an occult document and a document of the occult, to again invoke Tyler (1986). Suhr and Willerslev (2013) argue that film can evoke hidden dimensions of ethnographic reality, with montage employed to disrupt observational realism. As I described in the Thesis Introduction many of the calls for anthropology to engage critically with media (and to use media critically) have drawn upon the ethnographic surrealism of the past ((see for example Foster, Jay, and Moore in Talyor (1994). This “experimental” intersection between film and the temporal and “primitive” concerns of anthropology may constitute a radical audio-visual engagement for anthropology—radical in that it is not traditional ethnography, but more aligned to what I’ve described as hauntology.

**Methods of Haunting**

I want to suggest two filmmaking methods that seem to use the haunted technicality of audio-visual media in the form of film, as well as the general “hauntology”—the paying attention to ghosts—that I believe is position through which to formulate anthropological critique. The first of these methods is re-enactment, a method that has of course been around since the inception of documentary film. Robert Flaherty’s (1922) *Nanook of the North* was of course famously a re-enactment of Inuit life as interpreted and directed by Flaherty, in recent times has been critiqued relentlessly because of it. *Les Maîtres Fous* was in some ways a re-enactment, with Rouch asking his film’s protagonists to re-enact a particular ritual as a response to their request for him to make the film; likewise, Rouch’s *Moi, Un Noir* was a partial re-enactment by it’s protagonists, and is sometimes referred to as “ethno-fiction.” In contemporary times, some anthropological reenactments for film have been less about depicting the life or past narratives of others, and have instead stand as subversive acts in and of themselves.

As Sylvie Jasen (2011: ii) has described, “reenactment as event is less interested in replicating or even representing the past than in evoking its current traces and ongoing impact.” In *The Act of Killing* (2012), for example, Indonesian killing squad members are asked by the directors to act out their past atrocities. Most do so with great flair, seemingly relishing the opportunity. The film obviously depicts the past impeding on the present, but the past is also being invited and welcomed into the present as a disruption by the filmmakers. It’s not that the protagonists of The Killing Fields are to be “welcomed” as guests in the way that Levinas described, but rather the depictions of the past that remind us of the injustices to others that we are ultimately responsible for, by taking the risk of bearing witness to the these disturbing acts of the past manifesting in the present.

*The Act of Killing* is of course about extreme violence and trauma, and the re-enactments of these acts underscores the way in which time isn’t as homogenous as we imagine it to be; far from being neutral and bounded, the reenactments of the film show that the boundaries of the past and present are not limited, but bleed into each other, with the future implicated as well, as the filmic record itself lives on. But what happens when re-enactment methodologies are applied to more innocuous aspects of culture? In some ways, this is what happened in *Les Maitres Fous*, with the workaday lives of the protagonists contrasted with their re-enactments of their “other” lives, frothing at the mouth in the face of Parisians in the cinema back home. Re-enactments applied to everyday events and encounters, such as in Trent Harris’s *The Beaver Trilogy* (2001), in which the “same” narrative depicting the exploits of an eccentric local character the director came across in Salt Lake City, Utah, was filmed three times over the years using various actors to re-enact the same narrative, resulting in the mundanity of the original event somehow being illuminated and made meaningful by the subsequent interpretations of it.

Rithy Panh’s *The Missing Picture* (2013) is another recent film featuring re-enactments of violence, but here primarily in the form of small clay figurines that are used to act depict Pahn’s experiences in Khmer Rouge labor camps. Pahn’s film also features a second methodology that is related to the hauntological potential of film practices: the re-assemblage of “found” or existing footage. Such mining of the archive in order to re-assemble what is found there produces what Paula Amad (2010) has called the “counter archive.” As Russell (1999: 271) describes it, bringing to mind my argument for the dialectical nature of the photographs and online digital archives produced by ghosthunters, “once the retrieving and recycling of images has transformed the imaginary space of memory into a random accessed data bank, images may be properly dialectical, inscribed with forgetting as a radical form of the Other.” The re-assemblage of found footage in film hence constitutes a radical practice of montage, in which the newly created film existing between the worlds of the past and present and the self and the other; it can be akin to poetry, or the “poesis” referred to by a number of the *Writing Culture* authors and others attempting to formulate new forms of ethnography. Jonathan Caouette, who created the film *Tarnation* (2003) about his troubled relationship with his schizophrenic mother using an extensive collection home videos from his childhood, has described how his technique of assemblage is inspired by being in a half-awake, half-asleep state:

And right as I’m about to conk out, this whole plethora of information comes from my own awareness and rushes into my mind’s eye. It’s like a story, or a poem, or a series of images…It only makes sense for a moment and then it dissipates. It’s like this weird waking dream. I wanted to lucidly mimic that in the form of a film and transpose it cinematically.

This is the difference between collage and montage: collage mines the archive and juxtaposes for initial shock, whereas montage not only combines, but smoothes over the edges so that origins are half forgotten—the secret of the ghostly other is maintained as it floats free and haunts in the present. It is not to be exorcised and made static after the brief moment of shock is over. It has become something new that keeps up its haunting and mystery.

Russell (1999) is also interested in the “archives” of old cinematic forms that have been replaced and recontexutalised by new technologies of film such as digital video. She (ibid: 272) writes, “If the convergence of primitive cinema and ethnographic primitivism can be mapped historically, perhaps the utopian historiography of the primitivist discourse can be redeemed allegorically, outside the colonialist, modernist anxiety about essences.” Rachael Moore (2006) also writes about the fascination with “degraded” media such as old films that are used in assemblage projects; I believe that, as with photographs and audio samples, the uncanny temporality of such projects is only enhanced by the ways in which in which these media are mined and re-assembled digitally. Martino Nicoletti (2014: 168) has written on “visual media primitivism” and the ways in which a return to vintage analogue forms of film constitutes a way of engaging with a slowed alternative temporality—a “dilation of time”--that constitutes a poetics of ethnography.

Film is thus an audio-visual media that, “experimentally” at least, has already been engaged with hauntologically within anthropology in order to represent the invisible. This is the project that I am arguing anthropology take up: the reconceptualising of audio-visual media as a “haunted” format that engages with the other as such—maintaining some experience of the other’s alterity and difference so that it not simply relegated the salvage or reification as data or “knowledge.” But film in general, because of its technological manipulability of image and sound and relation to temporality, is always able to radically configure time, to engage with ghosts, and to conjure the uncanny and to represent the visible as a form of anthropological critique. In the Thesis Introduction, I mention that this is a project that has in more recent times been taken as a concern of sensory anthropology, with the Sensory Ethnography Lab at Harvard producing films as well as audio and multi-media projects that prioritise media as a mechanism rooted in the real, but which opposes the rigidity of occularcentric and supplemental goals imposed upon it by earlier anthropological engagements with media. Such engagements, particularly if they are able to be open to the methods that I have touched upon above—the radical possibility of re-enactments and the re-assemblage of existing media that make media itself an already “haunted” medium—point to a media anthropology that is able to representing the invisible as a form of critique.

**PART II CONCLUSION**

Part II has drawn upon my study of ghosthunters as described in Part I in order to comment upon the occularcentric nature of engagements with others as “appearances” using photography, and to propose that audio and film offer alternatives to occularcentic engagements with the others of both anthropology and ghosthunting, primarily because of the ways in which audio-visual media in general are ghost-like in their capacity to conflate the notion of linear time and because their audio components underscore the issues at play when representing both the invisible and the uncanny. While I have suggested that photography as well as all media, particularly the digital, may function dialectically—maintaining as well as critiquing—I argue that non-visual media such as sound and film suggest media practices of engaging with the invisible that call into question occularcentric notions of anthropological media practice more concerned with “knowledge production” and less concerned about engaging with the others as a form of communication and critique.

I began Part II by positing that ghosts, as appearances, may both come to light and illuminate. I then examined the ways in which spirit photography and contemporary photography may both illuminate the ghost, but how more often than not they attempt to “reveal” the secret of the ghost, and have it function as data. My discussion of spirit photography showed the ways in occularcentric conventions were bound up with Spiritualism, and that drives to communicate with others were also quickly bound up with the need to supply evidence, with the media itself playing a particular role in the ways in which this evidence came to look and function. Over the last century photography became more accessible, and with the increasing digitalization of photographic practices, including archivization, the main characteristics of the photographic ghost became its mimesis and iterability. Like other forms of audio-visual media, inherent to the very mechanism of photography is its hauntedness—and hence its ability to stand as critique. Furthermore, the archives comprised of photographs—whether the exhibitions of spirit photography described by Stubbs, or Potts’ “many thousands of photographs”—is also hauntologcal and hence able to be mined or experienced critically. As Ariella Azoulay (2012: 67) puts it, “the archive as a point of “pluarality, deteritorialization and decentralization.”

Azoulay (2011) has declared Walter Benjamin to be one of the few to first understand photography a mode of production, rather than as an extension of drawing. Benjamin wrote of history and its ghosts as a series of dialectical images. Such images, according to James Kennel (2009), on his co-authored blog exploring the Arcades Project, signify “an interruption to the dream world of false consciousness.” They interrupt, says Kennel (ibid), “the linear narratives of history with a constellation of events frozen momentarily in an image containing histories of the past and present.” It is the construction, presentation and consumption of dialectical images that provides the emancipatory potential of Benjamin’s historical method, a method that links hauntology to the legacy of anthropological surrealism. According to Margaret Cohen (1995: 12), Benjamin belongs to a tradition of Gothic Marxism that is “fascinated with the irrational aspects of society’s processes and which takes seriously a culture’s ghosts and phantasms as a significant and rich field of social production rather than mirage to be expelled.”

Benjamin, of course, saw the capacity of images and their mimetic capabilities in the commodities fetishised in the arcades of Paris, with advertisements and shop windows serving as openings to other, dream-like worlds. As Benjamin (2002: 262) himself put it:

It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation.  In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill.  For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: it is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.

In this “suddenly emergent” dialectical image—in which both the archaic past and the present are both articulated—that Benjamin conceived of a mode of seeing that “seizes the past as an image” (Britzolakis 1999: ).

The dialectical image, despite the link with ghosts to appearances, is not necessarily pictorial; as with the communications devices of the 19th century that seemed to conjure the disembodied voices of loved ones at a distance or those who had died, in contemporary times the uncanny of course emerges in the form of audio or the audio-visual representations of ghosts or of the other of anthropology. There could be few better ways for understanding the connection between ghosts and the uncanny and the application of this relationship to engagements with others in the form of photography. In his commentary on the “banal” photographs of street life in Breton’s *Nadja*, Benjamin (1985: 231) describes the way in which images—which can be taken more generally as media recordings—may subvert the “everyday”:

Photography intervenes in a very strange way. It makes the streets, gates, squares of the city into illustrations of a trashy novel, draws off the banal obviousness of this ancient architecture to inject it with the most pristine intensity towards the events described, to which, as in old chambermaids’ books, word-for-word quotations with page numbers must refer.

It is this process of illumination from some emergent image that Benjamin called "profane illumination,"and which he described as the central task of Surrealism, the same movement that injected anthropology with the realisation of the power of the uncanny and of the representation of the culture of others to stand as critique. The past can be recognised in the present, as in the arcades or in photographs or audio recordings, but also within the notion—in apparitional/representational form—of the uncanny.Adorno (2006: 246) criticised Benjamin’s notion of profane illumination as a bit too Jungian and totalitarian, but he had his own version: “Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will one day appear in the messianic light.” Britzolakis (1999) defines profane illumination as a moment of recognition that disrupts linear history: “it is a configuration of shock which prefigures a messianic cessation of happening and revolutionary possibility.”

Hinting perhaps at the need for ghosts to maintain their secrecy, to remain “haunting”-- for there to be a category of the other, in order for there to be a self--Cadva (1998: 11) writes that the image can only captures traces, that which cannot completely come to light, or stay there. Cadva elaborates:

We could even say that the lesson of the photograph for history—what it says about the spectralization of light, about the electrical flashes of remote spirits—is that every attempt to bring the other to the light of day, to keep the other alive, silently presumes that it is mortal, that it is always already touched (or retouched) by death.

In this way, Azoulay’s (2012) statement about inventing new ways of being with others via photohraphy is about the way in which photography assumes that its subject is already other, and links to Kaja Silverman’s writing about t the shortcomings of understanding the photograph representation, index, or as mechanically reproduced. Rather, Silverman (ibid) proposes photography as analogy: the world revealing itself to us, in the way its wants to be seen—as Ghassan Hage (2012) has suggested--asking us to acknowledge that there is a world that exceeds our capacity to know it. As Berger (1972a: 2) has noted, “the true content of a photograph is invisible, for it derives from a play, not with form, but with time,” with ghosts calling into question the notion of time as linear or somehow bounded by media.

Baudrillard (2008: 148) wrote that “only the inhuman is photogenic. Reciprocal stupefaction only works at this price, through our complicity with the world and the world’s complicity with us.” To be sure, contemporary ghost photos are simulacra and spectacle: a ghost now resembles a ball of light, for example, and we give ourselves over to the stupefaction though we don’t know or remember why what we see is shocking, beyond the fact that it looks like the image that came before it in the archive and makes no sense otherwise in the context of the photo. This has been the case with other iconographic image types of ghosts: Caspar the Friendly Ghost is recognizable as a ghost because of his shape, colour and iconic status in popular culture; likewise, gauzy, transparent human figures in fictional films continue to be instantly identified as ghosts. Digital ghost images such as the orbs described in Chapter 5 are relevant because they constitute a departure from the ghost as a signifying figure despite; so far few would independently interpret appearance of an orb in a fictional film to be a ghost.[[133]](#footnote-131)110 Baudrillard (2008: 148) further seems to describe the feelings of ghosthunters, and the conundrum of an ethical hauntology, when he writes:

The only deep desire is the desire of the object. Not desire for something I am missing, or even for something (or someone) that misses me but for something that does not miss me at all, that is perfectly able to exist without me...The Other is the one who does not miss me, and that is radical alterity.

This is the primary experience of “ghost-seeing” in contemporary times as manifested in photography: an occularcentric obsession with the other as collectible and visually archivable object.

Baudrillard’s notion of radical alterity would seem to be a materialist reductive denial of the Levinasian other: the exterior other received as “guest” (as emphasized by Derrida), the other for whom we are responsible (as used by Davis (2005) to argue for the ethics inherent in hauntology). Baudrillard’s radical alterity is essentially opposed to the phantasmagoric potential housed in Benjamin’s capitalist arcades, and instead intent upon the collection and juxtapostion of objects, but never going further the radical consequences of going beyond such collage. But there is always the possibility of “maintaining the secret” through a more radical translations interpretations and “remixes” of other times and places--and their people, narratives, and objects--via audio-visual media that may be understood to be utilizing critical hauntological approaches to engaging with others in the form of ghosts and the others of anthropology. I have suggested the ways in which photography may maintain the uncanniness of the other—but also how it may reify the other as data for the archive.

In Chapter 6, I turned to the ways in which methods that are not solely visual in nature, such as audio and film, may also go against the tendency to understand mimesis and iterability as lending themselves to less critical ways of engaging with others. To remember the “hauntedness” at the root of audio-visual media is to embrace the manifestations of that legacy in digital media and emergent forms of audio-visual engagements with others. Historicism works by solidifying contextualisations into their apparently original contexts. Peter Buse and Andrew Stott (1999: 16) point out that in this way, history acts anachronistically as it brings the past, which does not belong, into the present: “A chronology must necessarily produce a concept of anachronism to define it and negatively keep it in its place.” This brings to mind Bliss Lim’s (2004) calls for ethical understandings of time that refuse to bring domesticate ghosts, and instead allow them to signify anachronism as a type of difference.[[134]](#footnote-132) Texts, of course, are made to signify even once they leave their origins and authors, but Derrida’s notion of spectrality indicates that history is only truly discernable through the iteration of those texts.[[135]](#footnote-133) The history and politics of a text can be found not in the imagined richness of its origins, but in its iteration and re-inscription, and I have suggested the ways in which this is particularly the case for audio, as demonstrated in the translations of EVP, and in different ways for potentially “hauntological” film, such as with the methods of re-enactments or re-assemblage of found footage as discussed in Chapter 6.

The ghosts of audio-visual media recordings are not the same person and so are not of the past, and are thus always making a debut—because they are not of the present either—just as those others who are subjects of any ethnographic text debut as something entirely new when reproduced or juxtaposed into some other context via writing or media. Derrida’s (1993: 4) concept of hauntology calls for the deconstruction of all historicisms grounded in a rigid sense of chronology, stating that “haunting is historical, to be sure, but it is not dated--never docilely given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of the calendar.” Like the cultural others of anthropology who always arrive from some different material reality, ghosts always arrive in the present from the some past. It is this paradoxical and dual movement of return and debut constitutes hauntology and Derrida (1994: 161) describes it as follows:

To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration.[[136]](#footnote-134)

This is not to say that a text—whether an ethnography of another culture or a recording of a ghost (or a translation of it)--becomes de-historicised, de-politicised, or alienated from external referents, but merely that “no context can entirely enclose it,” as Derrida (1988: 9) states elsewhere, and as Schneider and Pasqualino (2014), Surh and Willerslev (2013), Jasen (2011), Russell (1999), and others have described of the film methods that I have identified as potentially “hauntological”.

I began Chapter 6 with a discussion of the communication imperatives that were bound up with the development of audio technologies, media that would soon facilitate the advent of film as another method for recording and playing back the present in the present and into the future. I will conclude this section with a reminder that part and parcel of any audio-visual recording media is the playing back of it—the reception of the message by the other at a distance. Derrida (1994: 167), perhaps thinking of the Internet, wrote:

It obliges us more than ever to think of the virtualisation of space and time, the possibility of virtual events whose movement and speed prohibit us more than ever (more and otherwise than ever, for this is not absolutely and thoroughly new) from opposing presence to its representation, “real time” to “deferred time,” effectivity to its simulacrum, the living to the non-living, in short, the living to the living-dead of its ghosts.

As Peters and Eric W. Rothenbuhler (1997: 245) write of the phonograph, “its uncanniness consists in its ability to suppress absence, to span the chasm between source and addressee that death and distance once seemed to make impossible.” McQuire (1997: 683) invokes Paul Virilio’s (1997) phrase, the “geostrategic homogenization of the globe,” and asks, once the playing field is thus leveled and homogenized, “…would being propelled on a journey bereft of familiar coordinates problematise mastery and overthrow entrenched relations of power, or would it simply accentuate an existing state of generalized isolation and alienation?” This is certainly a question that has been asked of Clifford’s conceptualisation of ethnographic surrealism, and a question that is particularly relevant to the representation of others in postcolonial times.

And yet Heiedegger (1971: 165) already understood the shortcomings of media technologies when he wrote that “this frantic abolition of all distances brings no nearness, for nearness does not consist of the shortness of distance…despite all conquest of distances, the nearness of things remains absent.” On the one hand, though ghosts have been intimately related to the development of media, the pursuit of them through these technologies has not brought the absent other nearer, any more than anthropology, for example, has brought its others closer by pointing a camera at them (though attempts have been made that do accomplish a genuinely communicative and collaborative, or at least “ethical” stance and political support of the anthropological other—and this is where the usefulness of the comparisons between ghosthunting and anthropology are invariably a stretch). On the contrary, ghosthunters have used media to ontologise ghosts, replacing a longed-for presence or an emancipatory or transgressive uncanny experience, with an object--a representational trinket with no origin. And yet, with the acts of recording and translating of audio recording, and editing and disruptive montage of film, the secret of the ghost is potentially maintained via the haunted temporality of media.

**THESIS CONCLUSION**

**A HAUNTOLOGICAL APPROACH TO ANTHROPOLOGY AND MEDIA**

In this thesis I have argued that the critical element of audio-visual media for anthropology is to do with its ability to invoke the uncanny--not just the uncanniness of the other at a distance, in space or time or culturally--but the uncanniness of the act of transmitting, recording, and ultimately reaching out to others for whom we are ethically responsible. I have suggested that a way of furthering the aims of critique of anthropology is via a more critical engagements with media, one that acknowledges audio-visual media’s “haunted” nature in particular, and hence its inherent capacity to engage with cultural others. My study of ghosthunters who prescriptively use audio-visual media to “capture” ghosts has functioned as a metaphor for the ways in which some anthropologists use audio-visual media in ways that are much less critical than written forms of ethnography. My analysis of the media engagements of ghosthunters has illustrated the dialectal capacity of audio-visual recording media, its uncanniness partially stemming from its haunted history of development, but also from it’s subversive ways of functioning as critique against the grain of reification.

In the case of photography, where fraud and later the rhetoric of pseudo-science have determined the ghost, spirit photographs nonetheless function as potential images, while digital ones bring about a questioning and potential subversion of the archive. Furthermore, photographs are able to stand as critical engagements with others in the ways that Chris Wright (2008) has hinted at—because of their many localities—and also because they evoke material responses in those experiencing them (touch, sound and other forms of communication, as described by Elizabeth Edwards (2005)). As for audio recordings of EVP, despite the science of recording, the uncanniness of the disembodied voice, and the desire for the other at a distance, results in translation as poetry, something shared by some of the methods of experimental ethnographic film that I have discussed as particularly engaging with the past as a dialectical and mediated concept.

I described in the Thesis Introduction that phantasmagoria shows preceded most forms of media that I have discussed in this thesis. Phantasmagoria shows were dialectical in their own way, as they tended to both charm and terrify people, even as their creators insisted the images and sounds were mediated through technology and science, and they tended to play on actual fears determined by the political and economic climate.[[137]](#footnote-135) Britzolakis (1999: 87), in her re-examination of Walter Benjamin’s specific interest in a wider conceptualisation of phantasmagoria, considers the phenomenon to be a “sign of a historic formation of modernity” particularly its connection to the “ocular rhetoric of understanding” that I have described in this thesis. Britzolakis (ibid: 79) understands the concept of phantasmagoria as denoting “a heightened, distorted, or manipulated visibility; the apparitional quality of objects extracted uncannily from the process of their own making, and disporting themselves in the new urban landscape of modernity.” As Benjamin noted, the term *phantasmagoria* literally alludes to “ghosts in the marketplace” (*phantasma*, “ghost” and *agoureuin* “marketplace”), and it is the dazzling and spectral shopping arcades of the “modern” Paris between the wars on which Benjamin focused his attention in his unfinished Arcades Project.[[138]](#footnote-136)

Modern technology is seen as “having a creative mythic component rooted in the mimetic capacity,” as Christine Britzolakis (ibid: 83) puts it, and Benjamin himself thought it was impossible not to see the mythic at the root of modern media technologies. In *Spectres of Marx* (1994: 183), Derrida asks, “how do you recognise a ghost?” His answer is that it is by the fact that a ghost does not recognise itself in a mirror, and of course, what makes ghosts uncanny is this mimetic doubling, whereby the preceding origin is no longer of its own double.[[139]](#footnote-137) Derrida’s concept of texts as mimetic doubles emphasizes that to be mimetic is always to be a double—a representation potentially produced by media, as I have described both ghosts and the others of anthropology—and free from the origin that produced it, and yet always implicating this original and the need for deconstruction. My argument is that sort of radical aleterity of the anthropological other is not the fesishising of others via media, but rather about fetishising audio-visual media itself as always being uncanny in the ways that I have described. Part and parcel of media mimesis, following on from Derrida, is its uncanny capacity to thwart spatial and temporal categories, even as it also produces representations as fetish or spectacle.

Derrida (1994: 183) describes this “mythic” nature of representations as follows:

Speculation always speculates on some spectre, it speculates in the mirror of what it produces, on the spectacle that it gives itself and that it gives itself to see. It believes in what it believes it sees: in *representations*. [[140]](#footnote-138)

Frederich Kittler’s (1999: 2) well-worn but not often heeded statement about media always having yielded ghostly phenomena refers not only to the haunted history of media—to the belief that early media such as radios, cameras, and telephones could conjure absent and long dead others into the present—but also to the consequences of contemporary digital forms of media, by virtue of their is inevitably spectral and uncanny technical properities. As Derrida utters in the film *Ghost Dance* (1983), “modern technology, contrary to appearances, increases tenfold the power of ghosts.” (a line picked up on by Bernard Stiegler (see Derrida and Stiegler 2002: 115)). I am arguing, like Kittler, for an “archaeology of the present” (1990: 369), an epistemology less about humans as self-governing subjects than as the subjects of data and quantifying technical media; as Kittler argued, “ontology has dealt with the matter and form of things rather than the relations between things in time and space.” A hauntological approach to media may constitute an opening to the latter.

John Durham Peters (1999: 199) reminds us that during William James’s tenure as president of the American Society for Psychical Research, the SPR’s US equivalent founded in 1885, James’s implementation of psychical research had as much to do with communicating with the other as it did with investigation; he writes, “psychical research, at its Jamesian best, not only was about paranormal phenomena but ultimately was an attempt to answer [Kant’s] questions: ‘What can I know? What should I do? For what may I hope?’ One way of addressing both ghosts and the others of anthropology is by employing skepticism in order to address the inherent strangeness of the uncanny. This is not the “skepticism” proudly worn as a badge by some ghosthunters who take more seriously the calls for rigid methodologies than others. Nor is it the skepticism inherent in the research of the SPR and other groups that insist upon employing elaborate safeguards and statistics to achieve ontological respectability. Ralph Noyes (1999: 157), who was a long-standing member of the SPR, maintained that such techniques are likely to be rejected by skeptics as “not ‘really real’ unless wholly lumpen evidence can be provided and a wholly physicalist (five-senses) explanation can be given within the framework of a curiously old-fashioned interpretation of nineteenth-century (three-dimensional) physics.”

Rather, skepticism, in the words of Levinas (1975: 261), offers us “the brusque, unexpected, and shocking revelation that the world as we thought we knew it is not as what we believed it to be.” This hearkens back to my argument that media contains within it already the potential to critique, as well as to Ghassan’s Hage’s (2012) proposal that the uncanny is always to do with the shock of the other and that this can be harnessed in an ethical way as form of critique. As Hage (ibid: 189) puts it:

This critical anthropological thought does not therefore only challenge us by telling us that there are people who live differently from the way we live. It challenges us by telling us that they are of relevance to us. The other has, but we can have, different ways of conceiving sexual relations, kinship, our relation to plants, animals and the landscape, causality, sickness...

Noyes notes that “many seem to ignore that the physics of the late twentieth century demands far more than the three dimensions of common experience to account for the behavior of mere matter” (1999: 157). He advocated that researchers learn from the uncanny as employed by fiction, and reminds us that what initially struck the founders of psychical research, Gurney, Myers, and Podmore (1886), was the ordinariness of the accounts of the phanstasms: “living ghosts,” occurring in the daytime that importantly didn’t fit into the Spiritualist archive of the time. Noyes writes that it will take more than technological engagements with others to reveal a potential change in a whole worldview; although it can be mined in critical ways, as I have suggested, the archive only ever maintains itself, not its individual content, and certainly not outliers.

As Colin Davis (2010: 68) writes, there is always the implied question of the other in skepticism, with the question being: how do we learn to “abide peacefully, in generosity and justice, with that which will not be reduced to the order of the same? How do we live with the Other without trying to annihilate it?” Skepticism may appear to ask us to reject a belief in ghosts but it actually asks us to suspend all our beliefs, including the one that ghosts don’t exist. It is “the refutable, but also what returns/the revenant” (Levinas 1975: 261). Levinas understands skepticism as a ghost that keeps returning, a shadow that cannot be dispersed, and for this reason philosophical questioning can never shake skepticism, this question of the other.[[141]](#footnote-139) Levinas makes skepticism—the importance of maintaining the secret of the ghost so that it might still debut and challenge--an ethical issue, rather than just an epistemological one, and therein lies its “magic”, to recall Tyler’s description of revolutionary possibilities inherent to shock of the category of the other.

Derrida (1999:52) writes that the “death of the other” is the “first death” and that “I am responsible for the other insofar as he is mortal”. Derrida (ibid) further quotes Blanchot (1969: 52) on Levians’s conceiving of the other as constitute of an ethical philosophy:

We must not despair of philosophy. In Emmanuel Levinas’s book [*Totality and Infinity*]—where, it seems to me, philosophy in our time has never spoken in a more sober manner, putting back into question, as we must, our ways of thinking and even our facile reverence for ontology—we are called upon to become responsible for what philosophy essentially is, by welcoming, in all the radiance and infinite exigency proper to it, the idea of the Other….

This is the “receiving” of the other, or the ghost, as a guest as I discussed earlier. As Hage (2012: 306) writes, “radical alterity is present everywhere. There is always an outside of a system of intelligibility, of governmentality, of domestication, of instrumental reason,” but when this alterity is in the form of the ghost, or the other of anthropology, then the risk we take to receive it entails an ethical responsibility. As Hage (ibid) further writes, “by inviting us to consider the worlds analysed by primitivist anthropology as present in our very own modern world in the form of ‘minor realities’, this approach does more than create a rapprochement between these two traditions – it moves towards dissolving them. And it does so precisely by a re-centring of the primitivist/alterist ethos as a critical foundation for the discipline.”[[142]](#footnote-140)

Buse and Stott (1999:1) introduce their edited collection of essays on ghosts by stating, “It is safe to say that to be interested in ghosts these days is to be decidedly anachronistic.” But this is not quite accurate; there has seemingly never been a time when people were not interested in ghosts, when ghosts were not always already returning. The ways in which ghosts have been bound up with media—seen and heard by the masses, thanks to recording and replication—has, as I have implied, given them more of a presence (both quantitatively and qualitatively) in contemporary times than in the distant past.[[143]](#footnote-141) And yet, as Buse and Stott (ibid) concede, “there may be no proper time for ghosts;” they are always anachronistic, for the very structure of a haunting is the deformation of linear time. As Lim (2001: 267), reminds us of ghosts in film:

[they] are not merely instances of the past reasserting itself in a stable present, as is usually assumed; on the contrary, the ghostly return of traumatic events precisely troubles the boundaries of past, present, and future, and cannot be written back to the complacency of a homogeneous, empty time. The ghost always presents a problem, not merely because it might provoke disbelief, but because it is only admissible insofar as it can be domesticated by a modern concept of time.

Rethinking what we think we know about history in the form of the past, and culture in the form of the present, is the alternative presented by an acknowledgement of the uncanny, I have shown the ways in which audio-visual media in particular is a dialectical, but ultimately offers a form of critique that differs to written forms of ethnography. Ghosts are not just problems, but others for whom we are responsible, precisely because they do trouble us, and ask us to risk hosting them.

Hauntology—paying attention to ghosts—demonstrates the utility of the uncanny to anthropology’s relationship to media as a form of critique. A hauntological approach to media means acknowledging the uncanny’s propensity to upset established borders, allowing representations to stand as critique rather than to ontologise. As Royle (2003: 4) writes, “everything in Marx that speaks of a spectre haunting Europe, everything that has to do with notions of alienation, revolution and repetition, comes down to a thinking of the uncanny.” Derrida acknowledges this as well; the first line of *Spectres of Marx* (1994)—“maintaining now the spectres of Marx”—is not a rumination, but a call to revolution, an injunction to maintain the provocative secrecy of iterated texts, or representations, that the uncanny provides. Freud’s uncanny, with its links to the uncertainty of the self in the face of others, is in turn related to representation as an anthropological practice, and I have introduced the possibility that audio-visual media in all forms—as with Benjamin’s “dialectical image”—are capable of actively invoking the uncanny as mode of cultural critique, as the Surrealists did for a brief time with anthropology, but with in contemporary times with the uncanny potential of the digital.

Frederic Jameson (1995: 65) seeks to incorporate Derrida’s hauntology into his project of making Marxism “a wandering signifier capable of keeping any number of conspiratorial futures alive.” With regard to anthropology, if not Marxism, a hauntological approach to audio-visual media may do just that. However, I have attempted to take care with my own approach to the notion and “promises” of hauntology. As Davis (2005: 13), in his critique of Julian Wolfrey’s (2002) text on literary hauntings, wrote: “In this breathtaking display, ghosts progress rapidly from being one theme amongst others to being the ungrounded grounding of representation and a key to all forms of storytelling. They are both unthinkable and the only thing worth thinking about.” As Mladen Dolar (1991: 23) stated, what was, for a time, considered “postmodernism,” for example, was actually “a new consciousness about the uncanny as a fundamental dimension of modernity.” Dolar (ibid: 19) warns that contemporary ideology can be understood today as a “social attempt to integrate the uncanny, to make it bearable, to assign it a place,” with “criticism of ideology…caught in the same framework if it tries to reduce it to another kind of content or to make the content conscious and explicit.”

Indeed, despite my critiques, I empathise with ghosthunters; it is difficult to theorise anything, much less the spectral, without falling into acts of ontology, even while advocating a deconstructive approach. Royle (2003: 25) seems to be evoking Tyler’s (1986) advocacy of shock as a form of critical ethnography when he warns that we must never give ourselves over to the uncanny; there must be grounding in the rational in order to experience “its trembling and break-up.” And yet anyone concerned with the politics of representation—from artists to academics—may give themselves over to Heidegger’s darkened city, to the possibilities of the uncanny, rather than attempting to classify and archive such phenomena, and to do so in the deconstructive spirit of Derrida (1994: 218), who wrote: “fear is not good for the serenity of research and the analytic distinction of concepts.”[[144]](#footnote-142) While I believe that the relationship between the uncanny and media to have significant implications for critical audio-visual practices within anthropology, to attempt to explicitly outline how to—or how not to--“do” hauntology is not to “maintain the spectres.”

Derrida’s trouble with defining the border of haunting, and the borders of the provenance of theories about it, is that we can give proper names to theories thanks to those who did the theorising, but that is all.[[145]](#footnote-143) Transgressions of borders—philosophical, categorical, geographical, not to mention practical, physical and disciplinary--inevitably haunt my study of ghosthunters. While the issues at stake are ethical and political, the specific problem that my thesis is attempting to redress is ultimately one of method, and while I seek to transgress accepted thinking within anthropology about audio-visual media, I have avoided being too prescriptive with my suggestions, preferring instead to offer the insights gleaned from my comparative study of ghosthunting and anthropology, of potential further areas of study and, indeed, experimentation with audio-visual media. Here, I have attempted to produce make the connections between the uncanny and ghosts as a metaphor for the other, as an one opening to begin to redress anthropology’s reluctance, despite a “crisis of representation” to embrace audio-visual media as critical tools in the same way as writing.

I have therefore suggested that anthropological engagements with media ultimately go beyond “experimental” ethnography and become part of a critical audio-visual media that can stand as a body of methods. This critique would also go beyond collage, the sewing up of raw data in some way that’s provocative. For a provocation generally incites, or instigates—it does not merely dazzle aesthetically. It is more than the “co-efficient of weirdness” suggested by the work of Malinowski’s (1922), or James Clifford saying that “ethnographic lists tend to produce reverie”(1988: 151): rather, these things are uncanny because they float free of time and the known reality of space. They are not just supplemental, and they are more than just the “perverse collection” (that documents, juxtaposes and relativises the array of cultural experience). Clifford (1988) has noted that surreal ethnography doesn’t allow raw and rough work to become “homogenous representation.” But there is another category—the hauntological—that may inspire a way of engaging with the uncanny that is not merely a transparent construction and evidential collage of raw data. Rather, it is poetry, or a “remix,” or the disruptive montage of Surh and Willerslev (2013). Hauntology—attending to ghosts as others, speaking with ghosts as subjects, receiving ghosts as guests—is a starting place for place for anthropologists to begin to think more critically about the place of the uncanny and its relation to audio-visual media.

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1. The so-called “crisis of representation” in anthropology stemmed from a concern about the claims of methods of capturing cultural knowledge completely and without bias or generalisation. [↑](#footnote-ref--1)
2. The term “ghosthunter”—and, arguably, ghosthunting as a popular contemporary activity—came into vogue especially around the turn of this century, during the advent of television programmes such as *The UK’s Most Haunted* and its many imitators in the UK and the US. (During the mid- to late-1980s, the term “ghostbusters,” following the popular 1984 American film of the same name, was more often applied to people who pursued ghosts.) [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
3. Marcus and Clifford (1986) distanced themselves from the term “postmodern” (preferring “high modernism” or “reflexive modernity”). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
4. Hart (2009) sums up anthropological relativism as follows: “every way of life, however barbarous, has a right to exist and it is not for outsiders to judge it as inferior for any reason.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
5. Discursive practice within anthropology refers to gaining knowledge from usually face-to-face linguistic encounters, rather than from observational practices alone; discursive practices are often discussed in contrast to representational practices, methods that are based on observation. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
6. In George Marcus’s (2007) reassessment of *Writing Culture* twenty years after its publication, he concludes that many of the resulting texts may be understood less as experimental critique and more as the products of a “messy” baroque period of anthropology; Marcus has advocated a return to more traditional ethnography as a potentially more effective means of critique for anthropology. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
7. This included audio-visual projects by anthropologists, but also resulted in a subsequent greater acknowledgement of the materiality of visual culture, such as writings on photography by Elizabeth Edwards (2005), Christopher Pinney (1997), Jay Ruby (1995), and Chris Wright (2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
8. Visual anthropology has at times even been considered more “factual” and unbiased than textual ethnography by merit of the persistent belief that cameras and other recording devices are able to capture the truth; this is, of course, the premise on which ghosthunting media practices are based. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
9. Other earlier visual anthropology texts are collections of essays, such as Banks and Morphy’s *Rethinking Visual Anthropology* (1999), that are disparate in content and are more aligned to the anthropology of art or media reception studies than to media production within anthropology. Although in these collections there is a sense of the growing importance of media in all its forms and the need for anthropology to begin to engage with it beyond the how-to manuals of visual anthropology, there is no sense of the underlying historical connection to the uncanny that I argue links all media. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
10. See for example the transcript entitled “For God’s Sake, Margaret,” published in 1976 by Stuart Brand. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
11. Research film was understood to not be for public consumption, and those filmmakers who did branch out to make early “ethnographic films” during the 1960s and 1970s (cf. Robert Gardner and John Marshall) using montage, narration, or *cinema verite* techniques weren’t always embraced by academic anthropology because of their perceived populist appeal. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
12. Keith Hart (2009) reminds us that Margaret Mead is lately ripped apart in the name of the cultural critique—that is, the insistence upon the recording of facts against racist fictions--that she herself helped to pioneer. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
13. This thesis is concerned with the primary media recording devices of anthropologists. A more detailed study of the digital dissemination of media is beyond the remit of this thesis, but would no doubt lend further support to my argument that contemporary digital media forms—because of their ability to confound –are able to function as a discursive and ethical engagement along the lines of Huillot’s calls to “speak with others.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
14. Media anthropology would initially serve two roles, according to Allen (1994): the first was research (into audience, authors, technologies, etc) and the second was to do with the applying media to further the aims of anthropology, in the realm not only of training anthropologists to use media for their own research ends but also to influence mass media to consider the uniquely “holisitic” perspective of anthropology. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
15. Posthill notes that 2002 - 2005 was the “boom” time of people taking up media anthropology: at least four overviews of the subject were published, plus the EASA Media Anthropology Network was formed. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
16. Posthill describes how Ginsburg and Abu-Lughod’s (2003) media anthropology overview begins with a Michael Leunig cartoon depicting media history, while the text itself is mostly about contemporary media. Likewise, Askew and Wilk’s (2002) reader includes a timeline of media developments, but again focuses on contemporary media worlds. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
17. Posthill notes that media anthropologists tend to look at how people consume and create media, but not writing. Writing, he argues, must be understood as the earliest form of media, and its history interrogated as such, if we are to move on to studies of contemporary media. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
18. Each contributor to Horst and Miller’s (2016: 3) text had to provide an overview of his or her work, two detailed case studies (“usually ethnographic”) and a discussion of “potential developments”—which then helped formed six tenets of this new sub-discipline. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
19. On the other hand, as a study of “new” media, Horst and Miller’s text acknowledges that media beyond the remit of the traditional photographic and filmic focus of visual anthropology, such as the Internet and social media, may straddle textual and audio-visual. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
20. Jean Jamin (1991), March Manganero (1990) and Michael Richardson (1993) all offer correctives to Clifford’s views of surrealism, with Richardson in particular offering a scathing attack on Clifford’s seemingly interpreting surrealism as intentionally political in its taking up of “primitive” cultures in the spirit of anthropological critique that Hart (2009) has described. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
21. Clifford (1988) differentiates between ethnographic surrealism and surreal ethnography, the latter of which he claims exist few examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
22. Leiris’s account of the expedition, *Phantom Africa* (1934)--which Clifford (1988: 142) cites as “an isolated example of surreal ethnography”--with its self-reflexivity and contravention of professional standards of the time, such as his critique of colonialism and personal narratives, would alienate many of his anthropological colleagues, but would also make manifest the role of the ethnographer in defining those things “brought back” from anthropological expeditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
23. See for example, Hal Foster (1995) on the connection between Surrealism and World War I: personal experiences of twisted or severed limbs, burned fields of dead bodies, and cities bombed beyond recognition were aspects of the post-war world from which came Surrealist art that questioned the mechanistic and industrial underpinnings of a landscape—corporeal, natural, and urban—rendered uncanny by war. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
24. The debates between Marshal Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere surrounding Cook offer a good overview of the issues surrounding cultural relativism within anthropology; there must be some third way between apolitical and sublime relativism and utilitarian ontology, which I propose to be hauntology. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
25. Although Freud describes ghosts as the prime example of the uncanny, he concludes that anything uncanny originates from long-repressed “primitive” anxieties: “…Everything which now strikes us as ‘uncanny’ fulfils the condition of touching those residues of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression” (1919: 240-241). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
26. Heiedgger expanded on this denial of death in *Being in Time* (1927): death, the most individuated possibility of a person, is falsely concealed as such, with “every one dies” being commonly understood as “no one dies.” As such, an awareness of one’s own death, and one’s angst about it, represents a “coming to light” of being-in-the world—and an example of the way in which Heidegger’s rethinking of ontology (presaging Derrida’s calls for hauntology) sees the future as always containing the past. As such, ghosts—and the seeking out of them under the guise of “no one really dies” as Freud described, and as prompted by one’s angst about his or her own inevitable and personal death--could be examples of what Heidegger refers to as *alatheia*, the openness and “unconcealedness,” that occurs when that which has been hidden is revealed, which is one way Freud came to understand the uncanny, as we shall see below. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
27. As Nicholas Royle (1999: 7) puts it in a longer description in which he too marvels at the uncanny nature of Freud’s essay (and which perhaps inadvertently hints at the ghostly legacy of Freud’s thought in general), “the essay provides an exemplary instance of why it will never be possible to have done with Freud, to finish reading him.” [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
28. Royle states that the first English usage of the word “uncanny” in relation to the supernatural was likely in Scottish poetry of the 18th century; Scotland—liminal and “beyond the border” in British history--produced some of the earliest recorded experiments of “psychical research” and is perhaps an “uncanny other” of England. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
29. Although Freud’s rather humorous account of getting repeatedly lost in a seedy area of town is portrayed as a decidedly unpleasant uncanny experience, the Surrealist notion of *l’amour fou* and the concept of psychogeography are examples of how encounters with the other function as experiences of the uncanny as a form of enchantment. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
30. See Peter Mason (1990) on the early period of “realist/rhetorical” ethnography, during which he claims the subject matter of anthropology was the stuff of imaginary worlds—but by extension, also part of the natural world and therefore something to be tamed and brought into the fold of science. That which exceeded the limits of ethnography could therefore be thought of as supernatural, if only temporarily. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
31. Origins and destinations, of course, are temporal as well as geographical or cultural. The adage “you can never go home again” is as much a statement about the foreign and alienating nature of the passing of time and a longing for the past as it is one of locale. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
32. There is of course a potential for ethnocentrism in likening cultural others to ghosts, and just as ghosts are always somehow always connected to the politics of the past, so to are ghostly others in the present. But as Hage (2012) has argued for critical anthropology, it is not judgement but rather ethical concern for others as alternatives to ourselves that lies at the heart of being haunted by others, and that offers up possibilities of engaging with others as ghosts that can stand as anthropological critique. For a recent example of this see the film *Those Who Feel the Fire Burning* (2014) in which the main character is the ghost of a refugee who apparently perished at sea, haunting the borders of Europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
33. Derrida (1993: 219) wrote of the uncanniness of Marx: “One should not rush to make of the clandestine immigrant an illegal alien or, what always risks coming down to the same thing, to domesticate him. To neutralise him through naturalisation. To assimilate him so as to stop frightening oneself (making oneself fear) with him. He is not part of the family, but one should not send him back, once again, him too, to the border.” See John Hutnyk and Sanjay Sharma (1996) and Hutnyk (2000) for discussions of hybridity as “a safe way to categorise difficult subject-matter” (Hutnyk 2006: 22). Hutnyk has written extensively on the ways in which Asian dance and hip hop bands in the UK have been dismissed and diffused as “hybrid”—or else had their outputs unofficially “banned,” and relegated to the realm of abject for being too radically authentic. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
34. See Steven Luke’s (2000) essay concerning relativism and rationalism, following Peter Winch’s (1967) earlier essay questioning the very idea of social science. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
35. David MacDougall (1998), for example, disputes the view that ethnographic filmmaking is merely a visual form of anthropology. Rather, he sees it as a radical anthropological practice that challenges many of the basic assumptions of anthropology. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
36. The question of whether Derrida has usefully grasped Marx’s own conception of the spectral has been much debated, most notably in Sprinker’s (1999) edited volume following a symposium on *Spectres of Marx*. This volume contains Jameson’s updated essay, in which he avoids simplifying Derrida’s take on ghosts, stating that while the task of Marxism may well have been to exorcise the ghost of old communism, the acknowledgment of such fairy-tale ghosts belies, as Derrida described, something much more complex. Jameson (1999: 65) seeks to incorporate Derrida’s hauntology into his project of making Marxism “a wandering signifier capable of keeping any number of conspiratorial futures alive;” I conclude this thesis by suggesting some ways in which this project may being taken up critically and practically and made manifest by anthropology and other practices. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
37. Discussing Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Derrida (1993) suggests that the ghost of Old Hamlet, with his proclamation, “the time is out of joint,” is representative of time in general, and that it is doubtful that any time is not out of joint. Hamlet the apparition, says Derrida (ibid: 70), is emblematic of the deconstructive view of time that questions “a general temporality made up of the successive linking of presents identical to themselves and contemporary with themselves.” [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
38. This is akin to Todorov’s (1873) notion of the meta-uncanny: literature that is defined as “gothic” or uncanny tends to be the least uncanny, as by pre-ordaining it with a genre, we already know what to expect—and expecting ghosts, or holding them up for examination, denies them of their potential of uncannily debuting. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
39. Freud (1919) begins “The Uncanny” by essentially writing himself out, implying that his own mind has overcome the tendency to revert to the “primitive” slippage of seeing the uncanny in the everyday; by the end of the essay, however, he has narrated at least one meaningful personal uncanny experience. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
40. See, for example, the litany of texts across disciplines relating just to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, or to the genre of supernatural fiction of 19th century Britain. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
41. Luckhurst (1999) makes connections between the origins of Freud’s psychoanalysis and the supernatural, such as his association with the Society for Psychical Research and his private penchant, as reported by his friend and translator James Strachey, for the more mysterious and unexplainable of his cases. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
42. In the US, a 2005 Gallup poll found that 32% of Americans believed in ghosts. In the UK, a 1998 *Daily Mirror* survey found that 49% of Britons polled professed a belief in ghosts. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
43. Ghosts, as uncanny phenomena, have come to signify, especially in language, that which is uncertain or irrational.Phantom limbs and phantom pregnancies, ghost writers, a “ghost of a chance,” ghost towns, even the “phantom objectivity” of goods as described by Marx (1867: 128)—all evoke things whose very existence is shrouded in shadowy uncertainty, perhaps living or functioning, perhaps not, but more likely somewhere in-between. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
44. The most common response I get when describing the topic of this thesis is, “Do you believe in ghosts?” [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
45. Marx (1867) writes of the “fairy tale” ghost of communism, and it interesting to note that Freud, in his essay on the uncanny (1919) explicitly rules out fairy tales as examples of the uncanny because they are already of a certain fantasy world, or context, to evoke Derrida. Perhaps Marx also would have differentiated between those media representations of ghosts as “data,” the contemporary manifestations of which I am here critiquing, and the general experience of the uncanny as potentially exemplified by ghosts, which I am proposing as the potential of using audio-visual media as critique. At any rate, Marx’s own “unintentionally uncanny” manner of writing is taken up in Harries’ (2000) book about Marx’s use of well-known literary quotes (such as those from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*); Harries argues that Marx’s attempts to evoke the supernatural through these “scare-quotes” in order to mark out the irrationality driving the coming revolution actually serves to undercut his demystifying goals and may be read quite cryptically. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
46. For example, during my fieldwork I was given a Chinese Buddhist pamphlet about the supernatural that summed up ghosts in the following way: “Respect ghosts but stay away from them.” [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
47. As such, various forms of “spiritualism” have been practiced across cultures; see Harwood (1977) for an example of how ghosts have been called up to treat mental health issues in Puerto Rico, and David Lan (1985) on the ways in which the spirits of dead ancestors have been used to help fight the wars of the living. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
48. See also Boyd and Thrush’s (2011) collection of essays discussing imagined Native American ghosts and their relation to colonial settler history and territorial issues. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
49. That ghosts are enjoyable as well as disturbing—and sought out by audiences--hints at the appeal of the uncanny and its potential as a representational method that serves as more than entertainment. The uncanny must be differentiated from Kant’s (1951) definition of the sublime, which is both about indescribably pleasant beauty, but also has the capacity to arouse enjoyment but with horror. The disruption of the uncanny, while brought about by particular aesthetic representational methodologies, is more aligned with Lyotard’s (1994) later conceptualisation of the sublime as *differend*, entailing a crisis at the realisation of the inadequacy of representation to communicate reason and concepts. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
50. See Poo (2010) for a recent historical and cross-cultural analysis of ghosts. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
51. John Durham Peters (1999) mentions that there were surely no Victorian houses 200 years ago where someone had not died. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
52. Even more “modern” cities are not immune to ghosts. Central Glasgow, long seen as a banal area within a city exemplifying the rationalised industrialism of the 19th Century, rarely rated a mention in tourist guidebooks, but has recently been transformed by the use of ghost tours. Mercat, the Edinburgh ghost tour company, started the first “horror tour” there in 2003, and competitors were quick to follow suit. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
53. Interviews with owners and managers of each of these pubs indicated that they acknowledge that the Cricketers, with some of its parts dating to at least 1549, has functioned as a pub the longest. However, the Druid’s Head is located in the oldest part of Brighton and is believed to have existed as a livestock hold on the perimeter of the town square of the original city of Brighton, Brighthelmstone. The Red Lion is situated just next to the Cricketers and its basement links to tunnels running to the sea that were said to be used by smugglers; these smugglers are said to haunt the pub, and ghost hunters spent a number of nights in the basement in throughout the 1990s, lending further credibility to its haunted and historic claims. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
54. Encountering heritage through so-called “living history” experiences becomes a way of gaining cultural capital, enabling those in charge of presenting the heritage to gain monetary capital. “Heritage managers,” such as the National Trust and National Heritage, however, have good reason for wanting to procure capital, as maintenance fees at heritage sites are expensive. Fowler (1992: 82) rather sentimentally states that heritage jobs were once “marked by national pride,” with workers and volunteers acting as custodians of the past. Now, he laments, they have to concentrate on “counting bums on seats.” To Fowler, the National Trust’s two million volunteers are nothing more than salespeople, not conserving what is already there, but promoting and embellishing it to through restoration in order to gain more capital to make history and heritage evermore sustainable and consumable through preservation. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
55. See Patrick Wright’s (1986: 1) description of returning to the UK from North America in 1979 and feeling as if he had “stumbled into some kind of anthropology museum.” At that time, the national atmosphere under Thatcher’s leadership was filled with nostalgia and a preoccupation with past mistakes. He describes how stories are often used in such contexts to shape a society’s culture and to order representations of itself. Such stories are judged by their relevance to what is happening now, and therefore their allegiance is always to the present, even if they are depicting events of the past. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
56. Andrew Smith’s (2012: 130) account of nineteenth century ghost stories brings to mind the ways in which the ghost stories re-enacted at heritage sites and ghost tours reflect concerns about defining the present in light of the past. In James’s *Turn of the Screw*, Smith finds “a critical, perhaps conservative, response to modernism” played out in James’s “view of how British history is represented through… stately homes” (Bly, “inhabited by the dead”, turns “the place into a morgue”). In Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol,* Smith (ibid: 36) notes there is likewise a making visible in the materialisation of Marley of “what capitalism tries to render invisible, namely the labour which is inherent to, and so sublimated within, the process of commodity production”. Smith (ibid: 17) links the nineteenth-century popularity of the ghost story with what he argues to have been the increasingly spectral nature of money – no longer “associated with land-ownership” it had become “less tangible, less visible.” [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
57. Roger Luckhurst (2002) questions the limits of invoking a generalized structure of 'haunted modernity' such as the spectral turn of thought that invokes a somehow modern London Gothic. Tourists to the UK, of course, often cite its “ghosts,” as a main attraction, and conversations with Australian and US tourists in particular often involved their impression that the UK is somehow “more historical” than their own nations. This was usually enhanced by a sense that heritage sites exist “everywhere,” with a couple of tourists citing the juxtaposition of heritage sites with cutting edge modern-archeology in urban areas as underscoring their feeling of a “more historical” Britain. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
58. Benjamin’s (1931) essay on photography, cited in Part II, focuses on the photographs of David Octavius Hill, who photographed his subjects among the memorials of Greyfriars Cemetery. As Eduardo Cadava (1998: 8) writes, “the portraits bear witness to the fact that we are most ourselves, most at home, when we remember the possibility of out deaths.” [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
59. See, for example, Henderson’s (2001) *The Ghost That Haunted Itself*. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
60. For example, in Edinburgh, the Scottish Whiskey Heritage Centre runs a tour narrated by the Master Blender’s ghost, with the legacy of the alcoholic spirit of Scotland buoyed by the presence of a more other-wordly type of spirit. Brighton’s one regular ghost walk during my fieldwork period was a child-friendly affair that hit the major tourist locations of the city and was run once a month with assistance from the local Council. Its guide was an amateur historian, Glenda Clarke, who wore plastic cartoon-style ghost earrings and passed out candy “for energy” halfway through the walk. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
61. For example, Catherine Crowe’s translation from the German of Justinus Kerner’s calls for objective investigation of the supernatural (supported by factual tales with fictional embellishments, mostly from Germany) in the *Night Side of Nature* (1848) is notable because it preceded Spiritualism. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
62. See Harvey (2004) and McCorristine (2011) for detailed accounts of Dickens’ particularly complex connection to representations of the spiritual and the ways in which his fiction served as a blue-print for how modern ghosts look and behave. McCorristine (ibid: 4) notes that Dickens “famously” threatened to shoot any ghost he encountered (though this doesn’t seem to be well-documented). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
63. The SPR describes itself as “the first society to conduct organised scholarly research into human experiences that challenge contemporary scientific models.” See Weaver (undated) for a condensed history of the SPR’s history on the organisations website. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
64. Some of contemporary ghosthunting organisations and clubs have committees and lecture series, but many more simply function casually as local hobby clubs with activities ranging from casually chatting online about ghosts to regular organised fieldtrips to haunted tourist and heritage sites and the archiving of the by-products of these experiences. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
65. Spiritualism in Britain is now often practiced in Christian Spiritualist Churches, which conduct religious services complete with hymns and tithing; though traditional Spiritualist activities such as demonstrations of mediumship and séances often crop up during ghost hunts (see my account of this, below), Spiritualism is now understood as a religious practice separate to the “scientific” methods employed by ghosthunters as a hobby. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
66. Arthur Gray’s (1919) ghost story “The Everlasting Club, ” published the same year as Freud’s essay on the uncanny, is thought to be about the Ghost Club, and parodies this aspect of the Club in particular. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
67. Many members of the Ghost Club continued not to be concerned with the popular turn towards psychical research in ghosthunting; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who was also a member of the Society for Psychical Research, led a mass resignation from that Society in the 1920s, on the basis that it was hostile towards spiritualism. Doyle’s public downfall over his refusal to accept that photographs of fairies in a garden were a hoax is well-known, but lesser-known writings on Spiritualism and photography (cf. Doyle 1922) are a useful snapshot of the way in which audio-visual media still held vestiges of functioning communicatively, as a “medium,” even after evidence-based “scientific” uses for media came to the fore. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
68. The biography section of Underwood’s website explains his resignation: “Unhappy with the way the Ghost Club Society was heading, the administrators having closed down the website, arbitrarily restricted membership, ceased holding meetings, stopped the Quarterly Journal, discontinued subscriptions, refused to co-operate with assistants and did not answer critical letters, Peter as President came to the conclusion that the club could not exist given these restrictions and in all the circumstances and with mutual consent he is now in the process of completely reforming the Ghost Club Society more along the lines of the original with new people in an organising capacity but this looks like taking some months and will involve forming a new Council and complete reorganisation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
69. This has changed over the last decade, with Ghost Club, like many other organisations, developing a more substantial presence on social media, and sharing information and events with other related societies, websites and publications such as the SPR, the Fortean Society, and the *Anamolist*. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
70. See Rachel Dixon’s (2009) *Guardian* article surveying the landscape of the “growing number of paranormal-themed experiences springing up around the country,” outside the of the traditional heritage-tourism remit. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
71. Walter Benjamin’s (2008: 278 - 9) notion of the “optical unconscious,” for example, was inspired by the unforeseen aspects that came to light in photographs, “making the difference between magic and technique visible.” [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
72. Wittgenstein (1993) critiqued Frazer for under-representing and undermining just how widespread and commonplace “magic” really is, stating that when Frazer described some primitive-tribal belief in ghosts, Frazer--himself a Western “man of science”--understood perfectly well what was meant by the concept of ghosts. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
73. Magic isn’t always killed off by science; within anthropology, Paul Stoller has addressed the difference between faith and perception, addressing his personal involvement with magic and shamanism as experiences during which his “unwavering faith in science vanished” (Stoller and Olkes 1987: 153). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
74. See James Carey and John Quirk (1989), following Leo Marx (1967) on the transition from the “technological sublime” to the “electrical sublime.” [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
75. Chapter 4 contains photographs of other “famous” ghosts, among them Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, channeled (and in some cases “captured” photographically) during séances in order to publicly lend credence to Spiritualism or to seek advice on matters of science or philosophy. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
76. For example, in April 2013, Iain Logie Baird, Associate Curator of the National Media Museum in Bradford and grandson of John Logie Baird, one of the inventors and developers of television in the UK, spoke of how his grandfather wrote in his diary about a visit he was paid by a renowned Australian etymologist, “John ---,” who was visiting Europe ostensibly to test psychical mediums, and whom had drawn parallels between telepathy and televisual broadcast, prompting the visit to Baird’s electronics studio. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
77. Chesher (2006: 125), drawing parallels between disciplines similar to ones made in this thesis between ghosthunting and anthropology, elaborates, “although the overarching systems of belief called magic, religion and science/technology are usually seen as incompatible, and often in direct conflict, they share similar aspirations, methods, and histories. Each aspires to extend perception and action beyond ordinary limits, and all share similar habits and procedures of ritual and power.” [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
78. Harvey (2004: 70) notes a later exception to this was the Baptist theologian F.B. Myer, who understood some psychical phenomena as being natural and endowed by God. Myer in 1919 believed telepathy was analogous wireless telegraphy and that “some brains had a sympathetic correspondence with the waves being transmitted.” [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
79. The theory that haunting is the result of the natural environment’s recording of past events is now known as “residual theory,” and is also sometimes referred to as the Stone Tape theory, after BBC television play *The Stone Tape* popularised the notion following its broadcast in 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
80. See the films *Poltergeist* (1982) and *White Noise* (2005) and its sequels to garner a feel for the archive upon which current views of poltergeists draw upon, not to mention similarly violent or “evil” spirits featuring in what might be considered the “Catholic” horror sub-genre-–see the *Exorcist* (1973), for example. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
81. Psychical mediums were often considered to be extensions of technological media. Justin Sausman (2011) describes Oliver Lodge’s 1895 investigations of the medium Eusapia Palladino, which treated her as a piece of technology--that is, without intent; though caught cheating, the consensus was that she was only trying to please. The spirits themselves could not have been faked, and Palladino’s skills were unquestionable because technology itself—the medium—cannot have intent. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
82. The deployment of science to explain, or prove, mysterious manifestations is not limited to the ghosts of spiritualism and contemporary ghosthunting; the biologist and artist Paul Vignon famously indexed features of the Shroud of Turin to suggest it depicted Jesus; countless other scientific tests and analyses have been carried out on the artefact, which nonetheless remains a liminal and uncertain visual depiction of an icon. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
83. As Derrida wrote (1996), the archive is the repository of that which will not go away. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
84. In 2011, an elderly Georgian woman scavenging in the wilderness made international headlines when she managed to cut through some copper pipes and shut down all Internet access in Armenia for several hours. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
85. Georges Bataille’s Critical Dictionary section in *Documents*,discussed in the Thesis Introduction, is perhaps just as biased, inaccurate, and co-authored as Wikipedia is, and perhaps there is a similar provocation inherent to both. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
86. In 2013, ASSAP stopped analysing photos of apparent ghosts taken on smart phones, due to the widespread use of applications that can easily alter photographs. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
87. People’s leisure time is a mirror of mechanized work—or in this case, a mirror of the “pro-am” (professional-amateur) experience described by Ledbetter and Miller (2004): “what happens at work, in the factory, or in the office can only be escaped by approximation to it in one’s leisure time”. In this case, most ghosthunters are approximating and aspiring to a level of expertise through work that they don’t get to experience on a daily basis. Few casual ghost hunters are scientists or researchers in their working lives, and yet it is this type of “professionalism” that they aspire to in their leisure time. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
88. Cadava writes of Davis Octavius Hill’s photographs in Greyfriars Cemetery, a haunted site I discussed in Chapter 1, of the way in which the people in the photos only came into being slowly, as they “developed” onto the photographic plates. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
89. Martin Seele (2005) writes about appearing, rather than semblance, as the basis for aesthetics, and understands our apprehending of things that suddenly appear as an attentiveness to ourselves, with artworks that reflect on the past or future gaining their transgressiveness from this bringing about of “improbable presences.” [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
90. In contrast, R.C. Finucane’s (1996: 3) long-ranging history of ghosts in the European context rather provocatively brushes ghostly terminology aside, because “on the whole, popular usage has been haphazard on this matter, happily disregarding theological technicalities.” [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
91. The notion of the *phantasm* has been taken up by Marilyn Ivy (1995) in her study of Japan’s interest the apparently disappearing past; for Ivy (ibid: 4), phantasm is to do with that which has receded and exists on the margins, and which has become the focus of a national-cultural obsession with disappearing aspects of the past. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
92. Noyes (1999) notes that certain terms having to do with ghosts connote things that, while potentially visible, are not quite real or tangible—for example *spirit*, *spectre*, *spectate*, and *spectrum*--with the word *phantom* even standing as an ontological statement, to do with nothing real, or with supposed doubt. He points out that *apparition* is now the preferred term for those hoping to study ghosts scientifically because there is less “occult baggage” (ibid: 253). [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
93. Marx and Engels (1932: para 20) specifically critique Max Stirner (“Saint Max”) for essentially giving instructions for “spirit-seeing.” They then go on to describe “the first manufacture of spectres on a large scale”: “when Szeliga truly perceives some object, the object ceases to be an object and becomes the truth” (ibid). This notion, mocked by Marx and Engels, is reminiscent of the ghosts I described in Part I--“perceived” and made material fact by ghosthunters (and their media tools). [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
94. Furthermore, the human form has become a redundant requisite for the photographic appearance of a ghost, with orbs and streaks of light often standing in as evidence of an apparent anomaly, although there is very little “anomalistic” about such photographs, as they are merely replicating what is already in the archive. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
95. Freud (1930: 91) noted that writing “was in its origin the voice of an absent person.” [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
96. Peters (1999) goes so far as to wonder whether the images of people on television today are much different to “phanstasms of the living” who present themselves across great distances by means of thought transference, the subject of one of the publications of the Society of Psychical Research during the late 1800s (see Gurney, Myers and Podmore 1886). [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
97. Crandon was famously debunked by Harry Houdini, a sceptic of spirit photography, but defended by Sir Arthur Conon Doyle. The relationship between Houdini and Doyle turned from friendship to rivalry as Houdini’s attempts to convince Doyle of mediumistic fraud—including, in some cases, his own, were not accepted by Doyle. Doyle remained a Spiritualist until his death, writing numerous tracts and books on the subject, included the comprehensive *The Case For Spirit Photography* (1922). Doyle eschewed the SPR because he felt testing wasn’t needed for something he believed was beyond doubt or science, but see Ginzburg’s (1979) essay on clues for the ways in which visual scrutiny became a visual paradigm for truth-searching and mystery-solving in Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes series. For more on Doyle’s particular critique of Houdini’s handling of Crandon’s apparent fraud as a medium, see Doyle (1930). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
98. For example, Ian Hacking (1983) describes the "optics" of plant morphology, which could be shown through illustrations using new printing techniques that then figured into the account of the "reproduction" of the plants themselves. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
99. See Erik Davis (1999) for a good summary of the history of vital forces, effluvium, and their link to electricity, the ether and ectoplasm. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
100. With aura photography, colour becomes “the spectrum of the spectre” (Harvey 2004: 78). Both *spectrum* and *spectre* were used to refer to apparitions in the England and particularly Scotland in the 1700s. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
101. See Derrida and Stiegler’s (2002) concerns with witnessing versus representing. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
102. Veronica is said to be one of the women who accompanied Jesus to Calvary. She used her veil to wipe his face, and an imprint of his features is said to have remained on the veil. Veronica is thus the patron saint of photographers—and laundry workers. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
103. Christian Spiritualism would became an offshoot of mainstream Spiritualism; photographers prayed over the camera and plates, and church services functioned like modified Christian services and yielded a hymn book that is still in use today. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
104. Electronic voice phenomena, discussed in Chapter 6, also features its own champions for the cause, with the ghost voices often attributed to well-known deceased physicists and engineers who promote particular recording methodologies and EVP itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
105. Mumler’s wet colloidon process required chemicals and plates to be prepared at the moment of the photography, allowing little chance for tampering, and thus adding to the credibility of his photographs. Mumler would famously produce a spirit photograph of Abraham Lincoln standing behind his widow, before his career was ruined after going on trial for fraud (a charge from which he was acquitted). [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
106. As discussed in Chapter 5, often the “fakest” of images are the ones imbued with the most authenticity. This is a reason corporeal ghosts are no longer en vogue (too easy to create in Photoshop) whereas the much more lo-fi, apparently spontaneous, and homemade digital images of orbs and the like imply a ghosthunter has been “in the field” rather than playing around in Photoshop. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
107. The theory of psychic transference as an explanation for spirit photography has continued into recent times. The Scole Group, who carried out psychic experiments over a five-year period during the early 1990s, was investigated extensively by the SPR after they were able to “prove” their spirit photograph by offering evidence imprinted onto factory-sealed film. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
108. For example, colour photographs, though invented by 1861, didn’t coincide with spirit photographs until, according to Doyle (1922), the early 20th century. In the 1920s Ada Deane made colour photographs, but according to Harvey (2004: 80), “the sweet tints of the prints and, in particular the somewhat flat and insipid hues of the spirit’s face sentimentalize the subject and, in so doing, diminish the aura of the fugitive and the uncanny…[t]he [spirit’s] likely past life (as a printed illustration) and its resemblance to a scrap component in an elementary decoupage are less well disguised.” [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
109. Favero has also pointed out the magic of mobile phone and tablet apps, such as those that allow users to “smell” using images, or the Synaethesia app, which produces sounds to correspond to images recorded via the camera. Likewise, the technology of 3D printing, whereby the virtual is made material (calling to mind analogue photography), is a “magical” digital function. Such technologies underscore the enchanted nature of the digital and its relation to the uncanny through senses other than just the visual. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
110. An account of my parents’ experiences during their time living in the supposedly haunted Allen House, including the details of the mirror photo, in which the figure of the apparent ghost has itself faded over time, can be found in Alan (2005) and Myer (1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
111. See, for example, *The Others* (2001) or *The Sixth Sense* (1999) for examples of reflexivity in film narratives, and the *White Noise* (2005, etc) series of films for examples of the found footage horror sub-genre. In Chapter 7, I will argue that these specific techniques have been used as forms of critique in “experimental ethnography” films. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
112. Before digital cameras, the Sorrat group, a British paraphysics experimental group set up in the 1960s, used instant Polaroid photography to assure a similar degree of “non-intervention” and immediacy, echoing early calls of some visual anthropologists to simply turn the camera on leave it running in the field. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
113. This is not to mourn the passing of “portrait”-style ghost photographs, but rather to observe that ghost photography has evolved into something else entirely. James Elkins (2011) has written against photographic canons of Benjamin and Barthes who emphasised portaiture and the human subject as the basis for photography’s unique aura and philosophical value, preferring instead to understand photographs without human figures as material objects entailing ways of seeing that have little to do with the interpersonal. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
114. Scott McQuire (2013) has explicitly linked the shift of the photograph from “picture” to “data” the shift to archives that are “operational,” with implications for repressed peoples whose photographs appear in them. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
115. Townsend’s contrast between an “extra” (an unexplained anomaly) and an “artefact” (something material, and not supernatural) in photographs evokes the anthropological contrast between “discursive” and more archaeological engagements with culture. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
116. When Cruikshank published his “Discovery Concerning Ghosts” in 1863, querying how the special powers that made the spirit real also extend to the clothes of the spirit, he made the whole concept of ghosts seem absurd. But his “discovery,” McCorristine points out, added value to the concept of dreamed ghosts—a subjective trace, projected as a vision—that had already been expanded upon by continental philosophers such as Kant and Shopenhauer. As Alfred Roffe (1851) had previously explained, using the clothing of ghosts in Shakespeare (such as Hamlet’s father’s suit of armour) as his example, no clothes can be made manifest without first being made in some symbolic way in the mind. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
117. Below, I will argue for ways in which non-visual representations of ghosts—audio recordings of things heard (or not heard bur conjured through media), the multi-sensory experiences of films or multi-media productions—may tap into the other sensory aspects of ghosts; many accounts of ghosts involve the senses beyond vision, and stories abound in which ghosts remain invisible and are merely “felt.” Tapping into the sensory aspects of representing the invisible, and of representing the anthropologically uncanny via media has been taken up by the Sensory Ethnography Lab at Harvard, mentioned in the Thesis Introduction and Chapter 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
118. See Jay Ruby (1995) on death and mourning photography during the nineteenth century. A collection of photography from this period can be found online at the Thanatos Archive of Early Post-Mortem and Mourning Photography, available at http://thanatos.net. Archives of historical photographs of the dead demonstrate Kracauer’s (1927) comparison of memory to photography; emotionally imbued death-bed photos of the past become historical artefact in the contemporary archive, with 9/11 victim photos likely sharing the same fate over time. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
119. There is, of course, a connection between shadows and photography. Cadva (1998: 10) writes of the photograph as “a small funerary monument…a grave for the living dead” that tells “a history of ghosts and shadows,” and John Harvey (2007: 42-3), in his survey of spirit photography, traces the shadows back to the Biblical figure of Adam as the “shadow of things to come.” Harvey points out that the Greek *skia* (shadow) and *tupos* (type) are related to the “foreshadowing” of events in the Old Testament that would come to be in the New Testament. The term is likewise related to the Greek *hupodeigma* (copy)—that is, a sketch or draft for something in the future. Likewise, *anti-tupos* (anti-type), a copy that emphasizes the relationship between the copy and the original, is a concept foreshadowed photography, not to mention digitalization. Here again is the dyschronia of hauntology: foreshadowing, but also post-shadowing. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
120. Georgina Banita (2011) offers another reading of contemporary spectral photography via the clonology theory of Mitchell. As Derrida wrote, terrorism began by the target of terror exposing and exploiting the images this terror. Banita (2011: 99) states that “the spectre of terror as media reproduction thus supersedes the authentic terrorist attack,” shifting focus from an easily traceable ideology of terror to a hauntology, or “clonology,” or indeed to “clonophobia”: “the fear of terrorism seen as the spectral reproducibility of an indeterminate and invisible danger.” Mitchell writes that terrorism is a war on a projected spectre—an elusive and invisible enemy --that always misses its target. Like a possessed person trying to banish the spirit, it harms the person more than it does the spirit haunting him. Instead of a ghostly spirit interrupting the attacks, the attacks themselves are spectral and “the very condition of our existence” (Banita 2011: 104). But this clonophobia can surely work both ways, and outside of the realm of “terror.” [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
121. According to Picker (2003: 8) Dickens had used his lecture circuit a decade before the phonograph to “perfect and maintain a technology of oral presence.” He became a “reproducing speech machine, with audience members wanting to hear his same old hits again and again”—just as *A Christmas Carol* still returns every year to haunt us. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
122. Guglielmo Marconi, often credited as the father of recording technology, is said to have also believed in the possibility of using electricity in conjunction with audio recording devices to tap into voices of the dead from the time of Jesus Christ. Marconi was influenced by the theories of English physicist, Sir Oliver Lodge, who became concerned about the existence of life after death after his son perished in World War I. Lodge’s proposal that the substance of ether conducts electromagnetic waves (and might therefore be a conduit to the dimension of the dead) was supported by the work of Heinrich Hertz, namesake of the Hertz (Hz) unit of frequency. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
123. The development of the concept of ether cemented the relationship between science and communications with the dead. Ether was thought to be the matter that comprised the whole of the universe and therefore supported the amalgamation of spirit and matter, which could be detected through ether-disturbing electromagnetic waves [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
124. Watson wondered if they were picking up sunspots or even alien communications, and idea that Nikola Tesla would later explore in his owns electro-transmissive inventions and that would linger into the 20th century. In 1924, civilian and military radio transmitters shut down when Mars passed close to Earth to leave the radio waves open for communication (there was indeed, as Hendy (2013: 283) puts it, “a symphony of freak symbols”). [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
125. The AA-EVP offered a free downloadable recording of Portuguese crowd babble, so that English language words may stand out as glitches. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
126. Derrida and Stiegler’s (2002) discussion of live versus recorded testimony offers some further insight into potential differences between transmitting and recording. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
127. Most EVP researchers recommend making a series of recordings, each between twenty seconds and two minutes long. As Konstantinos (2001) notes, even though the room may have been completely silent during the recording, “even a five-minute taping session can result in an hour’s worth of playback and deciphering time.” [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
128. When I attended Chris French’s talk on EVP and other anomalies at the 2003 International Sceptics Conference in London. his computer rather humorously and inexplicably “crashed” each time he attempted to play an EVP sample for the audience, evoking the sense of opacity of modern technology as medium. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
129. Peters suggests that this is always a dream deferred, but as I have argued, it is this maintaining of the idea of a radically alterior other that also suggests an ethical responsibility for others in the face of the reifying tendencies of some anthropological engagements. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
130. Freud’s project, according to Sconce (2000), was actually much more occult and mystical than Raudive’s, which offered the possibility of scientific “breakthroughs” and objective analysis of data. It was the liberating concepts of psychoanalysis that inspired the much of Surrealism, but it could be argued that there is just as much free association and delving into the subconscious going on with EVP to make it a surrealist practice in and of itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
131. As with spirit photography, where “celebrities” as well as relatives might appear, the voices of dead sound engineers sometimes show up to help guide people to technological developments to further communication with dead. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
132. See also Koskinen (2004), Ito (2005) and Murray (2008) on the possibility of constant contact and visual presence entailed by image-sharing social media applications. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
133. 110 That said, photographic glitches as supernatural fore- and post-shadowing have been featured especially in popular Japanese supernatural films, where a “cursed” character’s face appears distorted or defaced in a photo just before or after the fact of their death (see for example *Ringu* (1998) and derivatives of it such as *One Missed Call* (2008)), both films that also feature telephones channelling the supernatural other. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
134. See Rancière (2006) on the ways in which cinema exceeds the determination of narrative, so that film itself is already a disruption of sorts. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
135. Though see Peters’ (1999: 47) discussion of the *Phaedrus* and Classical beliefs concerning the manipulation of written vs. oral texts in relation to modern communications technologies: as Peters points out, any media communication is always a parody of actual “soul-to-soul” correspondence. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
136. As such, Derrida (1994: 202) suggests that Marx is indeed attempting to “exorcise” the ghost of old communism: “Everything begins before it begins. Marx wants to know and make known where and at what precise moment at what instant the ghost comes on stage, and this is a manner of exorcism, a way of keeping it at bay: before this limit, it was not there, it was powerless.” The work of contemporary ghosthunters is not so dissimilar. If media itself is uncanny, what does it mean to use it “rationalise” ghosts, to pin them down as media data? As Mark Fisher (2006a) asks, “Part of [Derrida’s] point was if communism has always been spectral, what does it mean to say that it is now dead?” [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
137. Barber (1989) recounts a particularly popular and long-running phantasmagoria show created by Etienne Robertson in an abandoned crypt near Place Vendome in Paris during the French Revolution; the show was officially investigated after complaints from audience members who feared Robertson would conjure back Louis XVI. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
138. According to Michael Taussig (1993: 29), “precisely in the commodity, more precisely in the fetish of the commodity, Benjamin sees the surreal and revolutionary possibilities provided by the culture of capitalism for its own undoing, its own transcendence.” [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
139. Derrida is here referring to the spectrality of commodities: after production, their origins are forgotten, transforming their human producers into ghosts in the process. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
140. Derrida’s discussion of the spectrality of representation is in particular reference to Marx and Engels’ (1932) statement that “all the spectres that have filed before us were representations [*vorstellungen*]” (with the German *vorstellungen* being variously translated as *representations* or *concepts* in English editions of the text). Marx and Engels’ (1932) half-farcical typology of the ten types of apparition that result from the amnesia that they consider to be of the hegemonic spirit of history constitute ideology, and of course set the tone for Derrida’s thinking on hauntology. Such apparitions are the very definition of representations: “fixed concepts” and “whimsies” (Marx and Engels 1932) whose origins and meanings have been forgotten. They tap into the explanation of the uncanny as “something coming to light that should have remained hidden” or Heidegger’s “unconcealedness”—a resolution of injunction of the ghost. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
141. Derrida (1999: 123) states that when someone once expressed concern about the “phantomatic character” of Levinas’s work, it was a “a claim he did not directly object.” [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
142. Hage also (ibid) also writes, “In the name of anti-colonialism, what became known as the ‘reflexive turn’ has brought with it an anti-primitivism that has in many places banished the founding notion of ‘radical alterity’ from the imagination of many undergraduate anthropology students.” [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
143. Ghosts are illustrative of the “metaphysics of presence”—of the “presence/absence” inherent to all things--described by Derrida (1967). [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
144. Freud specifically addresses the uncanny as a psychological phenomena, and calls for the rich area of the uncanny in fiction to be studied further. Certainly, though, in the case of ghosts, the two are inter-implicated, as for that matter are anthropology and fiction (see Clanton 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
145. Derrida (1994: 219) warned of the problems of attempting to theorise or put into practice hauntology, even as he held up Marx as an example of the “experience of secrecy” that he describes as the uncanny: “Our hypothesis is that the same is true for Marx's spectrology. Is this not our own great problematic constellation of haunting? It has no certain border, but it blinks and sparkles behind the proper names of Marx, Freud, and Heidegger: Heidegger who misjudged Freud who misjudged Marx. This is no doubt not aleatory. Marx has not yet been received. The subtitle of this address could thus have been: ‘Marx — das Unheimliche.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-143)