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Spectral Science:
Into the World of American Ghost Hunters

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Anthropology

by

Janny Li

Dissertation Committee:
Chancellor's Professor George Marcus, Chair
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2015

DEDICATION

To

My grandmother, Van Bich Luu Lu, who is the inspiration for every big question that I ask.

And to

My sisters, Janet and Donna Li, with whom I never feel alone in this world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Spectral Science:

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This dissertation follows American ghost hunters in their search for answers to questions of the afterlife and ultimate "truth." It is an account of how they piece-meal disparate knowledges and paradigms—including traditional religions, New Age philosophies, and even popular understandings of science—to transform invisible and ephemeral ghosts into empirical objects of inquiry. In this dissertation, I trace paranormal research to a movement from *within* the scientific community. In the wake of Darwin's theory of evolution, American psychologist and philosopher William James and a small group of distinguished scholars formed the American Society for Psychical Research to scientifically investigate exceptional mental states and more controversially, the possible postmortem survival of human consciousness. Fearing that the advance of science threatened to render the role of religion obsolete in modern society, James developed a theory of pragmatic truth, treating God and other supernatural beliefs as "real" insofar as they fulfilled personal needs and produced practical consequences. I engage with James' psychical research and pragmatism to historically situate ghost hunting within longstanding theoretical debates on how to empirically study the supernatural and how to account for the endurance of spiritual beliefs amidst an increasingly "rational" technoscientific

society. More precisely, I treat James' pragmatism as both a historical milieu and an analytic to understand how ghost hunters conceive of and do the work of paranormal research within the legacy of early psychical researchers. Paranormal research is, and has always been, defined by uncertainty: nonstandard and competing theories, research protocols, and standards of evidence. When faced with this uncertainty, ghost hunters must often rely on "other" knowledges not recognized by the scientific method, such as gut feelings, hunches, and personal experiences, alongside positivist reasoning in order to track paranormal activity. By delving into the experimental world of ghost hunters, I use the popular idiom of the "paranormal" to speak more broadly to the ways in which we negotiate between rationality and irrationality, knowing and feeling, and belief and proof in our understandings of ourselves, our common experiences, and our social worlds.

INTRODUCTION

"Let us then ask a naïve and elementary question: why do the dead return?" (Zizek 1992)

The "paranormal" is a popular idiom that many in America use to make sense of their identities, relationships, and personal conflicts. There is much evidence to support the cultural ubiquity of this trend. For instance, there are thousands of online communities, Meet-Up groups, and paranormal research teams that exist across the country. There are also the dozens of films and television programs devoted to "ghost hunting" or tracking paranormal activity (e.g., *Paranormal Activity*, *Ghost Hunters*, *Ghost Adventures*, *Paranormal State*, *Most Haunted*). To varying degrees, each show allows viewers to participate in an actual paranormal investigation and is premised on collecting scientific evidence to prove or deny the existence of ghosts and other paranormal phenomena.[1]

This dissertation is an ethnographic and historic account of how many Americans, who subscribe to paranormal beliefs, turn to paranormal research to find answers to their questions of the afterlife and ultimate "truth." It seeks to understand how paranormal researchers or "ghost hunters" come to experience ghosts as real, knowable phenomena.[2] More precisely, it traces how they engage in processes of knowing—discerning, interpreting, inferring, and imagining—ghosts and other paranormal phenomena in their own minds, material environments, and social relationships.

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[1] I use "ghost hunters," "paranormal investigators," and "paranormal researchers interchangeably, mimicking the identification practices of my interlocutors. However, there seem to be subtle differences between the two terms. According to the Ghoststudy website, a "ghost" is a dead person who is stuck in our physical world. In contrast, a "spirit" is a dead person who can travel between the spirit world and our physical world.

[2] I use "ghost hunters" and "paranormal researchers" interchangeably to refer to my interlocutors, though, these terms can have slightly different connotations. Paranormal research encompasses broader ranging foci and research agendas, including UFO-ology, cryptozoology, and parapsychology, whereas ghost hunting more specifically refers to the investigation of ghosts and questions of the afterlife. My interlocutors generally use the term "paranormal researcher" to refer to themselves.

This dissertation begins with a central paradox: How do ghost hunters "scientifically" study ghosts? How do they understand themselves to be transforming ghosts and other paranormal phenomena into empirical objects of inquiry? And, what methods and technologies do ghost hunters use to transform spaces, such as homes, public parks, and historical landmarks, into meaningful sites for paranormal investigation?

Let me be clear, I do not attempt to address fundamental questions at stake for ghost hunters as to the "realness" (or lack thereof) of ghosts. By far, the most frequently asked question posed to me since I began this research. I generally have two responses: personally, I think this is an impossible question to answer. Theologians, Physicians, Psychologists, Cognitive Scientists, past and present, have all tackled questions of the postmortem survival of the human soul. It is no surprise that the afterlife continues to remain one of life's greatest mysteries. As an anthropologist, I take my cue from Tanya Luhrmann. In a 2012 *Fresh Air* interview, host Terry Gross asked Luhrmann that after years of studying Renewalist Christians in America, did she believe that God is real? Luhrmann cleverly answered, "she did not have a horse in that race." Anthropology as a discipline, she explained to Gross, is not equipped to answer questions of whether or not God is real. It can, however, tell us something about the social and psychological features of religious experience. In short, it can tell us about how God is *made* real.

So, how are ghosts *made* real for ghost hunters living in a pluralistic, self-aware, secular, and scientific society? Ghost hunters who experience ghosts as real must learn to shift the way they scan the world to identify spectral presences and their demonstrable effects. The task of "hunting" for ghosts requires paranormal researchers to see differently, think differently, and feel differently. As a consequence, ghost hunting practices can shed light into a fundamental problem of knowledge: what is the role of "subjective" knowledge in constituting "objective" knowledge?

At the heart of paranormal research are the complex and often fraught relationships between *what we see* and *what we know*. Early anthropological inquiries into "magic," "science," and "religion," often recast into binaries of "rationality" and "irrationality" and "science" and "pseudoscience," shared a common dilemma: How do you empirically study the supernatural? To answer this question, anthropologists have traditionally framed seemingly "irrational" beliefs in the supernatural as fulfilling a personal or social function or as symbolic of a larger social order (Frazer 1911, Malinowski 1948, Tylor 1958, Levi-Strauss 1966, Evans-Pritchard 1976, Levi-Bruhl 1979).

Ghost hunters occupy a grey zone between "science" and the "supernatural." On one hand, they are attempting to understand the material consequences of their clients' paranormal experiences. On the other hand, they are also attempting to understand the very materiality of ghosts themselves. This dissertation will approach the question of how ghost hunters experience and empirically account for ghosts as real, knowable phenomena through three overarching themes: the problem of scientific authority; the relationship between science and "other" knowledges; and pragmatic truth.

The Problem of Scientific Authority

Ghost hunting has captured the imagination of the American public because it promises to capture "scientific" evidence to prove or deny the existence of ghosts and other paranormal phenomena. Moreover, the circulation of popular scientific and parascientific knowledge through mass media and the widespread availability of personal use scientific tools for public purchase have created an impetus for many Americans to form their own ghost hunting teams. It has also created a distinct cultural moment in which lay people can actively enroll or reject aspects of

science (e.g., tools, theories) to support their hypotheses about the world. Thus, ghost hunting offers a unique window into how scientific ideas travel outside of official science into everyday lives and communities of practice.

What counts as "science," however, has historically never been clear-cut. Science has been defined in many ways: epistemic virtues, methods, a community of experts; and often, there are internal inconsistences and contradictions between scientific ideals and scientific practices. The boundaries of "science" and scientific knowledge have been tackled in diverse fields, including: early anthropological inquiries into the "primitive" mind, history of science, philosophy of science, anthropology of science, and science, technology, and society studies. Following Bruno Latour and Steven Woolgar (1986), recent anthropological and science studies scholarship highlight the role of technologies and objects of inquiry by situating scientific knowledge as the contingent outcome of particular networks and sociotechnical configurations between scientists and their nonhuman counterparts (Haraway 1991, Latour 1988 and 1993, Rheinberger 2007, Knorr-Cetina 1999, Ghosh 2001, Shrader 2006, Barad 2007).

A look into the experimental practices of scientists *in situ* has produced two important insights. First, it brings into relief the personal stakes, aspirations, political struggles, and sociocultural contexts of working scientists. Second, it challenges notions of a monolithic science and instead focuses attention on the specificities and contingencies of scientific knowledge production; calling into question traditional binaries of nature and culture, mind and body, and subject and object.

As outsiders looking in, ghost hunters provide insight into the ways in which scientific ideas and epistemic virtues become untethered from their discursive material contexts. In

particular, it tells us what features of science lay people find to be most salient. What makes scientific knowledge become authoritative? What do we expect science to provide for us?

Ghost hunters use science as their dominant research paradigm because they expect it to confer onto their practices something that other paradigms (e.g., New Age, religions) do not: scientific authority and thus, pubic legitimacy. Paranormal research is centrally defined by the perceived contradiction between science and the supernatural. And, it is the attempt to reconcile this contradiction that drives how ghost hunters conceive of and do the work of paranormal research.

Given this concern for scientific authority and legitimacy, perhaps it is not surprising that the most salient feature of science that many ghost hunters latch onto is objectivity. This concern is particularly obvious in how ghost hunters screen clients, select sites for investigation, build their toolkits, and perhaps more strikingly, refuse remuneration for their services. "Objectivity," however, "is always a pragmatic, not merely a theoretical issue" (Levine 2002:10). It is a product of struggle and negotiation.

The push and pull of objectivity can be traced in the efforts of ghost hunters to transform singular experiences and anecdotal evidence into quantifiable measurements and uniform modes of observing and recording. As Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison argue, "there is no objectivity without subjectivity to suppress and vice versa" (2007:33). Thus, there are particular gestures, techniques, habits, and temperaments, which are needed to support an ideal of ghosts as natural, empirical phenomena. Following this insight, ghost hunters attempt, but ultimately fail to achieve objectivity and scientific authority through a variety of methods and technologies aimed at collecting evidence, which can withstand scrutiny within and outside of the paranormal research community.

Science and "Other" Knowledges

Underpinning the practice of ghost hunting is the hypothesis that ghosts and other paranormal phenomena create material traces (e.g., fluctuations in the ambient temperature), which can then be sensed by the human body, captured through audio-visual recording devices, and measured with scientific instruments (e.g., electromagnetic field meters). Ghost hunters rely upon a set of provisional hypotheses—often conceptualized as technical-affective cause and effect relationships (e.g., nausea might indicate the presence of a ghost)—to create portable, reproducible, and falsifiable evidence.

What ghosts are, however, remains uncertain. Hauntings are known through their effects as opposed to their material existence, hardly making objectivity and empirical research straightforward endeavors. The uncertainty of ghosts is further compounded by the fact that the theories that support paranormal research are conjectural and, unsubstantiated. For this reason, ghost hunters do not ultimately know what are ghosts or how to accurately study them.

Ghosts are treated as potentially ontologically real[3] (e.g., returned spirits), psychologically real (e.g., hallucinations), or as unexplained natural phenomena. The status of a "haunted" site is often determined by less codified forms of reasoning, such as emotions, intuitions, and the imagination, which fall outside of the recognized scientific method. Subjectively and intersubjectively appropriate feelings are embodied and enacted with measurements, photographs, and audio recordings to index immaterial realities. Ghost hunters appropriate and reconfigure scientific methods and tools alongside these "other" knowledges in order to cope with the uncertainty of ghosts and other paranormal phenomena.

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[3] Ontologically real hauntings are also referred to as "intelligent" hauntings (see Chapter 3).

This uncertainty highlights the relationship between science and "other" knowledges, particularly, how to demarcate scientific knowledge from non-scientific knowledges. Science is not a monolith. Its boundaries are porous, flexible, contextually variable, and internally inconsistent. In *Science and the New Age*, David Hess argues:

> "Boundary work should be situated in specific historical and cultural contexts in which communities of scientists distinguish between science from other discourses or cultural domains…[it] is not a mere rhetorical exercise or purely intellectual activity…it is rooted in the 'interests' of social conflicts between science and other institutions, such as religion that also seek to have special legitimacy in society" (1993:145).

"There are layers of scientificity," he adds, "that become clearer as one unfolds levels of skepticism and 'pseudo-scientificity' both within and across discursive boundaries" (ibid). The dynamics between scientific and "other" knowledges within paranormal investigations show us how the boundaries of science are contingent, open-ended processes that are shaped by the efforts of scientists and larger outside forces, including that of their publics.

The relationship between science and "other" knowledges sheds insight into how positivist logic (e.g., deductive, induction) and intuitive thought (e.g., hunches, gut feelings) processes work in tandem, enhancing the analytic power of the other. Given the conjectural nature of paranormal research, ghost hunters must operationalize subjectively meaningful feelings amongst other more codified resources (e.g., repurposed scientific instruments of measurement) to bolster, corroborate, and give meaning to their findings.

When faced with a dearth of evidence and a lack of perceptual cues from the material environment, ghost hunters turn to intuition and other forms of inner knowing to guide their technical practices and discern paranormal activity. While positivist reasoning dictates how ghost hunters collect and scrutinize their data (e.g., measurements), intuitive reasoning brings to mind personal experiences, gut experiences, and hunches, used to contextualize and transform data

into evidence for particular kinds of hauntings. Intuitive and positivist reasoning (while analytically separable) are in practice both integral and inseparable knowledge processes.

The epistemic and technical practices of ghost hunters demonstrate the evidentiary value placed on "other" knowledges as they are formalized in relation to positivist logic toward a diagnostic goal. The myriad of strategies used by ghost hunters in particular bring attention to how intuitive reasoning engenders an awareness for seemingly unrelated data, patterns, and causal relationships. Moreover, they highlight how forms of inner knowing are contingent upon technologies, material surroundings, and broader cultural meanings.

Pragmatic Truth

"Other" knowledges can lead to a path of probability, but they cannot lead a path of certainty. This is partially due to the fact that ghost hunters make use of intuitive insights that cannot be publicly verified. As a result, they must juggle competing tensions between subjective certainties and objective uncertainties. While this may seem inconsequential in other aspects of their lives, their use of "other" knowledges in their paranormal research has profound consequences for ghost hunters, especially their larger efforts to account for the clients' paranormal experiences and to gain public legitimacy.

Hauntings, as Avery Gordon writes in *Ghostly Matters*, bring attention to the "very ways in which we discover things or learn about others or grapple with history is intimately tied to the very things themselves, to their variable modes of operation, and thus to how we would change them" (2008:66). According to Gordon, hauntings are give shape by the "intermingling of fact, fiction, and desire" and particular pragmatic goals or ends (2008:24).

Ghost hunters work within a framework of relative "truth" or what I have identified as pragmatic truth. Pragmatic truth allows ghost hunters to take seriously paranormal experiences as

something that produces real consequences in their clients' lives. "Everyone has their own truth," as Gabriel from Gotham Paranormal Research[4] explains, "their own heaven, their own perception." Unlike the "truth" of positivism or at the opposite end of the spectrum, nihilism, ghost hunters posit truth as subjective and experientially real. The "truth" of ghost hunters' findings lies in its ability to empower clients and create the conditions of possibility for them to effect change in their own lives. Truth is treated as a pragmatic force that has the power to shape beliefs, which can change a client's perceptions and thus, their reality.

Figure 1 Séance at the Rancho Camulos investigation with Paranormal World Investigations using EMF meters, audio recorders, holy water, and dharma bell. Piru, CA.

This premise prevents ghost hunters from having a clear-cut and standardized research program, forcing them to work in the present with the knowledge that the meaning of their data will only become clear in the future. The deferral of causal interpretation allows ghost hunters to

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[4] Gotham Paranormal Research is a paranormal team based in Brooklyn, New York City.

continue widely and indiscriminately collect diverse data in the absence of statistical analysis and well-substantiated theories. It also allows them to hold *in potentia* seemingly contradictory theories of ghosts as returned spirits, hallucinations, or unexplained natural phenomena. More precisely, pragmatic truth affords ghost hunters an incredible degree of flexibility to outright debunk paranormal phenomena *in toto* or to work within their client's own belief system, depending on the contingencies of the case and the individual needs of the client.

While pragmatic truth allows ghost hunters to hold *in potentia* seemingly incommensurable theories, it also shifts the weight of "truth" from the nature (e.g., mechanics) of hauntings to its human purpose: why do people believe in ghosts? And, how does an individual's personal beliefs and unfolding experiences decide the "truth" about ghosts?

Desires and pragmatic goals are intimately tied to how ghost hunters understand hauntings. Paranormal investigations provide an account of "the way people think—they way they come up with ideas, form beliefs, and reach decisions" (Menand 2001:351). Thus, pragmatic truth brings to light the complicated and nuanced relationship between ghost hunters and "science."

Ghost hunters are not simply dupes of their own desires for scientific legitimacy. In fact, they are highly aware of their fringe status as "pseudoscientists." They recognize the prestige associated with repurposed scientific technologies and causal knowledge and as a consequence, these values impact how ghost hunters allocate their time and resources, interact with clients, and make claims using provisional paranormal theories. In short, their desires for scientific legitimacy orient them toward particular research practices for the posterity of the paranormal field.

But perhaps the key insight that ghost hunters can offer us is that "truth" is determined by what American psychologist and philosopher William James called "one's general sense of dramatic possibility" or what one can imagine is possible in the universe (1986:282). When faced with the uncertainties of paranormal phenomena, "truth" is decidedly contingent upon unfolding verifying experiences that form one's "sense of dramatic possibility." Ghost hunting tells us about the human purpose of paranormal beliefs because it offers a glimpse into the mental and social lives of ghost hunters and their clients; bringing to the fore emotions, desires, and anxieties at the root of paranormal experiences. It shows the power of our hidden mental and emotional lives to shape our everyday lives.

The truth about ghosts is unattainable and yet, ultimately unimportant. What matters is the ability of ghost hunters to initiate a change in their client's perception or as Vince from Gotham Paranormal Research puts it, to "empower them so that they are not afraid." It is acknowledging that paranormal experiences are intimately tied to their clients' lives and how they would change them.

Field sites and Methods

I conducted most of my field research from January 2012 to March 2013 in Southern California and New York City. During this 15-month period, I worked with a total of 14 ghost hunting teams, which brought me into contact with 25 men and 10 women.[5] I collected data using three primary methods: interviews, participant observation, and archival research.[6]

The bulk of my data consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews that I conducted with ghost hunters and other members of paranormal interest groups. I audio recorded these

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[5] With the exception of the American Society for Psychical Research and nineteenth-century psychical researchers, I use pseudonyms to refer to all ghost hunters and paranormal research teams mentioned in this dissertation.

[6] I also administered anonymous online surveys through UCI EEE system to collect demographic data (e.g., education, religion, occupation, etc.) that I was unable to obtain through my interviews. I collected 43 responses. I have yet to analyze this data and have not included those findings in this dissertation at present.

interviews and transcribed key interviews that I have included in this dissertation. I recruited my interlocutors through chain referrals, paranormal interest group meetings, and cold emailing contacts that I had found through online search engines. I conducted 100 interviews in total, often interviewing interlocutors two or three times. In fact, I interviewed Gabriel of Gotham Paranormal Research nine times throughout the course of my preliminary fieldwork and fieldwork. My interview questions were tailored to individual interlocutors, but I broadly asked about personal histories, including: childhood and previous paranormal experiences, paranormal beliefs and theories about ghosts, involvement in the paranormal research community, and the perceived value of ghost hunting in contemporary society. Interviews with ghost hunters specifically focused on their personal motivations for becoming involved in paranormal research, research agendas, research design and strategies, available resources, and guiding principles and goals of paranormal research.

These interviews were particularly insightful because they revealed how ghost hunters produce and circulate popular discourse on science and parascience in relation to larger institutional forces, such as mass media, marketing, and skeptics in the scientific community. More precisely, I learned how ghost hunters discern what counts as "science" (e.g., tools, theories, virtues) and how they understand themselves to be creating systematic knowledge from disparate investigations. I also learned about detailed and often idiosyncratic paranormal theories of ghosts including: what are ghosts, where they come from, why people believe in them, and how they possibly interact with people and the material environment.

In addition, these interviews revealed how ghost hunters manage their public personas as "pseudoscientists." My interlocutors spoke a great deal about how they borrowed from scientific tools and methods (e.g., strategies for controlling variables, measurement), extolling the virtues

of paranormal research as a serious and worthwhile endeavor. But perhaps more telling, ghost hunters viewed themselves as collecting data that could potentially contribute to a scientific body of knowledge, holding out the hope for a tolerant future science that will one day recognize their efforts and account for the afterlife. As I would later learn, many of the scientific ideals and practices exalted by ghost hunters often fell short when faced with the exigencies of paranormal investigations.

I conducted participant observation of 15 paranormal investigations (including both private homes and public sites) and 22 miscellaneous social events, including: public lectures, training sessions, and paranormal Meet-Up group meetings. I learned how ghost hunters exchange ideas in formal (e.g. lectures, training sessions) and informal (e.g., Meet Up groups) settings. Comparison of formal and informal venues allowed me to collect data on how ghost hunters produce and represent their research and its public reception across diverse social settings. Like interviews, I found that ghost hunters used these venues as an opportunity to gain public legitimacy and shed their public persona as "pseudoscientists," emphasizing their expertise and adherence to scientific methods and technologies.

Figure 2 Public lecture given by Big Apple Paranormal Club at Fort Totten in Queens, New York City.

Paranormal investigations, however, often told a different story. While ghost hunters saw science as means to "truth" and earnestly aspired to be as scientific as possible, they found it impossible within constraints of an actual on-the-ground paranormal investigation. Paranormal investigations are constrained by many factors that prevent ghost hunters from adhering to the scientific method: uncontrollable environment, speculative theories, and a dearth of evidence and perceptual cues from the material environment. Ghosts are invisible and ephemeral in their very nature. This means that ghost hunters hardly encountered any significant atmospheric or environmental anomalies that might indicate spirit presence, rendering their technologies (e.g., barometer, thermometer) more or less useless.

I also found that other factors significantly shaped the outcome of paranormal investigations.[7] For instance, ghost hunters approach their investigations of private homes

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[7] I must note that these were general trends that I observed in paranormal investigations. There were exceptions to this trend. For instance, I saw teams use more speculative methods in private homes as well as teams take seriously

differently than public or historic sites (e.g., Gettysburg). They tended to be more conservative with their findings, often debunking rather than supporting the "haunted" status of a client's home.[8] In contrast, public sites presented lower stakes. Since ghost hunters were not beholden to clients, public investigations can be treated as spaces for experimentation, allowing ghost hunters to more freely employ speculative theories and tools, such as pendulums and spirit boxes, to collect and interpret their findings.

Figure 3 Big Apple Paranormal Club members using dowsing rods and a pendulum during an investigation at All Faith Lutheran Cemetery in Queens, New York City

In addition to interviews and participant observation, I conducted archival research at the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) over the course of four months.[9] I also spent a

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their investigation of public sites. There is an additional variable that I did not get the opportunity to discuss in this dissertation: entertainment. In my last year of fieldwork, I noticed that some paranormal research teams paid (often hundreds of dollars) to investigate famous "haunted" sites. I believe that this kind of monetary and time commitment can possible contribute to ghost hunters' expectations to encounter paranormal phenomena.

[8] See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of private home investigations and the reasoning behind this conservative quality.

[9] I did not conduct ethnographic research at the ASPR. Due to a lack of funding, the ASPR does not conduct experimental research at the moment. During my preliminary research, however, I did participate in a Ganzfeld

week researching the William James archives in Houghton Library at Harvard University. At Houghton Library, I primarily examined correspondences between James and his family, friends, and colleagues in order to ascertain: the role of psychical research in his personal life, his private thoughts on psychical research, and the connections between his personal life, pragmatism, and psychical research. In particular, I reviewed letters exchanged between James and thinkers who were influential to his work, including: Henri Bergson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, F.W.H. Myers, Edmund Gurney, and C.S. Peirce.

Twice a week, I visited the ASPR library to research materials related to the establishment of the society (e.g., constitution, proceedings), biographical accounts of James written by other ASPR members, articles authored by James on psychical research, James' addresses as two-time ASPR president, James' book reviews in the ASPR journal, materials referencing James' work after his death, and other materials related to the history of the ASPR. I also reviewed case reports written by the Committee for Haunted Houses formed to investigate anecdotal evidence of ghost sightings and compile a "census" of hauntings in the late 1880s. I used these materials to: (a) contextualize early psychical research within late nineteenth century religion-science debates and fascination with the occult, (b) understand the philosophy and foundations of contemporary ghost hunting, (c) trace major trends and transformations, including technologies, experimental designs, and paradigms within paranormal research, and (d) analyze how public imaginaries of "science" and "religion" shaped and continue to shape paranormal research.

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experiment conducted by ASPR President Dr. Nancy Sondow. I wrote about my experiences in ""I Don't Have ESP: What the Ganzfeld Experiment can tell us about Science" at *Method: A Quarterly Magazine about Science and Society*. Available: http://www.methodquarterly.com/2014/11/i-dont-have-esp/

Ghosts Then and Now

The power of the dead holds a longstanding interest for anthropologists. Anthropologists have accounted for the power of the dead either in terms of an anxiety towards death or the need to continue an emotional relationship with dead relatives. As Arthur Lehman and James Myers argue, "perhaps humans have some basic need that causes us to believe in ghosts and to worship ancestors: to seek verification that although the mortal body may die, the soul survives death" (1996:283). In addition to their emotional or psychological function, much attention has also been paid to ghosts' physical forms. "To most people in Western culture," as Lehman and Myers notes, "the word ghosts brings forth an image of a disembodied spirit or a dead person swooping through dark halls, hovering frighteningly over a grave, or perhaps roaming aimlessly through damp woods" (1996:285). In particular, we imagine "murder victims, miscreants, and evil people, for example, might become ghosts doomed to wander the earthly world" (ibid). However, a look back in history will reveal that each generation encounters its own ghosts, often in strikingly different forms.

Prior to the sixteenth century, encounters with supernatural forces were understood in terms of sorcery and later, possession. Sorcery was a predominately rural phenomenon, occurring in moors and remote villages. According to philosopher Michel de Certeau, "a different species of the same genus comes after sorcery, existing side by side with it for a while, then superseding it: possession" (1996:4). Possession, unlike sorcery, was located in urban centers and affected women from the same "middle" class. For this reason, de Certeau argued, the public viewed these women as victims as opposed to the guilty. "Deviltry moves from violence directed against magicians to a pitying curiosity for its victims" (ibid).

Coeval with possession, ghosts in early modern Europe were "often perceived as solid persons" (Luhrmann 2014). But by the nineteenth century, people had begun to think about ghosts in their spectral forms. In *Spectres of the Self*, cultural historian Shane McCorristine points to two reasons for this transmutation. The first was skepticism about the supernatural, generated by new developments in science. And second, the concept of hallucination emerged to explain experiences like seeing an apparition. "As seeing of ghosts became a psychological phenomenon," Luhrmann writes, "it also became a pathological one" (ibid). In 1848, the British skeptic Charles Ollier spoke for many when he wrote, "anyone who thinks he has seen a ghost, maybe take the vision as a symptom that his bodily health is deranged" (ibid). As a result, McCorristine writes, "the ghost was gradually relocated from the external, objective and theological structured world to the internal, subjective and psychological haunted world of personal experience" (McCorristine in Luhrmann 2014).

According Jeffrey Sconce, the spectral nature of ghosts was further perpetuated by new technologies. The dawn of new disembodied telegraphic communication made possible the "fantastic splitting of the mind and body in the cultural imagination" (2002:27). By the 1860s "'spirit photography' presented astonishing images of people alongside dead relatives, using double exposure and other manipulations to portray gauzy form alongside living flesh" (Luhrmann 2014). "It was transparency that marked the dead as dead" (ibid).

Catherine Crowe in her book *The Night Side* (1848) first popularized the belief that ghosts were the returned spirits of deceased persons. Ghost stories spilled from every page of *The Night Side* telling stories of haunted houses, mysterious voices with portentous warnings, and nightly visitations from the dead. Crowe gathered hundreds of accounts from friends,

newspaper accounts, other books, letters, and dairy excerpts (Blum 2006:15). As Deborah Blum notes, "her stories convinced thousands of readers that life remained, at its borders, a place of mystery, inexplicable and often terrifying (ibid).

This terror continues to remain a fixture in modern ghost stories. Popular depictions in ghost stories often portray paranormal encounters as singular, life-altering experiences born from terror. At the heart of these stories are ruptures that challenge our understandings of reality and ourselves. The American form of haunting in particular, according to Judith Richardson, draws from a wide basis in culture and psychology, but is fundamentally predicated on social and historical discontinuities that imbue the past with a sense of mystery and strange possibility (2003:6). Avery Gordon understands this "strange possibility" as the potential for a reckoning, the chance for an undead past to rectify an injustice. She writes:

> "Haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be done.
> Indeed, it seemed to me that haunting was precisely the domain of turmoil and
> trouble, that moment (of however long duration) when things are not in their
> assigned places, when the cracks and rigging are exposed, when the people who
> are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of living, when disturbed
> feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from
> before, seems like it must be done" (2008:xvi).

In many significant ways, the hauntings described by Gordon differ from the hauntings experienced by my interlocutors. For them, hauntings are not terrifying encounters with an invisible undead past causing turmoil in their thoughts and actions. Instead, they are paranormal experiences that become quietly absorbed into their everyday lives. Ghosts are not otherworldly, other-temporal beings, but rather beings that inhabit their world. They are instead beings that share in their lives, their conversations, and seem to have a vested interested in their well-being.

Seen in this light, ghosts of today can be seen as undergoing another transmutation. They are transmuting from what McCorristine describes as the "internal, subjective and psychological

haunted world of personal experience" to the external, objective world. This external, objective

world, however, is not the theologically structured world of devils and demons in the sixteenth

century; but rather, it is the seemingly disenchanted world of secularism and science in which

even ghosts are subject to natural laws, though they are natural laws that we have yet to

establish.

"Perhaps technology plays a role as well," Luhrmann writes of the durability of ghosts in

our cultural imagination (2014). She adds:

> "Our world is animated in ways that can seem almost uncanny—lights that snap
> on as your approach, cares that fire into life without keys, websites that know
> what you like to read and suggest more books like those. The Internet is not
> material in the ordinary way. It feels somehow different. Maybe this, too, stokes
> our imaginations" (2014).

Technology stokes our imagination and it also helps us to reimagine what are ghosts. For ghost

hunters in particular, ghosts are intimately tied to the technologies used to index immaterial

realities.

In fact, ghost hunters use many different technologies, such as thermometers, barometers,

and ion counters, to detect paranormal activity. These technologies by and large frame ghosts as

atmospheric anomalies and other naturally occurring phenomena. The most popular paranormal

theory, however, links ghosts to anomalies in the electromagnetic field. This theory was

popularized in the 1960s by the late parapsychologist Hans Holzer. Holzer suggested that our

"life force," or what separates the living from the dead, to be the animating power of electricity

(1969:4). [10] "In my view this is entirely reasonable," he added, "we already know that man's

brain, through his mind, emits extremely short waves which can be measured by the

electroencephalography" (ibid). Understanding our life force to be "essentially electromagnetic

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[10] This theory can be traced back to the Vitalism Debates in the early 1800s, when scientists attempted to reanimate
inanimate corpses with electricity. See Chapter 2 for more details.

in nature," ghost hunters use electromagnetic field meters to track ghosts or perhaps more accurately, disembodied consciousnesses, which can manipulate the ambient electromagnetic field in order to manifest and communicate with living persons. Despite the influence of modern secularism and science, sociologist Claude Fish observed, "the magic has not totally gone" (Fish in Pew Research Center 2013).

Haunted America

A 2013 Harris Poll found that 42% of Americans believe in ghosts. According to the Pew Research Center (2009), nearly one-in-five American adults (18%) say they have seen or been in the presence of ghosts. Furthermore, the number of Americans who claim to see dead people has doubled over the past decade and those that say they have felt in touch with someone who has died has also grown considerably from 18% in 1996 to 29% today (Pew Research Center 2009). Overall, surveys have shown that one-fifth to over one-half of Americans believe in ghosts, haunted houses, and communication with the dead (Harris 1998, Gallup 1996, Sparks, Nelson, and Campbell 1997, USA Today 1998, NSF 2004).

The language used by the Pew Research Center surveys and other extensive studies frame the paranormal in terms of "belief:" "over one-third [of Americans] say that they believe in the spirits of the dead coming back; about that many also say they believe in haunted houses" (Pew Research Center 2013). These statistics are calculated to tell us something about American religiosity and the changing spiritual landscape in America.[11] Or in the case of the National Science Foundation (NSF) surveys, paranormal beliefs serve as indicators to measure public attitudes and understandings of science more generally and in particular, science literacy. The

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[11] The Pew Research Center reports that people who often go to worship services appear to be less likely to say that they see ghosts. "Just 11% of those to attend religious services at least weekly say they've been in the presence of a ghost, while 23% of those who attend services less frequently say they have seen a ghost" (Pew Research Center 2013).

2001, 2004, 2007 NSF studies show that 60% of Americans surveyed reported beliefs in the paranormal (or "pseudoscience") alongside a professed respect for science and technology.[12] Although science and technology are held in high esteem, these reports also show that most Americans (about two-thirds in the 2001 NSF survey) do not clearly understand the scientific process.

These NSF reports also tell us some interesting things. They tell us that the scientific community contrasts scientific knowledge with paranormal beliefs: possessing scientific knowledge diminishes paranormal beliefs and vice versa. Moreover, scientists believe that widespread paranormal beliefs can pose certain societal risks: "The science community and those whose job it is to communicate information about science to the public have been particularly concerned about the public's susceptibility to pseudoscientific or unproven claims could adversely affect their health, safety, and pocketbooks" (NIST 2002).

However, these reports also tell us that many Americans—much to the chagrin of the scientific community—do not understand science and the paranormal as existing in an inverse relationship. They instead view science and the paranormal as coexisting and intermingling semantic resources to make sense of their everyday lives. In fact, "seventy percent of Americans believe that scientific research does not pay enough attention to moral values." (NSF 2007:7-34).

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[12] "Pseudoscience" is the term used by the NSF surveys. Pseudoscience is defined as "claims presented so that they appear [to be] scientific even though they lack supporting evidence and plausibility." (Shermer 1997:17). In contrast, "science is a set of methods designed to describe and interpret observed and inferred phenomena, past or present, and aimed at building a testable body of knowledge open to rejection or confirmation" (Shermer 1997:17).

But perhaps more striking than science's apparent lack of morality is how scientific

rhetoric and positivist logic actually frames popular understandings of the paranormal. Ghosts

are increasingly understood as natural as opposed to supernatural phenomena. This is particularly

evident in the ghost hunting technologies that help us reimagine ghosts as fluctuations in the

electromagnetic field or ambient temperature. Ghosts are no longer things that we merely believe

in, they instead are things that we can know and more significantly, things that we can prove (see

Figure 4).

Knowing, Not Believing

I met Jean[13] at the December New York City Paranormal Meet Up.[14] A tall woman in her

fifties, she wore thin wire-framed glasses and spoke quickly with a subtle New York accent. I

instantly liked her. She had an environmental studies degree and in the past, worked as an

educator for the New York Aquarium, American Museum of Natural History, and the Brooklyn

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[13] Jean is a paranormal researcher and member of the Big Apple Paranormal Club based in Queens, New York City.
[14] This particular Meet Up group meets in a diner in Manhattan every month.

Botanical Garden. She told the group that she had recently purchased a Christmas present for "Nancy," the ghost of a thirteen-year-old girl, who lived in her home in Queens. "It's generic," Jean told the group, "it's Christmas-y, it's cute, [and] it's a puppy." "I left it there and it didn't get dropkicked down the stairs," she added, "so I assume it is something that she is happy with because she is not getting rid of it."

Christmas was a busy time for the spirits in Jean's home. She linked the paranormal activity to cold weather. "My house seems to get a lot of activity when you get a transition between sunshine and rain," she explained, "when there is a [transitional] day, that's when stuff happens in my house." In addition to the colder temperatures, Jean also linked the increased paranormal activity to humidity levels and the amount of water in the atmosphere. "I don't know all of the science behind it," she added, "but the summer months are (pardon her pun) a dead zone. It's just very quiet, you don't hear a bunch of stuff, you don't see a bunch of stuff."

The "stuff" happening in Jean's home ranged from moving objects to doors inexplicably shutting on their own. In the past months, however, her things began to go missing. She experienced the sudden disappearance and reappearance of her possessions: a pocketbook, shoes, and shirts. "Most of the time, I am not going to say that Nancy took it unless I have a pretty good idea," Jean explained. "She tends to be attracted to things a kid would use to [play] dress up." In many of these cases, many of her lost items appear in unrelated, unexpected locations or turn up years later. "I find it sitting out somewhere that I know I have passed by like a thousand times in the past year and it's sitting there. So I know that wasn't me."

Recently, she lost a diamond earring. As an early Christmas present to herself, she purchased a pair of diamond earrings. When she returned home from work, she noticed in the mirror that she was only wearing one earring. Several thoughts raced through her mind: Did she

lose it at work? Did it fall off during her subway commute? Was it somewhere in her home? "I am looking on the bureau, on the floor, all around," she described her search efforts. "Nothing." She gave up and went to bed thinking, "maybe it will turn up in the morning."

The next morning Jean woke up to find her diamond earring on the floor beside her bed. "Now I know it wasn't there when I went to bed," Jean recalled, "because I searched everywhere in that room." She explained to the group that the earring most likely fell onto the floor and rolled under her bed. Nancy must have found the earring and hid it for safekeeping. "It is a very delicate gold earring," she explained, "and if you step on it with [the heel of a] shoe, you would really wreck it." Nancy returned the earring by placing it a visible and obvious location. Jean thought that if Nancy had a toy of her own, perhaps she would learn to respect other people's property.

It first occurred to Jean that her home was haunted when her friend Gene, who has self-proclaimed psychic abilities, saw a young girl in the window.[15] He told her that he sees the girl waiting for Jean by the window every time he walked her home. His sensed that the girl's name was Nancy and that she was about twelve or thirteen years old. Despite Paul's instincts, Jean wants proof. She is in the process of collecting deeds, mortgage documents, and other paperwork to identify past owners of her home and thus, learn if there is a young girl related to the property.

"So right now, [I have] made it a point [to] talk to her when I go in [the house]," Jean spoke of her relationship with Nancy, "and [I'll] bring out the [electromagnetic field] meter, she loves to play with the meter." Everyday after coming home from work, Jean will place an audio recorder and an electromagnetic field (EMF) meter on her coffee table and ask Nancy a series of

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[15] Gene is also the founder and lead investigator of the Big Apple Paranormal Club.

questions: How was your day? What did you do today? Did you have a nice day? Is everything fine? She explained her peculiar conversations with Nancy:

> "Sometimes it's a lot easier for ghosts to manipulate the meter [than it is] for than to talk on tape (voice recorder). At least that's what happens in my house, Nancy is much more adept at answering 'yes' or 'no' questions. I think she likes the meter, I think she likes to play with the lights. I still can't get her talk to me on tape."

In addition to these conversations, Jean also uses a digital camera in her attempts to prove Nancy's presence in her home. She joked, "I have a tendency to use these tools now that I am on a first name basis with my ghost." So far, nothing has shown up in her photographs or audio recordings. Trying a different tactic, Jean has also devised little tests for Nancy. On her entryway table, she places a crystal on top of a piece of masking tape, which is marked to note its location. The crystal has moved an inch or two, Jean reported, and on one occasion, it has moved the entire length of the table.

She concluded her story by telling us that the paranormal activity has significantly decreased since she started paying attention to Nancy. Moreover, she added that Nancy was no longer disappearing things, but has actually been helpful in locating other lost objects. "She seems to be a good kid," Jean told the group, "I am very happy to keep interacting with her if it keeps her happy and you know, if she doesn't do anything crazy."

Jean's story had little to do with belief per se. It instead was a story about her personally intimate and concrete experiences of Nancy's realness. She told the group of encounters with a ghost who was an immanent, natural being whose existence was tied to changing weather patterns and who could show its vivid presence through demonstrable effects (i.e., moving crystals).

The relationship between "knowing" and "believing" is commonly characterized by two opposing views: the first, belief is implied by knowledge or the second, knowledge excludes belief (Harrison 1963:322). Some philosophers and anthropologists, however, argue that knowing does imply believing and the view that the two are mutually exclusive is a misinterpretation (Harrison 1936:322). For instance, Luhrmann in *When God Talks Back*, describes faith in God as a slow learning process similar to learning a second language as opposed to acquiring a new belief, like a piece of furniture:

> "In fact, what I saw was that coming to a committed belief in God was more like learning to do something than to think something. I would describe what I saw as a theory of attentional learning—they way that you learn to pay attention determines your experience of God. More precisely, I would argue that people learn specific ways of attending to their minds and emotions to find evidence of God, and that both what they attend to and how they attend changes their experience of their minds, and that as a result, they begin to experience a real, external, interacting presence" (2012:xxi).

Taking seriously Luhrmann's argument that belief entails a slow learning process, the ghosts in Jean's story can be seen as something that she can discern from her own inner-voice and actions. Ghosts are not something that she merely believes in; rather, they are something that she knows. They are something that she can have daily conversations with. They are something that she can buy a Christmas present for.

Outline of the Dissertation

The four chapters of this dissertation each explore a distinct way that ghost hunters "know" ghosts and other paranormal phenomena: induction (Chapter 1), quantification (Chapter 2), intuition (Chapter 3), and inference (Chapter 4). Ghost hunters must often configure and reconfigure scientific methods and technologies alongside "other" knowledges in complementary, supplementary, and at times, contradictory ways to cope with the uncertainty of the paranormal. The following chapters showcase the tensions (limits and affordances) within the

strategies used by ghost hunters to transform ghosts into empirical objects of inquiry and real, knowable phenomena more broadly. Thus, they each address the three overarching themes presented in this dissertation: the problem of scientific authority, the relationship between science and "other" knowledges, and pragmatic truth.

Chapter 1: A Case of Quasi-Certainty: William James and the Making of the Subliminal Mind. The first chapter explores paranormal research as a popular movement that emerged from within the scientific community. It examines the establishment of the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR). In 1885, William James and a small group of distinguished scientists formed the ASPR to scientifically tackle questions of the afterlife. It details a 25 yearlong study of Boston medium Leonora Piper by James and early psychical researchers to account for popular supernatural beliefs despite the growing materialist bias of the scientific community. This chapter tells the story of how James grappled with what I call "quasi-certainty," a mode of knowing through associations and deferrals, to access debates over biological determinism and free will. It details how James held in productive tension the biological and mental processes studied in this psychical research with the "will to believe" advocated in his pragmatism.

Chapter 2: Visions of Future of Science: Inside a Ghost Hunter's Tool Kit. The second chapter addresses how popular perceptions of techno-science shape the practice of ghost hunters, leading them to frame paranormal phenomena in terms of scientific explanation and empirical proof. I discuss how the popularization of scientific and parascientific knowledge as well as the widespread availability of repurposed scientific instruments and specialized audio-visual recording devices (e.g., thermal imaging cameras) for public purchase has created a distinct cultural moment in which members of the public can actively enroll or reject aspects of

"science" (e.g., tools, theories) in their daily lives. This chapter presents the "Chelsea"

investigation to understand the growing popularity for repurposed scientific instruments of

measurement (e.g., electromagnetic field meters, thermometers) despite their seeming

ineffectiveness for performing diagnostic functions within a paranormal investigation. It

discusses the popular allure of repurposed instruments within paranormal research. In particular,

it looks at the practical and symbolic functions that these instruments accomplish for ghost

hunters.

Chapter 3: Residual Hauntings: Making Present an Intuited Past. The third chapter

considers how ghost hunters use what I call "authoritative intuition" to guide their technical

practices and to know a "haunted" site. Given the uncertainty of paranormal phenomena, ghost

hunters must often operationalize intuition as one meaningful resource amongst other more

codified resources (e.g., repurposed precision instruments) in order to collect, classify, and

interpret data and to determine particular kinds of hauntings. In particular, it traces the

evidentiary value placed on intuition and how it is formalized in relation to other technologies

and forms of reasoning (e.g., induction) toward a diagnostic goal. This chapter takes a look at the

"Old Slave Market" investigation to understand the trust that ghost hunters place on authoritative

intuition when faced with a dearth of material evidence and a lack of perceptual cues from the

material environment. It illuminates how intuitive insight and other forms of inner-knowing

work in tandem with positivist thought processes, offering insight into how boundaries between

"illegitimate" and "legitimate" knowledges are invoked, negotiated, and mutually constituted in

the real world.

Chapter 4: The Train Conductor: A Case Study of a Haunting. The final chapter

focuses on what I call "client-centered" methods, such as interviews, background research, and

close observations, that ghost hunters use to identify the psychological underpinnings of their clients' paranormal experiences. This chapters follows the twists and turns of the "Train Conductor" investigation to show how ghost hunters transform social and psychological data collected from client centered methods into clues that shed insight into their client's unconscious desires and hidden psychic traumas. This chapter presents three overlapping narratives—the client's narrative, the ghost hunter's narrative, and my own narrative—in order to show how ghost hunters recognize their client's habits, practices, behaviors, and language as clues that might point to realities that are not immediately accessible to perception or empirical inquiry. It traces how ghost hunters make legible infrapersonal states (e.g., emotions, ideas, beliefs) of their clients as clues to index immaterial realities and ultimately, solve the case.

The **Conclusion** turns to overarching themes of the dissertation to show how ghost hunters experience ghosts as real through specific ways of attending to their minds, technologies, and material environments. It discusses how ghosts are given form and substance through new media and technologies. It also suggests that the ubiquity of ghosts in American culture promotes an understanding of paranormal phenomena as natural as opposed to supernatural phenomena and that this shift has profound consequences for the future of paranormal research.

CHAPTER 1

A Case of Quasi-Certainty:
William James and the Making of the Subliminal Mind

"Our duty is not the founding of a new sect, nor even the establishment of a new science, but is rather the expansion of Science herself until she can satisfy those questions which the human heart will rightly ask…" (Myers 1901:119).

Some Promise of Life Beyond

The séance began with small talk about the weather. The late afternoon sun warmed the small parlor. Leonora Piper slowly drifted into a trance. Her voice deepened. She began to list a string of names, with initial difficulty5, but gradually made perfect. At first, Piper guessed "Niblin." No, she tried again, "Giblin." Finally settling correctly on "Gibbens." It seemed as though she had difficulty pronouncing, or perhaps more accurately, hearing the words (Blum 2007:100). Before coming out of her trance, she asked about a dead child. It was a boy, she said. She fumbled for a name. "Herrin?" Despite these incongruities, William James believed "the *facts predicated* of the persons made it in many instances impossible not to recognize the particular individuals who were talked about" (1986:80). As she added details to the names, James weighed the chances of blatant fraud. Or, by remarkable coincidence, she was incredibly lucky in guessing the intimate lives of strangers. Or perhaps, he allowed himself to imagine the most improbable, that this young medium might be "possessed by supernormal powers" (ibid).

Two months prior, American psychologist and philosopher William James and his wife Alice Gibbens James had lost their youngest son. Herman James, affectionately known as "Humster," died at the age of one after contracting pneumonia (Blum 2007:96). The day after his son's funeral, James wrote to this cousin, "it *must* be now that he is reserved for some still better chance, some promise of life beyond Earth" (ibid). He had no intention to prove the existence of

an afterlife, no plans to consult a medium on his of his son. "That he ended up doing both," as Deborah Blum notes, "William James would always consider a strange and remarkable coincidence" (ibid). In James' lifetime, he would witness vast changes to the scientific and spiritual landscape of America, including Darwin's Theory of Evolution, Manifest Destiny and the territorial expansion of the nation through telegraphic communication and railroads, the Third Great Awakening, and the abolition of slavery. Séances provided an unexpected window into nascent debates—concerning biological determinism and the human experience of free will—that shaped how the "mind" and the "body" were being re-imagined in America in the 19th century.

Over the last 25 years of his life, William James investigated the trance states of Boston medium, Leonora Piper, as part of his work for the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR). James referred to Piper as his "white crow," the single exception that could destroy the universality of the general rule that all crows are black (Taylor 1999:169). For James, Piper's trance phenomena destroyed all of the basic premises held by the mainstream scientific community on the divisibility of the mind and the physical limits of human consciousness.[16]

In this chapter, I consider the relevance of William James' psychical research to emergent theories of the human mind and specifically, to the making of a subliminal consciousness. More precisely, I discuss how James connected biologically determining aspects of his psycho-physiological data with an ethnically meaningful doctrine of free will to formulate provisional theories of trance phenomena. Séances and seemingly fringe trance phenomena have the power

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[16] James did not set out to disprove existent theories of the mind. In fact, when he initially began his psychical and physio-psychological research he also believed in the dominant theory held by the scientific and medical community that the mind could only be divisible into two states of consciousness: the waking and sleeping states. It was only later through his investigation of trance phenomena did he think that the mind could be divided into multiple states of consciousness.

to illuminate intersecting tensions between the growing scientific hegemony and rising religious sentiments on reality of God, free will, and a purpose driven universe within 19th century American society.[17]

Darwin's theory of evolution ushered in a golden age of scientific rationalism alongside a deep public fascination with the occult. With the intellectual anxieties produced by new discoveries in geology, biology, and astronomy were generating for conventional religions, thousands of converts turned to spiritualism[18] as a means to provide an even more *rational* basis for questions of faith and the ultimate purpose of human life (Hess 1993:19). Spiritualism gained traction as a popular religious, therapeutic, and political movement because it provided a technically plausible system of explanation for seemingly occult occurrences, "transforming the supernatural into the preternatural" (Sconce 2000:28). Not surprisingly, the movement ignited the wrath of both prominent scientists and church leaders, condemning spirit mediums as the "nemesis of the pulpit" (Blum 2007:20).

Spiritualists shared the basic tenant that human consciousness, or the soul, survived bodily death. Through psychic mediums, séances, spirit technologies (e.g., Ouija boards, planchettes), slate writing, table tipping, and dramatic displays of apparitions, spiritualists believed that they could achieve direct communication with the spirit world and provide empirical proof for the existence of an afterlife. In an era of widespread intellectual and moral

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[17] The emergence and enduring legacy of debates between biological determinism and the human experience of free will, often recast into nature-nurture debates, has been a deep and rich area of scholarship for many anthropologists, historians, and science studies scholars. For example, see Shapin and Schaffer 1989, MacCormack and Strathern 1980, Haraway 1991, Latour 1993.

[18] Scholars have counted between thousands to millions of members participating in the Spiritualist movement, possibly with membership peaking at 11 million members at the movement's heyday in the 1870s (Albanese 2007:220). For more on 19th century spiritualism, see Oppenheim 1985, Winter 1998, Albanese 2007.

upheaval, spiritualism—alongside the dawn of new disembodied telegraphic communication[19] —

made possible the "fantastic splitting of the mind and body in the cultural imagination (2000:27).

The late 19th century marked a historical moment when the human mind had become of

greater importance than bodily structure (Fichman 2004:155). Twenty years after they co-

authored their theory on natural selection. Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, much to

their own surprise, found themselves embroiled in a high-stakes debate over the origin of man.

Wallace had controversially declared natural selection insufficient to account for man; namely,

the origin of consciousness and the higher intellect and moral sensibilities of the human mind.

Instead, he proposed that the evolution of man's consciousness must be guided by a higher

power, an intelligent designer, "in definite directions and for special ends" (Kottler 1974:145).

Wallace attributed this "supreme intelligence" to mysterious forces that he encountered through

his involvement with spiritualism (Ross 2004:6).[20] More importantly, he believed that if science

denied the possibility of a higher intelligence, a universal moral force, the result could be a

widespread amorality that threatened to rip apart the social fabric. As George Stocking argues,

Wallace shifted the focus of the anthropogenesis debate from the physical to the mental and

moral evolution of man (1987:149).

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[19] Jeffrey Sconce argues that spiritualists attempted to gain scientific authority and public legitimacy by aligning themselves with the principles of "electrical science." This was an attempt to distinguish mediumship from more "superstitious" forms of mystical belief in the pervious century. "It was the animating powers of electricity that gave the telegraph its distinctive property of simultaneity and its unique sense of disembodied presence, allowing the device to vanquish previous barriers of space, time, and in the spiritualist imagination, even death. More than an arbitrary fanciful, and wholly bizarre response to innovation of a technological marvel, the spiritual telegraph's contact with the dead represented, at least initially, a strangely "logical" application of telegraphy's consistent with period knowledges of electromagnetic science, the experimental frontiers of physics/metaphysics…" (Sconce 2000:28).

[20] In the 1870s, Wallace emerged in the public eye as the champion of spiritualism, ardently defending psychic mediums against the scientific community and the wider public. To be clear, Wallace did not attribute this moral force to God. As Deborah Blum points out, he continued to view organized Christianity's way of explaining the world antiquated and unconvincing (Blum 2007:38). However, Wallace worried that without God or a supreme force, or at least a belief in one, he found it difficult to imagine how individuals could distinguish between right and wrong without assurance of future reward or punishment. Eric Slotten insightfully argues, "[Wallace] had omitted a soul from the monster he created—an omission he discovered belatedly and hoped to remedy" (Slotten 2004:6).

"The purpose of *On the Origin of Species*," as Louis Menand argues, "was not to introduce the concept of evolution; it was to debunk the concept of supernatural intelligence— the idea that the universe is the result of an idea" (2001:121). To a certain extent, Darwin also found natural selection inadequate to account for all aspects of evolution (Fichman 2004:157). In his defense, he supplemented natural selection with a new theory on sexual selection and traced human behavior to its animal origins. Positing a predominantly deterministic scheme of explanation, Darwin and other scientific materialists reduced all phenomena, including human thought, to laws of matter and motion. Materialist accounts of science disregarded volition, effort, free will, and ultimately even consciousness itself as illusory. This disregard was perceived by many within and outside of the scientific community as a threat to the traditional bases of morality (Daston 1978:192). As Lorraine Daston suggests, this perceived tension between the moral necessity of free will and a mechanistic law-governed mental science played a central role in framing the mind-body conceptualizations within the scope and limitations of late Victorian science (ibid).

Debates between spiritualists, creationists, evolutionary teleologists, and scientific materialists over the nature of the human mind became a means to address larger intellectual, ethical, and moral anxieties concerning God, the afterlife, and the perennial concern of where humans stood in the "great chain of being." If the mind was not simply "molecular changes in protoplasm," as argued by T.H. Huxley and other Darwin proponents; then, who or what was responsible for man's higher mental and moral faculties (Blum 2007:20)? And, if the mind was not restricted to biological processes, then could human consciousness survive bodily death?

Throughout his career, James maintained an ambivalent relationship to Darwinian thought.[21] On the one hand, he advocated "science of religion,"[22] subjecting *all* beliefs to public scrutiny or the kind of critical selection analogous to natural selection; a "survival of the humanly fittest" or the survival of the fittest belief (Hollinger 1994:14). On the other hand, James believed that natural selection had produced in humans, organisms gifted with the capacity to make choices or what he would call the "will to believe (Menand 2001:220). The "will to believe" presented to James a moral imperative, a vote in the evolving constitution of the universe: "when we choose a belief and act on it, we change the way things are" (ibid).

In their respective ways, Darwin and Wallace each sought to formulate an all-encompassing theory to account for the origin of consciousness and the evolution of the mind. This was not the sort of consciousness-making that James participated in. James instead contributed to theories of the mind through a seemingly fringe part of his scientific career, psychical research, to a fringe part of the mind, the subliminal consciousness. His work, then, presents an alternative way of knowing the mind—not through great scientific discoveries or grand totalizing theories—but through the vicissitudes of his explorations on the margins of consciousness.

Trance phenomena are particularly salient to critically engage with the reality of the unseen because they are known through their material effects, not by an intrinsic or pre-given nature. Throughout the course of his investigations, James came to believe in the genuineness of

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[21] Lorraine Daston also suggests, "James oscillated between a deterministic and an autonomous theory of will throughout his career. It has been convincingly argued that his eventual decision in favor of the latter can be attributed to biographical as well as intellectual factors" (Daston 1978:205).

[22] In *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), James shifted from a doctrine of "separate spheres" marking off religion and science as distinct classes of truth to a "science of religion." His "science of religion" transformed all private beliefs into expressed and tangible actions, behavioral and emotional changes, and practical consequences that can be measured and tested along with other forms of belief including scientific beliefs, which are rooted in the personal experiences. David Hollinger writes that the goal of James' "science of religion" is to "test saintliness by common sense, to use human standards to help us decide how far the religious life commends itself as a kind of human activity" (Hollinger 1994:14).

Piper's "supernormal" knowledge. What he was uncertain about, though, was the source of her extraordinary powers. To make sense of his direct observations and empirical data, James vacillated between two primary theories to account for this source: "spirit-return" (the postmortem survival of consciousness) or the subliminal mind (and altered states of consciousness). More confounding still, he was uncertain if survival and subliminal theories were mutually exclusive in the first place. Perhaps accordingly, James' research articles and reports were not explanatory devices, but rather an analysis based on a logic of associations and deferral of conclusions, an inevitable call for more research.

William James grappled with what I call "quasi-certainty" as a means to access debates over the reality of biological determinism and free will. The "quasi-certainty" within James' thinking held in productive tension the biological and mental processes studied in his psychical research with a "will to believe" advocated in his pragmatism.[23] Quasi-certainty is a mode of knowing through associations and deferrals. It arises when some elements are certain, that is unequivocally known, but other elements remain unknown amidst larger uncertainties and ambiguities. Quasi-certainty is linked to a mode of knowing that emerges from effect-cause relationships—rather than cause-effect relationships—in which material effects and practical consequences are known but not their origin or cause. Seen in this light, James' quasi-certainty

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[23] The question of whether or not it was trance phenomena that caused James to reject the increasing materialism of science around him or if, by contrast, it was his determination to fight increasing materialism that biased the interpretation of his findings is an important one. As an anthropologist, however, I do not believe that I am in a position to laud or condemn James. The answer to this question, I propose, largely depends on what James called, "one's general sense of dramatic possibility," that is what one can imagine is possible in the universe. This sense, then, can lead readers to view James' quasi-certainty favorably or unfavorably as pseudoscientific self-delusion. Rather, the goal of this article is to examine the limits and affordances of quasi-certainty—as a mode of knowing through associations and deferrals—and illuminating the connections between James' psychical research and his pragmatic philosophy. Though it should be noted that many psychologists, notably Joseph Jastrow, participated in detecting fraud amongst mediums and Hodgson and James were no exception. In fact, James spent the early part of his psychical research revealing fraudulent mediums in Boston. Moreover, James and Hodgson spent a great deal of time attempting to debunk Piper at the beginning of their investigation (see page 19). For more on Jastrow, see Tanner 1911.

echoes the inductive reasoning and empiricist discourse of Darwin and other scientific materialists. Further highlighting his ambivalent relationship to Darwin, he described the efforts of psychical research:

> "When Darwin met a fact which seemed a power to his theory, his regular custom, as I have heard an ingenuous fried say, was to fill in all round it with small facts, and so mitigate the jolt, as a wagoner might heap direct round a big rock in the road, and thus get his team over without upsetting" (James 1892:101).

As a result, James' provisional piecemeal theories began with the empirical and observed effects of trance phenomena and tried to generate most likely hypotheses through a continuous chain of verifying experiences. [24] As a parallel mode of practice, verifying experiences act as the driving force of quasi-certainty—propelling and modifying the relationships between the known and the unknown. Quasi-certainty allowed James to deny trance phenomena an *a priori* essence. This shifted James' focus to unfolding conjunctive and disjunctive associations—between past and current experiences—in order to access his objects of inquiry.

James' quasi-certainty privileged open-endedness in two ways: an open-endedness that relies upon intra-experiential relationships as a productive force, generating ever more nuanced hypotheses and provisional theories *and* an open-endedness that creates the conditions of possibility for a personal "truth" founded upon subjective experiences and beliefs. James' reliance on this logic of associations and deferral can be attributed to the limits of psychical research and the indeterminacy of paranormal phenomena. It, however, could also be attributed to James' own personal temperament: his willingness to dwell in uncertainty and his fear of premature conclusions that might foreclose potential lines of inquiry. Regardless, his strategy of deferral and logic of associations as well as his commitment to open-endedness were concerns that he maintained and fostered throughout his psychical research career. These concerns were

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[24] Quasi-certainty as a mode of knowing is inspired by abduction or a mode of knowing. For a more detailed analysis of abduction, see Peirce 1957, Saunders 2008, Helmreich 2009.

also omnipresent in his pragmatism and were later formalized in his method of "radical empiricism" and theory of pragmatic "truth" in the last years of his life.

The quasi-certainty within James' theories of the subliminal mind demonstrates that his psychical research (and the demand for psycho-physiological facts) and pragmatism (and the demand for free will) were not distinct, unrelated, concerns in his life; but in actuality were coeval, co-emergent, and intimately intertwined facets of his thinking. James' refusal to transcend his object of inquiry—that is his engagement with the gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions of the Piper phenomena—afforded him the opportunities to make certain insights into the depth and potential of the human mind. James engaged with quasi-certainty to access the subliminal mind thorough continuous chain of verifying experiences and shifting relationships between the known and the unknown, brining to the fore personal desires, moral convictions, and pragmatic truths.

William James and Psychical Research

William James is celebrated as the founder of American psychology and the philosophical tradition of pragmatism and is considered by many scholars to be one of the most influential thinkers of the 19th century (James 1992, James and Kuklick 1987). "There has been," however, "much uncertainty in the minds of William James' readers and particularly that portion in them interested in psychical research as to his conclusions on this subject to which he gave so much thought" (Pierson 1938:5). As Virginia Pierson suggested, psychical research was in fact something that deeply preoccupied James thoughts for the over a quarter century.[25] Throughout his psychical research career, he served both as President and Vice-President of the ASPR and an active member on their Committee on Work, the Committee on Mediumistic Phenomena, the Committee on Experimental Psychology, and the Committee on Hypnotism.

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[25] See also, Bordogna 2008.

The uncertainty over James' private thoughts on his psychical research can be attributed to the fact that he only published two articles for the general public, "What Psychical Research Has Accomplished" (1892) and "The Confidences of a 'Psychical Researcher'" (1909). Instead, he relegated the majority of his psychical research to summaries, notes, and interpretations printed exclusively in the journals and proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) and subsequently, the ASPR. Psychical research, though not immediately obvious in his publication record, played an enduring and significant role in James' life and psychical research and pragmatism were inextricably entangled threads of his thinking.

Henry James Jr., William James' eldest son, described his father's early interest in psychical research as born from an "instinctive love of sportsmanlike fair play," not a desire to definitively prove or deny the existence of an afterlife (Pierson 1938:5). In other words, James' interest was sparked by what he saw as the growing materialist bias of the scientific community and their outright refusal to treat the claims of spiritualism as valid objects of inquiry. Fearing that the advance of modern science threatened to render of role of religion obsolete in society, James' developed a theory of pragmatic truth treating God and other supernatural phenomena as "real" insofar as they fulfilled personal needs and produced practical consequences. In particular, James' method "radical empiricism" provided psychical researchers with two advantages: to encompass marginalized phenomena, dismissed by mainstream science, into their scope of inquiry as potentially natural phenomena *and* to transform the lived experiences of their subjects (e.g., behavioral changes, habits) into generalizable "facts" that they hoped would eventually legitimize their research.[26]

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[26] Throughout their careers in psychical research, Sidgwick, Myers, and James remained convinced that by "fidelity to fact and a truly empirical method, psychical research along with other areas disallowed by materialistic presuppositions of science, would be restored as a proper subject of scientific and philosophical inquiry. What is particularly fascinating is that James' developed psychical research as a means to bridge the gap between science

In 1882, the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) emerged in response to the rigidity of the scientific and religious community, built by leading Cambridge University philosophers Henry Sidgwick and F.H. Myers who believed that questions of immortality and the boundaries of the human mind demanded rigorous and objective investigation. For Sidgwick in particular, psychical research fulfilled a moral obligation to salvage religious beliefs and pursue what he saw was the exception to scientific hegemony and scientific explanation: the human experience of free will, value, and higher purpose (Daston 1979:194). [27] Like Wallace, he believed God—or at least faith in one—to be the foundation of morality and ethics in western society. In general, the bulk of the society's work entailed gathering case studies, reports, and testimonies from thousands of witnesses on their encounters with spirit apparitions, haunted houses, and exceptional mental states. For instance, the Committee on Thought Transference—led by E.C. Pickering and C.S. Peirce—applied statistical analysis to the responses of psychic mediums to circulars and public notices in an attempt to measure the frequency of telepathy and other forms of extrasensory perception (Taylor 1999:87).

The American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) was established three years later in 1885, largely due to the efforts of James and other influential members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. [28] The main work of the American society was to

and religion. This passion and commitment to empirical observation of personal experiences is one of the most tangible elements that were carried throughout James' psychical research, psychology, and philosophy. See James 1986 (1892).

[27] Henry Sidgwick in his book *The Methods of Ethics* (1874) writes, "[Determinism] has steadily grown both intensively and extensively, both in clearness and certainty of conviction, and in the universality of explication, as the human mind has developed and human experience has been systematized and enlarged. Step by step, in successive departments of fact, conflicting modes of thought have receded and faded, until at length they have vanished everywhere, except for the mysterious citadel of the will" (Sidgwick 1981(1874):47). Lorraine Daston argues that Sidgwick's "citadel of the will" (including human experiences of volition, value and ethics) comprised the "world of history" in opposition to the "world of science" (Daston 1978:194).

[28] The ASPR was established with the help of other prominent scientists including, astronomer and mathematician Simon Newcomb (who served as the first president), physician and physiologist Henry Bowditch (who served as vice president), psychologist G. Stanley Hall, James Mills Peirce. These men shortly quit the ASPR owing to disagreements over the methodology and findings of their experiments on thought transference. More specifically,

apply the most advanced techniques of modern science to the investigation of the claims of spiritualism. Unlike its British predecessor, the ASPR decided against being led by classical scholars. Its founding members determined to operate on purely scientific methods, using only trained researchers on their investigations. "Not that scientific men are necessarily better judges of all truth than others," James argued, but researchers tended to be more believable as experts (Blum 2007:87). The Committee on Hypnotism, led by James, was indicative of this shift of focus to an experimental paradigm. In a specially outfitted lab at Harvard University, James carried out extensive research on physiological reactions during hypnotic trances; in many instances, "commandeering his own undergraduate students as his first subjects" (Taylor 1999:165). In the U.S., the Piper case particularly captured the imagination of psychical researchers because it promised to definitively resolve the question of the postmortem survival of the human soul (ibid).

The White Crow

"I remember playing the *esprit fort*," James wrote of his initial reactions to séances, "seeking to explain by simple considerations of the marvelous character of facts which they brought back" (1986:80). As part of his work on the Committee on Mediumistic Phenomena, James investigated the more notable mediums of Boston, detecting brazen fraud at séance after séance. Unlike these other mediums, however, Piper did not rely on dimly lit parlors or theatrical gimmicks to prove her talents.

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they perceived the ASPR not be an upstanding scientific organization and were disappointed to share membership with people they perceived to be enthusiasts and promoters, rather than impartial researcher. In particular, Newcomb began his presidency by writing an article for *Science* magazine criticizing William Barrett's experiments on mind reading. He wrote that he had yet to read a "single piece of convincing evidence" (Blum 2007:88). It should also be noted that Newcomb did not participate in the research. While *Science* editors praised him for his "acute observation" of psychical researcher, as Deborah Blum notes, James characterized him instead "critic without substance" (Blum 2007:90).

Piper's biography bears striking resemblances to those of other female spirit mediums in the late 19th century.[29] As Judith Walkowitz notes, "Spiritualists deemed women particularly apt for mediumship because they were weak in masculine attributes of will and intelligence, yet strong in the feminine qualities of passivity, chastity, and impressionability" (Walkowitz 1988:9). Like the Fox sisters, Piper's body can be seen as similarly defined by such imaginative psychological and physiological speculation. The bodies of spirit mediums or what Jeffrey Sconce calls "the negative female" (and the bodies of women more generally) presented for many Victorians an unfathomable entity, "a machine they could not understand" (Sconce 2000:44).

On the surface, Leonora Piper seemed completely ordinary. At the age of 26, she was married to William Piper, a Boston shopkeeper, and mother to a one-year old daughter. Underneath the respectably middle-class appearances, though, rumors swirled that Piper could tell people things about their lives that could not have possible known; sometimes, she would reveal family secrets that they themselves did not know (Blum 2007:97).

Piper's parents detected the first sign of their daughter's ability when she was eight years old. While playing outside in the garden, Piper felt a sharp blow to her right ear followed by a snake-like sound that resolved itself to "Sara" and then a message that her Aunt Sara was not dead, but still with her (Blum 2007:97). Several days later, her parents received a letter from Sara's husband telling them that she had died on the day, and at about the same time, that the hissing voice spoke into their child's ear (ibid).

As upright members of the Methodist church, young Leonora (then Symonds) and her family wanted nothing to do with whispering voices, or more practically, gossiping neighbors. At

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[29] This section is indebted to Deborah Blum's description of Piper and the Piper case. For a more detailed history of the Piper Case study, see Blum 2007.

the time, spiritualism had become a national obsession in America.[30] Spiritualism attracted

followers worldwide, but to a much greater extent in the U.S., particularly following the Civil

War was grieving families sought to make contact with deceased loved ones. Psychic mediums,

such as the Fox sisters and D.H. Holmes, became overnight celebrities as members of the upper

echelons paid a fortune to communicate with the dead and experience the wonder of levitating

objects and fantastic apparitions. The Symonds had no intention of seeing their daughter become

a freak (Blum 2007:97). At the age of 22, Piper married William Piper and if it were not for a

persistent illness, she would have left her otherworldly encounter in her childhood garden (ibid).

Since the age of 16, Piper suffered from a dull ache across her midsection that only grew

more acute after the birth of her first child. Frustrated by her doctor's inability to diagnose the

cause, Piper visited a blind medium named J.R. Cocke, who claimed he could contact spirits to

aid in his treatment. Under Cocke's care, Piper had her first trance experience. Voices swirled in

her head, but she could only hear one of them clearly. She scribbled the message on a piece of

paper and handed it to an elderly man waiting for his turn with the psychic. To his utter shock,

the man revealed that it was a message from his dead son (Taylor 1999:168).

Piper cried all night when she first discovered her abilities, fearing that it would separate

her from her home life and her children (Blum 2007:97). Now pregnant with her second child,

she simply wanted to be a mother and a respectable wife. Yet, she could not help wonder if this

was divine will, some kind of God-given gift.

In the winter of 1885, James witnessed a dozen more séances with Piper, the young

medium he saw following the death of his son. As part of his study, he also sent over 25

anonymous subjects or "sitters," mostly family members whom he had personally introduced to

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[30] Most scholars have traditionally dated spiritualism with the "Hydesville Rappings" of March 31, 1848. On that day, the three young Fox sisters claimed to be able to communicate with the spirit of a murdered man found on their farm through rappings on their bedroom wall.

the medium. Typical of the trace-mediumship popular at the time, Piper's trances were facilitated

by a "spirit-control" or a spirit who acted a conduit between the medium and the spirit world. In

particular, Piper was "controlled" by a spirit guide named Dr. Phinuit, purporting to be a

deceased French doctor.[31] A dozen of James' sitters received nothing but unknown names and

trivial talk from the medium. But unexpectedly, 15 sitters claimed to be surprised by the

messages they received—details and facts so intimate that Piper could not have possibly known

them through gossip or random guessing. "The probability that she possessed no [clue] as to the

sitter's identity, was, I believe," James admitted, "in each and all of these fifteen cases,

sufficient" (1886:15).

To the readers of his "Report of the Committee on Mediumistic Phenomena," published a

year later, James acknowledged that these details do not otherwise prove anything, since proof

ultimately lies in personal conviction or what one chooses to believe based on his or her own

experiences. He later called this choice the "will to believe." "I am," James wrote, "persuaded by

the medium's honesty and the genuineness of her trance" (1886:16). The source of Lenora's

"supernormal" knowledge, however, continued to elude James.

True to James' style, the report offers "no definitely concluded piece of work" (James

1886:16). As Krister Knapp notes, when James began his investigation of consciousness in 1878,

he believed that the mind could not be divided into two seemingly unrelated states (2001:2). "It

simply defied logic based on then accepted physiological and anatomical theories of the brain"

(ibid). Instead of providing a conclusion, more questions arose from the seemingly irrelevant and

trivial nature of Piper's trance utterances: Are they improvisations of the moment? Are they in

themselves right and coherent but addressed to the wrong sitter? Or, are they vestiges of former

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[31] James later speculated that Piper's spirit control took the form of a doctor because of her first encounters of trance-mediumship with "Dr." Cocke, medium who claimed he could heal others with the help of spirits.

sittings, now emerging as part of the automatism of the medium's brain? These questions suggested a transition in James' working assumptions based on a single indivisible mind to a mind that could be divided into multiple states of consciousness.

The skeptic rules out evidence in advance. The believer, in contrast, accepts far too much evidence to be true. Opting out of belief *and* disbelief, James—choosing to dwell in quasi-certainty—substituted a conclusion for a deferral. He wrote, "the committee of the society should first devote itself to the very exact and complete study of a few particular cases" (1886:18). This deferral characterized James' psychical research and created the conditions of possibility for him to hold open multiple, seemingly incommensurable, theories of the mind and lines of inquiry.

The Limits of Dr. Phinuit

"What science wants," James believed, "is a context to make the trance-phenomena continuous with other physiological and psychological facts" (1886:16). Piper's trances threw into sharp relief the inadequacies of spirit-return and the subliminal mind as theories to account for the mental and biological processes of her trance states or the acquisition of her "supernormal" knowledge. The *prima facie* theory suggested that the reality of spirit-return. To subscribe to this theory, though, one also had to believe in the immortality of the soul and the survival of consciousness after death.

Tensions between the experiential reality of spirit-return for Piper and the demand for establishing psycho-physiological facts are acutely reflected in the design and interpretations of James' experiments. Curious to ascertain whether there was continuity between a medium trance and an ordinary hypnotic trance, James conducted a series of experiments on Piper to understand psychological and physiological modifications in these different states of consciousness. Initially, James had difficult time hypnotizing Piper, forcing him to turn to her spirit-control,

Phinuit, for assistance. By his fifth attempt, James reported that the she had "become a pretty good hypnotic subject, as far as muscular phenomena and automatic imitations of speech and gestures go; but [he] could not affect her consciousness, or otherwise get her beyond this point" (1886:82). Piper described entering her trance states as a feeling of numbness, a sensation she likened to "descending into a dense and chilly fog" (Blum 2007:100).

James noted that her condition in semi-hypnosis was very different from her medium trance. In keeping with the pattern of James' other hypnotic subjects, Piper's hypnotic trances were followed by extreme muscular weakness. Unlike his other subjects, however, Phinuit purportedly mediated Piper's semi-hypnosis and she could not recollect the instructions given to her during her hypnotic state. In future experiments, Richard Hodgson, would put the "genuineness" of Piper's trances to every test he could reasonably conduct:

> "He'd put ammonia soaked cloth under her nose, dumped spoonfuls of salt, perfume, and laundry detergent into her mouth, pinched her until she bruised, all without provoking a flinch. [Piper] sometimes complained of bruises, but often she was unsure how she'd acquired them" (Blum 2007:181).

Attempts to measure "thought-transference," or telepathy, in Piper's hypnotic trance were equally unsuccessful. She was tried twice with epistolary letters and was only successful in one instance. Piper did not fare any better in her waking state, the amount of playing cards that she guesses successfully were not statistically significant enough to offer substantial evidence of thought-transference. So far as evidence goes, these findings suggested that Piper's medium-trance seemed to be an isolated feature of her mind; though, he was unable to determine the psycho-physiological or supernatural source of Piper's spirit-control. From these initial experiments, James was able to discern three distinct states of consciousness: the normal waking state, the medium trance, and the hypnotic trance. "This would of itself be an important result,"

James wrote, "if it could be established and generalized, but the record is obviously too imperfect for confident conclusions to be draw from it in any direction" (1886:17).

Two years would pass before James returned to the Piper case. In 1889, he visited four times with Piper and her family spending a week at the James' country house in New Hampshire. This visit confirmed for James his belief that Piper was a "simple and genuine" person:

> "No one, when challenged, can give 'evidence' to others for such a belief as this. Yet we all live by them from day to day, and practically, I should be willing now to stake as much money on Mrs. Piper's honestly as on that of anyone I know, and am quite satisfied to leave my reputation for wisdom or folly, so far as human nature is concerned, to stand or fall by this declaration" (1886:83)

Four years after taking on the case, James was no closer to providing Piper or the ASPR with any answers: "as far as the explanation of her trance-phenomena, I have none to offer" (ibid). He hesitated to make rash generalizations from a few cases, since he suspected that the names probably covered a very great number of neural conditions (ibid). Yet more confounding still was how to make sense of Phinuit, Piper's purported spirit-control.

In James' sittings with Piper, he continued to encounter Phinuit's uncanny ability to recount intimate details of his family affairs, sometimes revealing things that he was not aware of at the moment. In light of Piper's trance utterances, James surmised that thought-transference did not merely entail the conscious or unconscious thoughts of the sitter, but often the thoughts of some person far away. Perhaps, James thought, her trances were accessing a power "in reserve," what he sometimes called the "sublime reservoir" or later referred to as "the cosmic reservoir" (Knapp 2001:3). Piper was especially gifted in recounting the intimate details of Alice Gibbens James' maternal family:

"Some of them were dead, some in California, some in the State of Maine. She [characterized] them all, living as well as deceased, spoke of their relations to each other, of their likes and dislikes, of their as yet unpublished practical plans, and hardly every made a mistake, though as usual, there was very little system or continuity in anything that came out. A *normal* person, unacquainted with the family, could not have said as much; one acquainted with it could hardly have avoided saying more" (James 1886:97).

The accumulation of details, despite their seeming insignificance, had an irresistible effect on James, stoking the fire of his own "will to believe" in spirit-return and a purpose driven universe. Piper's trances, however, were also full of gaps, discontinuities, and contradictions. For all of Phinuit's remarkable talent in "controlling" Piper, James was especially perplexed by Phinuit's ramblings on the most trivial things. "What real spirit, at least able to revisit his wife on this earth, but would find something better to say than that she had changed the place of his photograph" (James 1886:83)? James confessed, "I was too disgusted with Phinuit's tiresome twaddle even to note it down" (1886:85). Rather than a returned spirit, Phinuit increasingly appeared to James to be a figment of Piper's subconscious imagination, that is, a psychological fact or an exceptional mental state. James wrote expressing his doubts:

"His French, so far as he has been able to display it has been limited to a few phrases of salutation, which may easily have had their rise in the medium's 'unconscious' memory; he has never been able to understand *my* French; and crumbs of information which he gives about his earthly career are […] so vague, and unlikely sounding..." (1886:84).

Further, all attempts to locate any records, such as census records or birth certificates, in France ended in failure. Albeit more fascinating than the possibility of spirit return, for James, was the tenacity and minuteness of Phinuit's memory. Phinuit was able to recall the lives of sitters stretching across years with remarkable accuracy and detail. To unravel this mystery, James and the society would need someone to undertake a full time investigation of the Piper case. In 1887, Richard Hodgson signed on to work as the principle investigator.

Prior to the Piper investigation, Richard Hodgson had successfully exposed two well-known mediums, Eusapia Palladino and Helena Blavatsky, founder of the popular Theosophical Society. This earned him the nickname "the terror of fraudulent mediums" and the reputation of being the most ruthless and skeptical SPR researcher. Right away, Hodgson set to work to come up with a good, workable *modus operandi* to explain Piper's medium trances, although more likely, he expected to prove her deception. To do this, he hired private detectives to follow the Pipers. After a month of surveillance, the detectives reported that they had discovered absolutely nothing (Blum 2007:181). Neither Piper nor her husband had held secret meetings, read past copies of newspapers, visited cemeteries, or hired their own private detectives—all common strategies used by mediums to collect information about potential sitters (ibid). Fraud, as it turned out, increasingly seemed to be the unlikeliest of explanations to Phinuit's insights.

In 1892, Hodgson wrote his first report on the Piper case. He declared Phinuit to be a secondary subliminal personality. The ASPR investigators involved came to the consensus that the spirit-control was a creation of Piper's subconscious, a mental process that served to buffer herself from whatever mental battering took place in her trance states (Blum 2007:182). Although no conclusive evidence for the existence of spirits had been found, it was abundantly clear to James that Piper's subliminal self had remarkable powers of control over involuntary bodily processes and seemed to access heightened powers of perception, memory, attention, and cognition in ways that he could not explain (Taylor 1999:169).

As a fictional character and mental buffer, Phinuit seemed to make a kind of strange sense (Blum 2007:182). But as a returned spirit, the facts made no sense at all. From their collected evidence, neither James nor Hodgson had been convinced of spirit return. For real believers, however, Hodgson's rather cryptic close promised other results would be forthcoming:

"Mrs. Piper has given some sittings very recently which materially strengthen the evidence for existence that goes beyond thought-transference from the sitters, and which certainly [on its face] appears to render some form of the 'spiritistic' hypothesis more probable" (ibid).

Birds in the Sea

It was the death and arrival of the George Pellew spirit control that provided the concluding note of optimism to Hodgson's first report (Blum 2007:182). In the winter of 1892, Pellew, a young philosophy student and friend of Hodgson, unexpectedly died from a fall off his horse. A few months prior to his death, Pellew half-jokingly promised Hodgson that if he died first, he would provide his friend with irrefutable evidence of spirit return (ibid).

So when the George Pellew control—referred to as "G.P." by Hodgson—succeeded Phinuit as Piper's spirit control and made its presence known in her sittings, he was not convinced that this control was the spirit of his deceased friend. But perhaps, this opportunity would be Hodgson's best shot at definitively resolving whether Piper's spirit-controls were really subliminal personalities or indeed returned spirits. Unlike the dubious Phinuit, G.P. claimed to be someone known to Hodgson. This fact alone offered him a realm of possible tests to determine the source of Piper's "supernormal" knowledge (Blum 2007:182).

The test was simple. Hodgson would bring in over a hundred sitters to visit Piper and check their knowledge against this new trance personality. Some would be friends and family of Pellew and others would be complete strangers. No one would be allowed to reveal their identities or their connections—if any—to the G.P. control. The anonymous sitters would be allowed to improvise their own tests, but were not allowed to give any explanation of them. The sittings were going astonishing well. Piper recognized photographs, old possessions, and relayed

too private messages, which made sitters pale upon sight. Hodgson would spend another five years with the G.P. control before he would publish his findings in his second report.

After 130 sittings, Hodgson announced that he had been earlier mistaken in calling G.P. a trance personality (Blum 2007:271). The spirit-control present in Piper's sittings was indeed the returned spirit of his deceased friend George Pellew. All of the sitters were presented anonymously. Yet, G.P. effortlessly sorted through them. Not once did G.P. ever confuse a stranger for a friend or vice versa. In light of these results, Hodgson found telepathy to be an inadequate explanation. It was unlikely that all of Pellew's friends were gifted telepathic agents capable of sharing their thoughts with Piper (ibid). Moreover, it could not account for why G.P. was able to accurately describe friends not in attendance. To the shock of the SPR, Hodgson—long-time cynic and the most skeptical of psychical researchers—declared that these sittings provided the evidence needed to prove to the existence of spirits.

Hodgson's findings illuminate the quasi-certainty palpable within the Piper case. To formulate his conclusion of spirit return, Hodgson relied upon *a priori* theories—rather than experimental findings—to "know" the defining features of telepathy.[32] He arrived at his conclusion, however, without a full understanding of the origin or mechanics of telepathy; though he indexed certain variables—spatial distance and personal dispositions—as potential factors in extrasensory perception. For the experiments to yield results, Hodgson had to strategically and prematurely reify telepathy as a "known" phenomenon with objective properties that could then be verified or refuted against his hypothesis of spirit return. This allowed him to

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[32] What is particularly interesting about Hodgson's explanation of spirit return is his reliance on preexisting provisional theories of telepathy. It is important to note here that at this time that there was much uncertainty over telepathy and it was (and continues to be) an object of investigation for psychical researchers. Moreover, I have been unable to trace the origin of these provisional theories of telepathy. So it is fascinating to me how Hodgson must necessarily stabilize an otherwise uncertain and unknown phenomena of telepathy in order to "know" spirit-return.

accomplish what James had refused to do all along—to provide an explanation for Piper's "supernormal" knowledge.

Not surprisingly, Hodgson's second report proved to be extremely controversial, igniting criticism within the SPR and the scientific community writ large. [33] The *Saturday Review* acknowledged the rigor of Hodgson's study and its strong evidence in favor of survival after death. The *Review,* however, was quick to note it was unclear what survived—whether it was a soul, a spirit, or merely some sort of imprint of a personality (Blum 2007:223). In *Science* magazine, Columbia University professor James McKeen Cattell declared that "mediums are scientific outlaws and their defendants are quasi-insane" (Blum 2007:222). Handling Cattell's vitriol with his usual ease, James responded that Hodgson's report and investigation of Piper conformed to scientific principles: Hodgson proposed a theory and offered supporting evidence for it (Blum 2007:219). Accordingly, his SPR colleagues had reviewed it, criticized it, and demanded more substantial evidence.

Within the SPR, heated debates arose between Hodgson supporters and critics. Proponents of the spirit-return theory argued that the contradictions and inconsistences of trance phenomena were due to the spirit control's lack of familiarity with its new surroundings and the medium's body, using the metaphor "like birds in the sea." But what about those pitch perfect days (Blum 2007:219)? For critics, spirit-return seemed to be a poor cover story for the spirit-controls' shortcomings and idiosyncrasies.

To account for Piper's "supernormal" knowledge, James typically vacillated between theories of spirit-return and the subliminal mind. These debates, however, presented James with

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[33] Many of Hodgson's opponents believed that Piper's abilities did not warrant the kind of patience that Hodgson and James granted to them. They believed that there were too many holes in her abilities. For instance, Andrew Lang, a former SPR president, believed Piper's Pellew-control to be fraud. The Pellew-control had forgotten his Greek and philosophy despite the fact that Pellew with a philosophy student at the time of his death.

a third alternative—the theory of a "cosmic reservoir"—to connect psycho-physiological

processes with the "will to believe" in the afterlife and the seemingly real personal experiences

of spirit communication. He speculated whether the energy generated in our lives burned an

impression, or memory—a cosmic record of sorts that lingers even after bodily death. Perhaps,

there was no life after death, just the occasional echo of the past. Pursuing this idea further,

James wondered if we live the entirety of our lives buffered from this residual echo. But

occasionally, perhaps in an exceptional mental state or in an exceptionally gifted person, these

buffers might breakdown (Blum 2007:223). Imagining a world in which mental life and physical

life ran parallel, James wrote:

> "Not only psychic research, but metaphysical philosophy and speculative biology
> are led in their own ways to look with favor on some such 'panpsychic' view of
> the universe as this. Assuming this common reservoir of consciousness to
> exist…what is its own structure? (...) What again are the relations between cosmic
> consciousness and matter? So that our ordinary human experience, on its material
> as well as on its mental side, would appear to be only an extract from the larger
> psycho-physical world (1886:374-375)?"

Harkening back to his "science of religions," James' theory of a "cosmic reservoir" reflects a

similar tension between his faith in scientific inquiry and a commitment to provisional "truths"

based on unfolding personal experiences. His new theory reframed trance states as immanent

relationships between an individual's subliminal consciousness and a larger "cosmic

consciousness," which shapes human experience. Through reframing trance phenomena as

psycho-physiological responses or altered states of consciousness, allowed James to transform

trance phenomena into potentially measurable and generalizable "facts" that could produce

purposeful changes, including a person's sense of reality and orientation to the world. More

significantly, it allowed James to challenge scientific materialist assumptions on the divisibility

of the mind and the individuality of human personalities. Testifying to the importance of facts for

validating psychical research, James wrote: "It is through following these facts, I am persuaded, that the greatest scientific conquests will be achieved (1886:375).

The Sense of Dramatic Possibility

On December 20, 1905, Richard Hodgson unexpectedly died of a massive heart attack before he could finish his third report. Like George Pellew, Hodgson joked with James that if he died and Piper was still holding sittings, he would control her better than any other spirit-control because he knew intimately the conditions and difficulties of psychical research (James 1909:253). Eight days after his death, the Hodgson-control—referred in James' notes as "R.H."—appeared to Piper.

As the R.H. control flickered in and out of Piper's sittings, it became obvious to James that this was another opportunity to "test the question of spirit return," much like Hodgson's own efforts with the G.P. control (1909:253). James would set the standards for this test very high. He determined to be as ruthless an investigator as Hodgson ever was, setting aside emotions for cold hard facts (Blum 2007:286).

Encounters with the Hodgson-control veered between a presence so real that James remembered breaking out into chills and at the other extreme, tedious hours with what appeared to be Piper's peculiar masculine impersonation of Hodgson (Blum 2007:286). At his best, R.H. teased old friends and turned quiet and reserved with less-known acquaintances. The private jokes, intimate details, and embarrassing recollects all served to make Hodgson's sitters feel, however, in some way, more or less, that they were conversing with the real man (ibid).

For all of the extraordinary moments of connection, there were also profound moments of disconnection. R.H. could not accurately describe his childhood in Australia.[34] Along with the R.H. control came, James wrote, "so much repetition, hesitation, irrelevance, unintelligibility, so much obvious groping and fishing and plausible covering up of false tracks…the stream of veridicality that turns through the whole gets lost as if it were in a marsh of feebleness" (1909:336). During these moments, James would plead with the R.H. control:

> "But, Richard Hodgson, listen for a moment. We are trying to get evidential material as to your identity and anything you can recollect in the way of facts is more important than anything else…I wish that what you say could grow more continuous that would convince me. You are very much like your old self, but you are curiously fragmentary" (ibid).

Two years and 75 sittings later, James published his "Report on Mrs. Piper's Hodgson-Control" (1909). There was no doubt in James' mind that Piper demonstrated supernormal knowledge during her medium trances. The big question, however, remained unanswered. What was the source of this knowledge: Piper's subliminal consciousness or the returned spirit of Richard Hodgson?

To debunk "natural" explanations (i.e., information unwittingly furnished by the living Hodgson or other sitters), James relied upon his personal friendship and intimate knowledge of Hodgson. He described Hodgson as "gifted with great powers of reserve" and adverse to personal gossip and small talk, especially with Piper (James 1909:257). In his interactions with Piper, Hodgson had adopted a purely business tone, entering at the start of the trance and leaving immediately after the sitting was over. "It may well be that Mrs. Piper had heard one little incident or another to be discussed in the following report, from his living lips, but that any large mass of these incidents are to be traced to this origin, I find incredible" (ibid).

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[34] Worse still, when Hodgson died, he left behind a letter, the contents of which he said, his spirit would reveal via Piper. She was unable to pass this test. James excused this failure citing that it was difficult for spirits to speak through mediums.

Yet, it is the very fact of James and Piper's long-term relationship and familiarity with Hodgson that rendered the R.H. sittings more susceptible to information leakage and the impersonations of the medium. James was quick to point out, however, that Hodgson and other psychical researchers had previously hypothesized that spirits have a difficult time communicating through a medium's body—"like birds in the sea." James speculated that Piper's supernormal knowledge might be a product of her subconscious memories and imagination, unwittingly conjured, in order to impersonate and enrich the details allegedly provided by the R.H. control. Seen in this light, spirit communication need not necessarily involve spirit return.

In fact, James increasingly viewed spirit-return as an explanation lacking in evidential force. Rather, what James saw was Piper's "will to impersonate," that is, her power to draw upon "supernormal" sources of information. He imagined this "will" as potentially telepathically tapping into "the sitters' memories, possibly those of distant human beings, possibly some cosmic reservoir in which the memories of Earth are stored, whether in the same of 'spirits' or not" (James 1909:257).

It seemed, however, that James was not willing to abandon spirit-return altogether. He held open the possibility for spirit-return by proposing that spirit communication might not simply be limited to a medium's "will to impersonate," but rather occurred through an interplay between the medium and the external "will to communicate" of returned spirits.

> "Extraneous 'wills to communicate' may contribute to the results as well as a 'will
> to personate,' and the two kinds of will[s] may be distinct in entity, though capable
> of helping each other out. The will to communicate would be, on the *prima facie*
> view of it, the will of Hodgson's [or any deceased person's] surviving spirit"
> (James 1909:356).

In other words, James suggested that spirit communication might emerge from the interaction between two distinct "wills": Piper's "will to impersonate" and the R.H. control's "will to

communicate." These "wills" are indicative of how James, as Knapp shows, prioritized the concept of will in his pragmatism and found it increasingly salient in describing human behavior (2001:4).

"But if asked whether the 'will to communicate' be Hodgson's or be some mere spirit counterfeit of Hodgson," James wrote, "I remain uncertain and await more facts, facts which may or may not point clearly to a conduction for 50 to 100 years" (1909:356). This deferral allowed James to hold *in potentia* seemingly contradictory theories of spirit return, subliminal personalities, and the cosmic reservoir.

This seemingly ideal opportunity to once and for all prove the existence of spirits was doomed from the outset. What James did not anticipate was that the R.H. control was an exceptionally bad case to test spirit return owing to the unusual scope it gave to natural explanations. Taken by itself, James admitted that the case furnished no "knock-down" proof of Hodgson's spirit return (1909:281). This lack of evidence, however, did not eliminate the confidence one feels from a "good sitting." Distinguishing between personal experiences versus second hand accounts, James wrote:

> "One who takes part in a good sitting has usually a far livelier sense, both of the reality and of the importance of the communication, than one who merely reads the record…When you find your questions answered and your allusions understood; when allusions are made that you understand and your own thoughts are met; either by anticipation, denial, or corroboration; when you have approved, applauded or exchanged banter or thankfully listened to advice that you believe in; it is difficult not to take away an impression of having encountered something sincere in the way of a social phenomenon. The whole talk gets warmed with your own warmth, and takes on the reality of your own part in it; its confusions and defects you charge to the imperfect conditions, while you credit the successes to the genuineness of spirit communication. These consequently loom more in our memory and give the key to our dramatic interpretation of phenomenon" (ibid).

Strong convictions can fade. And what might seem real in the warmth of the present moment might diminish in one's recollections or upon a cold re-reading of transcripts. The decisive vote

is cast by what James called "one's general sense of dramatic possibility"—which ebbs and flows from one hypothesis to another—often, "in a rather illogical manner" (James 1986:282). This "sense," then, is contingent upon what one can imagine is possible in the universe. As for James, he readily admitted that he could perfectly well imagine the existence of spirits and other invisible agents and found his mind "vacillating about it curiously" (James 1909:282).

In the face of quasi-certainty, James ultimately turned to the "will to believe" and personal "truth" to make sense of trance phenomena. If the "truth" is decidedly contingent upon verifying experiences that form "one's sense of dramatic possibility," then, the larger question for James was not the origin or mechanics of spirit communication; but rather, its human purpose. To this end, at the very heart of psychical research, and more broadly, pragmatism, lies an account of "the way people think—they way they come up with ideas, form beliefs, and reach decisions" (Menand 2001:351).

The following year, James died in the arms of his wife Alice. Prior to his death, he wrote in his retrospective article, "Confidences of a Psychical Researcher" (1909):

> "I heard [Sidgwick] say, the year before his death, that if anyone had told him at the outset that after 20 years he would be in the same identical state of doubt that he started with, he would have deemed the prophecy incredible…My own experience has been similar to Sidgwick's" (1909:361).

As Blum notes, "after 25 years of working with outstandingly good psychical researchers, conducting experiments, studying the literature, sitting with mediums both fraudulent and gifted, James found himself stymied" (Blum 2007:310). Throughout his psychical research career, he encountered what he believed to be truly genuine supernatural phenomena, but he could not explain them. Lenora Piper continued to work as a medium for the ASPR for 40 more years, dying in 1950 at the age of 93. She would outlive most of her psychical researchers. She would

not, however, outlive the debates over matters of life and death, faith and empiricism, science and religion (Blum 2001:320).[35]

Conclusion

There are countless reasons why some of the most prominent scientists, writers, and philosophers of the late 19th century participated in psychical research. The prospect of life after death captured the imagination and fears of many hoping to definitively prove or deny the reality of spirit-return. James' involvement with psychical research, however, was incited by his moral and intellectual concerns over the growing materialist bias of the scientific community and perhaps more imperatively, over humankind stripped of faith (Blum 2007:41). What further set James apart from his fellow psychical researchers was his willingness to dwell in quasi-certainty, that is, his refusal to offer conclusive explanations for spirit communication and other psychical phenomena.

Quasi-certainty, as a mode of knowing through associations and deferrals, created certain affordances for James to access and "know" trance phenomena through wide-ranging and often, idiosyncratic material effects. In particular, quasi-certainty allowed James to create provisional piecemeal associations between psychological and physiological responses, transforming

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[35] There were several moments in her twenty-five yearlong tenure as a research subject for James and Hodgson when Piper decided to quit the study in order to focus on being a mother and wife to her family (i.e., after the birth of her second child). During one of these moments in 1901, Piper gave an interview with the New York Herald (New York Herald 1901). In the article, she announced her separation from the ASPR and denied being a Spiritualist, stating "I must truthfully say that I do not believe that spirits of the dead have spoken through me when I have been in trance state." She also said that she believed telepathy might explain her mediumship and that her "spirit controls" were an "unconscious expression of my subliminal self." These comments, not surprisingly shocked Hodgson, who firmly believed in her abilities to communicate with the returned spirits. She later recanted her comments, claiming misquotation and that her statement had been made in a "transient mood" (Clodd 1917, Fodor 1966). On October 25, 1901, Piper stated in the Boston Advertiser, "I did not make any such statement as that published in the New York Herald to the effect that spirits of the departed do not control me…My opinion is to-day as it was eighteen years ago. Spirits of the departed may have controlled me and they may not. I confess that I do not know. I have not changed ... I make no change in my relations" (Luckhurst 2002:231). It is interesting to note that Piper died without having known the cause of her medium trances and seemed to vacillate between the two theories supplied by James.

immaterial beliefs and personal experiences into potentially generalizable "facts" that might one day validate psychical research as a scientifically legitimate endeavor as well as lead to breakthrough discoveries about the depth and potential of the human mind. Through a mode of knowing contingent upon deferral and open-endedness as a driving force, James was able to hold in tension and *in potentia* seemingly incommensurable theories throughout the course of his investigation. This, then, shifted the weight to the individual's personal beliefs and unfolding verifying experiences to decide the "truth" about spirit communication. And the "truth," James characteristically concluded, one must decide for oneself. "I can only arrange the material" (1986:359).

Although James and early psychical researchers were ultimately unable to identify the source of Piper's supernormal knowledge, they made significant contributions to the understanding the subliminal mind and altered states of consciousness. "For the first time, investigators had the means to scientifically manipulate hidden mental processes and by so doing, to verify the reality of the subconscious" (Taylor 1999:170). It was also through these initial studies of psychic healers and spirit mediums that revealed a number of experimental techniques to induce trance and access unconscious states of mind. These techniques, as Eugene Taylor suggests, formed the foundations of modern psychotherapy (1999:173).

But perhaps the key insight of the Piper case, for James, was not the limits and horizons of our hidden mental life—but rather, its human purpose. It was the insight that human beings are not merely products of materialist determinism or biological hard wiring as argued by the dominant scientists of the 19th century, such as Charles Darwin, T.H. Huxley, and Herbert Spencer. But rather, human beings are active agents in their own destiny because they choose to believe in free will, higher purpose, and a meaningful universe. Psychical research and

pragmatism, then, were both entangled lines of inquiry for James to demonstrate the ways in which verifying experiences shape personal beliefs and how these beliefs are made real as organic habits and actions that modify future experiences (Menand 2001:355). Beliefs are not arbitrarily fixed, but must continually conform to our evolving desires, values, and moral understandings of right and wrong.

The quasi-certainty inherent in James' psychical research and pragmatism can be seen as indicative of larger religion-science tensions within the scientific community and public writ large. In the wake of Darwin's theory of evolution, Genesis creation and literal interpretations of the bible were cast out in favor of a world ruthlessly sculpted by blind forces of natural selection, random mutations, and environmental pressures (Blum 2007:33). Promising to unite science and religion, spiritualism provided many Americans with an accessible and tangible metaphysics—to understand the constitution of the human body and its relationship to the material and spiritual worlds—in a moment of the radical reconstruction of the nation's constitution and territorial boundaries following the Civil War (Sconce 2000:35).

For the scientific and scholarly community of the late 19th century, Darwin's theory ignited competing intellectual and moral obligations to salvage the ethical code of Christianity or to rid modern society of "the enemy of science" (Blum 2007:305). These concerns were particularly salient within mind-body debates over the nature of consciousness and the reality of free will, which often encapsulated larger questions of God, the afterlife, and the human soul. The Piper case, then, offers us a situated account of a mind-body debate through the efforts of James to bridge the demand for the empirical with the reality of the unseen, that is, to offer us a potential middle ground between empiricism and faith, materialism and spirituality, and biological determinism and human experience of free will. The 19th century is remembered as an

era of vast territorial expansion through scientific discoveries, new media, and technology. It is also remembered as an era of vast democratic expansion as political representation and voter's rights were granted to marginalized peoples for them to make active choices in the destiny of their nation and in their own lives. Perhaps more importantly, the Piper case offers us a historic glimpse into the anxieties and hopes of many Americans—living in an era of radical social, political, and ideological change—for the irreducibility of the human spirit to the human body.

CHAPTER 2

Visions of Future Science: Inside a Ghost Hunter's Tool Kit

"[People who] are drawn to [pseudoscience long] for a world that is some other way than the way it is" (Physicist Robert Park, speech at the National Press Club 2003)

Contrary to popular belief or what one might imagine, "ghost hunts" or paranormal investigations are quite mundane. Typically, nothing out of the ordinary happens. For the most part, paranormal investigations involve a lot of waiting around for something, *anything*, to happen.

This chapter begins with a rare moment in which something seemingly paranormal did happen, something that led the ghost hunters in the room to believe that they might be in the presence of an invisible spirit. Needless to say, none of us, including myself could really explain what we experienced—the material traces, the changes in mood and in atmosphere—though if pressed for an explanation, I am not sure we would provide the same one. That is the thing about the paranormal: it also involves para-explanations, para-theories, para-methods, and para-standards of evidence—often inconsistent and always co-existent.[36]

On a cold and damp night in February, I joined the Big Apple Paranormal Club[37]—a New York City based paranormal research team—on their overnight investigation of the Selma Mansion. [38] Located in Norristown, Pennsylvania, the Selma Mansion was built shortly after the Revolutionary War. In 1794, the mansion served as a private residence for five distinct military

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[36] I use "para-" to both refer to beyond something and parallel to something. "Para-methods" can refer to methods outside of the established methods of the scientific community, but also, they can mean that ghost hunters engage in parallel methods, drawing upon both recognized scientific methods and methods borrowed from metaphysical or religious traditions.

[37] The Big Apple Paranormal Club is a paranormal research team based in Queens, New York City.

[38] The investigation was held on February 23, 2014.

families until its last owner, Ruth Fournance, passed away in 1982. Most of Fournance's possessions, including crates of Union soldier uniforms and other war memorabilia stored in the home's basement, were sold at a public "yard sale" leaving a remarkably well-preserved, albeit hollow structure. Currently, The Norristown Preservation Society owns the mansion and in recent years, it has become a popular location for ghost hunters hoping to encounter some of the many past inhabitants who have lived and died in the home.

Figure 5 Selma Mansion, Norristown, PA

The temperature inside the mansion hovered just below 30° F. Gene, the lead investigator, divided the Big Apple members into two smaller teams. I jostled for space around the red-hot coils of an old space heater as my team waited for our turn to photograph and collect electromagnetic field (EMF) measurements on the second floor. Underpinning the practice of paranormal research is the hypothesis that ghosts and other paranormal phenomena create material traces—lurking shadows, moving objects, unexplained orbs of light, and more

commonly, atmospheric anomalies, such as sudden temperature fluctuations or spikes in the electromagnetic field—which can then be captured by audio-visual recording devices, measured with repurposed scientific instruments of measurement (or precision instruments), and sensed through bodily reactions (see also Introduction).

About halfway through the investigation and what was shaping up to be a slow and uneventful night, Gene decided it was time to liven things up by holding an impromptu electronic voice phenomena (EVP) session. Electronic voice phenomena, though referencing "voice" in its name, encompasses all disembodied sounds (e.g., voices, footsteps, knocking, music) heard on audio-visual recording devices upon review, but otherwise inaudible to the human ear at the moment of their capture. Despite this curious property, EVP sessions can be seen as the modern equivalent of séances; with the exception that spirit communication is mediated through audio-visual devices and other technologies, rather than a psychic medium. [39]

At the time, there were five of us huddled inside what appeared to be a long and narrow storage closet. Sharing the small space with us were the team's numerous pieces of electronic equipment: digital audio recorders, infrared camcorders, microphones, digital cameras, multiple kinds of electromagnetic field (EMF) meters, and more controversially (due to ongoing debates over its credibility in the paranormal field), a "spirit box" or "(Radio)Shack Hack," which refers to the severed AM/FM band that allows the radio to continuously scroll through stations with the hopes that spirits might be able to communicate with us using radio frequencies.[40] The focus of the team's attention, however, was directed toward the debut of their new heat signature pad, the latest addition to the team's ever expanding tool kit. The heat signature pad registers warmer

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[39] For a more detailed discussion of EVP sessions, see chapter entitled "Residual Hauntings: Making Present an Intuited Past."

[40] The use of spirit boxes is supported by the paranormal theory that ghosts can manipulate electromagnetic waves, including radio waves.

temperatures as brighter colors and cooler temperatures as darker colors. [41] Amidst the constant

din of the spirit box, the ghost hunters attempted to cobble together bits and pieces of these

material traces: clipped syllables, photographs, and sudden chilly sensations.

Figure 6 Thermal imaging pad used by Big Apple Paranormal Club in the Selma Mansion Investigation

The most exciting moment occurred when the team decided to focus on communicating

with the spirit of a fourteen-year old boy, who appeared to Gene in his "mind's eye" during an

earlier point in the investigation. [42] More specifically, it is the moment when Jim asked the boy

spirit: "Can you touch the pad?" It occurred to me that this question seemed to reflect the team's

desire to see if the heat signature pad would work at all as much as it was a desire to see what

might appear on its surface.

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[41] Temperatures above 52° F are registered (in order from warm to hot) as yellow, orange, and red. Inversely, temperatures below are registered (in order from cool to cold) as blue, dark blue, and purple.

[42] Gene does not offer any explanation for this. While it is common for ghost hunters to speculate and intuit their spectral interlocutors, I also suspect that this was due to the fact that we were conducting an EVP session in the area traditionally inhabited by the children of the families.

A few minutes later, Gene pointed to a small swelling blot, gradually growing darker, on the pad. "It is probably dirt," Jim said, almost dismissively. My own similar thoughts quietly ran through the possibilities: residual heat from previous handling, tricks of the mind and eye—until they were abruptly drowned out by Gene's excitement. Shining his black light on the now glowing stain, he exclaimed, "Oh my god, I can see it more and more now!"

"It is even showing up on the [viewfinder of] camera," Johnny quickly followed. The investigators leaned in for a closer look, each describing the oblong shape of the palm print, indicating its location on the pad, counting, and recounting the fingers, inspecting the color fluctuations, and noting that it was indeed "kid-sized." The static hum of the spirit box, the flickering lights of the EMF meters, the pointed cameras and camcorders, and the cold air that seemed to descend upon the small space all faded into the background as the ghost hunters began to, piece by piece, rationalize to themselves and to each other that what they encountered was in fact genuine paranormal activity.

So did we really see a palm print manifest out of thin air? In the excitement of the moment, I do believe that we genuinely saw what appeared to be a hand—a palm with five distinct outstretched fingers. However, I am also aware of the fact that beyond our personal experiences and perhaps more significantly, our desires, there was no real proof of spirit communication. The audio recorders, infrared cameras, camcorders, and electromagnetic meters offered almost no indicators of ghostly presence: no sudden atmospheric anomalies, otherworldly utterances recorded or presented through the spirit box, video footage, and as we would later find, even blurry photographs to corroborate our strange experiences. But to ask if ghosts are real, perhaps, is to lose sight of a more interesting point: How are ghosts *made* real?

Ghosts are made real through the technologies, especially "precision instruments" or repurposed scientific instruments of measurement, used by ghost hunters to conduct paranormal research. These technologies take on different roles and have polyvalent meanings and are used to generate evidence and transform "haunted" places into meaning sites for paranormal investigations. More precisely, they orient ghost hunters toward particular kinds of practices and what Jenny Kitzinger and Claire Williams (2005:731) call "strategies of [scientific] legitimation" for the posterity of the paranormal field. The technologies used by ghost hunters engender certain kinds of awareness for seemingly unrelated data, patterns, and causal relationships. More broadly, they tell us about how ghost hunters understand and engage with "science" and scientific knowledge.

The appearing "palm print" captures a recurring paradox in paranormal research. In recent years, there has been a growing popularity for precision instruments within the tool kits used by ghost hunters. Ghost hunters invest a vast amount of time and resources into purchasing, learning, displaying, transporting, setting up, using, and reviewing evidence captured from precision instruments. And yet, these instruments seem to offer little definitive insight and rarely play a deciding role in determining whether or not a place is "haunted." The decisive vote, as seen at the Selma Mansion, is often cast by less codified forms of reasoning, such as personal experiences, embodied sensations, intuition, and intersubjective agreement.[43]

How can we understand the growing popularity for precision instruments despite their seeming ineffectiveness for performing diagnostic functions within paranormal investigations? What is the allure of precision instruments within paranormal research? And if these

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[43] For a detailed discussion of these less codified forms of reasoning, see "A Case of Quasi-Certainty: William James and the Making of the Subliminal Mind" (Chapter 1) and "Residual Hauntings: Making Present an Intuited Past" (Chapter 3).

technologies do not function to determine the "haunted" status of a location, then what kinds of work do they actually accomplish for ghost hunters?

In what follows, I analyze the complicated and often, contradictory relationships between ghost hunters and the technologies they use to conceive of and do the work of paranormal research. I trace the tensions that arise between the practical and symbolic functions of precision instruments. In particular, I propose that ghost hunters use precision instruments as a strategy of legitimation, that is, as powerful symbols of objectivity and scientific authority. The next sections detail the contents of a ghost hunter's tool kit. They offer an overview of the affordances and limitations of precision instruments and how these qualities affect the ways in which ghost hunters collect evidence, engage with provisional paranormal theories, and interact with clients.

The remaining sections follow Gotham Paranormal Research on their "Chelsea" case to understand how precision instruments produce meanings that often exceed the boundaries of a paranormal investigation. These meanings offer a window into how ghost hunters speculate over the posterity of their field and how these speculations shape the here and now of paranormal research. The conclusion discusses the ways paranormal research is embedded within a proof-oriented society. More broadly, it explores how scientific technologies and technical practices have come to mediate and give meaning to unexpected spheres of human existence traditionally relegated to the supernatural world.

The Meanings of Measurement

Many ghost hunters stress their adherence to the "scientific method," associating their use of scientific technologies with scientific rigor. For instance, Ned, the founder of South Coast Paranormal Society,[44] prided himself on purchasing a $10,000 thermal imaging camera, citing

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[44] South Coast Paranormal Society is a paranormal research team based in Orange County, California.

that his team was the only one in the area to own such a rare piece of equipment. And yet, he also readily admitted that it had yet to contribute substantively to their investigations and at this point, is considered a "really expensive toy."

Ghost hunters use precision instruments as a strategy of legitimation. Precision instruments act as powerful and polyvalent symbols of ghost hunters' aspirations for the transition of paranormal research from subjective speculation to a "true" science (Gould 1996:71). These aspirations are particularly apparent in the ways precision instruments function as prestige items—as things borrowed from science, as things proudly talked about and displayed (as seen with Ned), and as things that confer expertise and authority upon their users. Moreover, precision instruments function as symbols of what Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison call "mechanical objectivity" (2010).

"Objectivity," as defined by Daston and Gallison, "is knowledge that bears no trace of the knower—knowledge unmarked by prejudice or skill, fantasy or judgment, wishing or striving" (2010:121). Accordingly, "mechanical objectivity" refers to the insistent drive to repress human will, putting in its stead a set of procedures; sometimes using machines and sometimes using a person's mechanized action (Daston and Galison 2010:121). Mechanical objectivity, as Daston and Galison insightfully note, is supported by both epistemic *and* moral values, requiring the moral comportment of a "certain kind of scientist—long on diligence and self-restraint, scant on genial interpretation" (ibid). As George Levine argues, in order to create knowledge "without a human hand having touched it," scientists had to subscribe to a narrative of self-humiliation and self-abnegation, becoming "saint-like" in self-denial (Levine 2002:3). Thus, the wisdom of mechanical objectivity is not derived from experience or even skilled interpretation; but rather,

from the application of sanctioned rules, the skilled operation of machines, and the self-restraint of the scientist.

Precision instruments function as symbolic guarantees of mechanical objectivity. The use of precision instruments to measure environmental variables transforms the uncertainties and contingencies of paranormal phenomena from what Jane Guyer refers to as a "craving for intelligibility" into strict protocols and set behaviors (Hayek in Guyer 2007:410). Indeed, as Theodore Porter notes, the accuracy of measurements is meaningless if the same operations cannot be performed at other sites (Porter 1996:29). The act of measuring, therefore, "neutralizes" concepts, transferring human meanings into portable and reproducible numbers divorced from their local contexts (ibid).

On a slightly different note, the measurements collected by ghost hunters themselves embody dual desires: first, a desire for order and second, a desire for a tolerant future science. In particular, measurements act as what Andrew Lakoff terms "anticipatory knowledge" (Lakoff 2008:401), which orients ghost hunters toward particular strategies of legitimation; specifically, what I saw as a yearning for statistical analysis. The reports compiled by ghost hunters before and during investigations—detailing the line-by-line cataloging of seemingly random and unrelated environmental variables, widely ranging from local sidereal time to luminesce—reflect a desire for causal knowledge and more broadly, a desire for objectivity, order, and rationality.

Moreover, the promise of statistical analysis creates the conditions of possibility for ghost hunters to envision a tolerant future science. Statistics connect past and future sciences, allowing ghost hunters to engage in double sight: with an eye toward past nascent scientific fields (once deemed "quasi-scientific") validated by numbers and an eye toward imagined scientific futures, in which their current paranormal research might potentially contribute to an all-encompassing

science with an open mind, broader scope of inquiry, and better resources equipped to handle one of life's most troubling questions: What happens to us after we die?[45]

These aspirations for legitimacy, however, have also fated ghost hunters to live in a bittersweet present. On the one hand, they must live in the present with the knowledge that what their measurements mean in relation to ghosts and other paranormal phenomena will only become clear in the future. On the other hand, as Porter points out, "quantification is a way of making decisions without having to decide" (Porter 1996:8). The deferral of causal interpretation allows ghost hunters to continue widely and indiscriminately collecting diverse measurements in the absence of statistical analysis. And more significantly, it allows them to orient themselves toward a tolerant future science with the technologies and causal knowledge needed to account for the afterlife; while in the present, benefitting from our "unshakable" trust in numbers and the cachet of measuring, "a sign of modern progressive science" (Kohler 2002:109).

A Ghost Hunter's Tool Kit

"We would bring lots of cameras, infrared cameras, infrared set ups, digital recorders to canvas multiple areas, analog recorders, analog cameras, 35 millimeter, digital, polaroid, we just had everything," recalled Peter, a former investigator with Gotham Paranormal Research. "Gabriel and I would have to rent a van to bring all of our equipment [to investigations]." Since the early 1990s, the use of consumer and increasingly, high-end standard and full spectrum (capturing infrared and ultraviolet light) cameras, ultra-portable camcorders, and digital audio recordings have become standard practice within the paranormal field. Ghost hunters engage with a diverse tool kit, including what Robert Kohler distinguishes as precision instruments and

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[45] For the power of numbers to validate a once-perceived "quasi-scientific" field, see Robert Kohler's *Landscapes and Labscapes* (2000). In particular, I borrow insights from his comparison of the "field" and the "lab."

"instruments of observation" to gather evidence that they hope will prove or deny the existence of ghosts (Kohler 2002:127).

What counts as evidence, however, is a matter of debate within in paranormal research community. This is partially due to the fact that ghosts are treated in a number of different ways, including as ontologically real (e.g., the returned spirit of ghosts), psychologically real (e.g., existing only in the mind), or as unexplained natural phenomena (see Introduction). Despite this fact, most ghost hunters agree that they are searching for "concrete evidence." As Tim, the lead investigator of the South Coast Paranormal Society puts it, "if you don't get concrete evidence, then what do you have?"

Concrete evidence is sometimes described, as Gene characterized it, as "something that can't be duplicated, something outside of nature." In other words, evidence is something that cannot be debunked by current scientific laws of nature. And at other times, it is described as Greg, the founder of the Long Island City Paranormal Investigations,[46] puts it "other people capturing the exact same evidence," something that is reproducible.

But perhaps these contradictions are in actuality differences in emphasis rather than differences in practice. In practice, ghost hunters consider evidence to be something truly supernatural, that is, something that exceeds the existing laws of nature. Evidence of this sort is further bolstered when other ghost hunters capture identical phenomena. In this sense, "concrete evidence" is something that is both anomalous *and* corroborated.

The most popular and compelling forms of evidence are photographs and audio recordings, referred to as electronic voice phenomena (EVPs), captured during investigations. Photographs are particularly compelling evidence because they potentially reveal properties of

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[46] Long Island City Paranormal Investigations is a paranormal research team based in Queens, New York City.

ghostly apparitions, including whether or not they have solid mass (e.g., blocking light, creating shadows) and (depending on the camera used) whether or not they fall within or outside of the visible light spectrum—potentially explaining why spirits are invisible to the naked eye. [47] But perhaps more significantly, experts within and outside of the paranormal research field can independently verify the credibility of photographs.

By far, audio recordings or EVPs are the more ubiquitous and well-circulated forms of evidence.[48] Accordingly, they are also subjected to the most well-articulated and elaborate standards of evidence. Ghost hunters have adopted a host of practices to control the quality of their EVPs, including: "tagging" ambient noises (e.g., coughing, traffic), abstaining from whispering, and syncing their audio recorders (ensuring similar time stamps) prior to an investigation in order to avoid mistaking spectral voices for a grumbling stomach or other mundane sounds. Moreover, EVPs are classified according by their intelligibility, ranging from Class A (audible to the naked ear) to Class B (slightly digitally enhanced) to Class C (significantly digitally enhanced), often with only highest quality recordings (Class A) presented as "evidence."

Similar to photographs, audio recordings are portable (easily emailed or transferred via USB drives) and can be independently verified by a community of experts. And, they have the potential to shed insight into the nature of ghosts and other paranormal phenomena. Bill, the founder of Paranormal World Investigations,[49] revealed that he was saving money to send his

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[47] In their book *Objectivity*, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison explore the long history of objectivity through vision and particularly through the scientific use of cameras. They write, "the automatism of the photographic process promised images free from human interpretation—objective images, as they come to be called" (Daston and Gallison 2010:131). Moreover, "a photograph was deemed scientifically objective because it countered a specific kind of scientific objectivity: invention to aestheticize or theorize the seen" (Daston and Gallison 2010:133).

[48] Ghost hunters seem to capture more EVPs than photographs. This makes EVPs the more common of the two kinds of evidence. Ghost hunters circulate their most compelling photographs and EVPs through email or posting them on their team websites, Facebook, YouTube, and other online forums.

[49] Paranormal World Investigations is a paranormal research team based in Orange County, California.

EVPs, specifically the recording of a spirit he identifies as "Jackie," for voice print analysis. "The same used in legal trials," he explained. Voice print analysis, he hoped would reveal if his similar-sounding recordings are, in fact, of the same spirit and if the frequency of her utterances fall within the human vocal range.

At the core of these standards of evidence are two basic features. First, they are both perceived to be products of audio-visual technologies as opposed to human senses and subjective experiences. "Evidence comes from science," Tina, a Gotham Paranormal Research investigator, explained, "the technical side, not feelings." The conflation of "science" and scientific knowledge with scientific technologies and technical practices is a recurring theme that orients how ghost hunters think about the legitimacy of their evidence and their research practices more generally.

And second, photographic and audio evidence can be sanctioned by a community of experts within or outside of the paranormal field. The objectivity of scientific statements, according to Karl Popper, lies in the fact that they can be inter-subjectively tested and scrutinized by the broader scientific community. Indeed, other philosophers of science, including Thomas Kuhn and Ludwik Fleck, have also recognized the importance of the scientific community in establishing scientific facts. [50] Ghost hunters similarly rely upon an expert community, such as professional photographers or sound engineers—who have at their disposal knowledge, equipment, and software programs—to authenticate genuine anomalies or detect fraud and digital manipulation.

More recently, ghost hunters (to varying degrees) have also adopted the use of precision instruments, including ambient and targeting thermometers, hygrometers (measuring humidity),

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[50] See Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970) and Ludwik Fleck's *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* (1979).

air ion counters (measuring levels of positive and negative ions), barometers, static pods (indicating the presence of static electricity), geophones (indicating the presence of seismic activity), lux meters (measuring sound levels), luminance meters (measuring luminescence), and most popularly, EMF meters. However, the measurements produced by these instruments, unlike photographs or audio recordings, are *not* considered definitive evidence for paranormal activity.

Figure 7 Static pod disguised as a toy train to attract child ghosts.

Measurements can act as corroborating data to bolster the credibility of audio recordings and photographs with recorded atmospheric anomalies (e.g., EMF spikes). They cannot, however, act as definitive evidence for or against paranormal activity. Tim most aptly describes this distinction through the semantic differences between "use" and "rely." While ghost hunters might *use* a particular instrument in order to test its properties or potential efficacy, he explained, they do not necessarily *rely* on it in order to prove or deny the existence of spirits. In other

words, precision instruments have become relegated to auxiliary functions as opposed to technologies that produce definitive results.

The unequal status between precision instruments and audio-visual devices can be attributed to the conjectural—that is, unproven—relationship between environmental variables (e.g., temperature) and the material manifestation of ghosts. This conjectural nature renders the measurements produced by these technologies meaningless-in-themselves without being set in relation to other factors and compound variables. For this reason, measurements, unlike EVPs or photographs, cannot be subjected to a standard of evidence or independently verified because their meanings are inextricably tied to the contexts in which they were recorded.

Hypothetical Hauntings

Sitting across from me at a busy Starbucks in a nondescript suburban mall, Tim, the lead investigator of the South Coast Paranormal Society (SCPS), described his early experiences as a paranormal enthusiast. "There were not a lot of resources, no real books on ghost hunting that I saw," he explained, "but there was a lot to do with haunted places." He described himself at eighteen years old, jumping over fences and running through empty cemeteries. "Have you been to a cemetery late at night?" he asked. "It gets really creepy." "I was really untrained at the time," he added, "it was just all about me, just seeing if I feel, feel like sense, that's when you try to overcome your fears." It was during these late nights when Tim first attempted to differentiate between *real* fear and fear that is internally generated, or as he puts it, "just you that is making it so."

Perhaps more enduring than his reflections on the shape of fear, however, was his initial surprise at the unlikely patterns that emerged through his encounters with local legends and stories of famous haunted sites. As he poured over these ghost stories, he was particularly struck

by their similarities and differences. In many of the stories, disembodied spirit voices were often heard around the same late hour at night or often, ghostly apparitions curiously appeared to be without feet. "How is that you don't see feet in the description?" He further elaborated:

> "My parents are from Hawaii, there is always a legend in Hawaii that [spirits] are attached to rocks, a lot has to do with this rocks and the story is if you disturb the rocks, [bad] things can happen. You disturb grave markers, you disturb this—you have to leave offerings. So when you hear about these legends and you start to reading about these ghosts in North America then you are like going, 'why doesn't this relate to the legend you hear about? How come the legends over here are totally different from the legends over there?' […] These are the things you start reading out and that's one thing I was reading about, there's no mention of how come there's no feet […] and how to resolve them."

When Tim became a paranormal researcher for the SCPS almost twenty years later, the word "resolve" took on a very different meaning from his early theoretical concerns. Instead, "resolve" had come to refer to a much more practical matter.

Ghost hunters primarily investigate two kinds of locations: historic sites and private homes. The most popular historic sites, such as Gettysburg or Alcatraz, are often places with well-established violent or traumatic histories. Ghost hunters usually pay a fee to access these sites and treat these investigations either as a chance test out new equipment or techniques and as a chance to learn more about American history (Hanks 2014). In other words, public investigations are treated as training sessions or social gatherings as opposed to serious investigations. Given the lax nature of these investigations, data collected from pubic sites often go unreviewed unless there is some compelling evidence.[51]

In contrast, private home investigations are treated as serious endeavors. Ghost hunters will often bring their complete tool kits (as opposed to select portable items for public investigations) and spend more time collecting and reviewing data. This is due to the fact that

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[51] For a more detailed overview of public investigations, see "Chapter 3:Residual Hauntings."

they are obligated to present their findings to their clients at the end of an investigation.[52] For

this reason, private investigations involve higher stakes because ghost hunters feel a sense of

urgency and moral obligation to help their clients and quickly resolve cases.

The resolution of private home investigations (as opposed to historic sites) predominately

involves a two-step process. First, ghost hunters determine whether or not a client's home is

"haunted" or the site of paranormal activity. And second, at the conclusion of an investigation,

they offer possible solutions to either rid the home of its lingering spirits or to mitigate the fears

of their clients. A handful of paranormal research teams offer controversial (due to ongoing

debates over their efficacy and associations with metaphysical traditions) "cleansing" services,

usually in the form of burning sage, prayer, and the use of "healing" crystals in their attempts to

banish spirits. But the majority of teams, like the SCPS, offer more restrained or mundane tactics

to make their clients' homes once again livable.

"So you know, [cleansings] are not my thing," Tim explained. "My thing is to

investigate, to give them information, to give them tools, where they should go if it is really bad

(usually a referral to a religious specialist) or if it is nothing, you know, common household

things to do." "Unless I feel 100% comfortable doing it," he elaborated, "I don't want to do it."

Moreover, he added:

> "The thing is, I would like to do more research on [cleansings], to see if it actually
> does change it or if it's just something mental, what a person thinks. But if it
> doesn't work, I don't want to give them a false sense that these guys came in and
> nothing happened. I want it to be more, you know, 'this is what we recommend.' I
> don't want us to be one of those teams who say 'oh, I am going to come in and
> cleanse your house and everything is going to be great' and walk out of there and
> everything happens again and they are like, 'what did you guys do?' I don't want
> to be that person, I want to be the kind of person that comes in and gives
> suggestions."

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[52] Client is a misnomer, because most "clients" of paranormal research teams are not charged a fee for their services.

Harkening back to his distinctions between real fear and fear that is internally generated, the quote above reflects Tim' anxieties over whether or not cleansings have to power affect actual change or whether or not their efficacy is due the placebo effect. This quote brings attention to the material and psychical conditions that bring forth human experiences, be it fear or hauntings. Moreover, it particularly highlights the hypothetical nature of cleansings and perhaps more generally, of hauntings themselves.

"I once had case," he recalled, "that I did [where] the electromagnetic fields were really high." The clients reported lights suddenly turning on and off again, seeing inexplicable shadows and orbs of light, and hearing disembodied voices. "I went into that [living] room," Tim said, "[and saw] where they sat, where they were having those experiences, shadows and everything, [the wall behind the sofa] where they sat on and everything was [behind] the refrigerator." "There were computers around there, there were monitors around there, so basically all they were doing was staring at a monitor for so long with all the EMF field, look out, the next thing you know you are going to see a shadow." Without audio or visual evidence, Tim attributed most of his clients' experiences to prolonged exposure to electromagnetic radiation or more banal reasons, such as faulty wiring, headlights from street traffic seeping through the blinds, and the structure of the home.

"My suggestions to [the clients] were, 'move the computer, get it away from the [EMF] field […], where you are seeing [the shadows] is in a big EMF field, so you know, these are suggestions in my analysis of the place.' I didn't believe it to be haunted because we were debunking everything [the clients] said." "The guy actually emailed me a couple of months later," he added, "and said nothing else was happening, everything has been good."

EMF Meters

EMF meters, traditionally used by electricians to diagnose problems with electrical wiring and power lines, are ubiquitous among the toolkits used by ghost hunters. And, they are particularly emblematic of the paradoxical relationships between ghost hunters and their precision instruments (see A Ghost Hunter's Tool Kit). In recent years, EMF meters have become the quintessential tool used by ghost hunters, with their popularity second only to digital cameras and audio recorders. EMF meters measure two kinds of electromagnetic fields: man-made electrical fields (e.g., emitted by household appliances) and natural geomagnetic fields.[53]

The most common models of EMF meters used on paranormal investigations are the KII meter (measuring single variable levels of electromagnetic fields) and the more sophisticated Mel meter (measuring compound variables of electromagnetic fields and ambient temperature).[54] The popularity of EMF meters (KII and Mel) can be attributed to the fact that they are relatively cheap and accessible, easily purchased at most hardware stores or online outlets.[55] EMF meters are frequently featured as the principal tool in many of the tech-oriented paranormal research shows currently on television (e.g., *Ghost Hunters, Ghost Adventures*). As a result, most of the

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[53] Natural EMF meters are less commonly used in paranormal investigations because there should be no fluctuation in the Earth's geomagnetic field (unless there is an earthquake or oncoming storm). For this reason, some ghost hunters believe that natural EMF meters are more reliable indicators of paranormal activity, since they seem to be less affected by other variables and there should be no reason for a sudden spike in the geomagnetic field. This chapter will focus on the KII and Mel meter, which measure man-made electromagnetic fields because they are the two most commonly used meters in paranormal investigations.

[54] Other differences between the KII and the Mel meter include: their price and their displays. The KII meter costs about $59.90 (on Amazon) and the Mel meter is almost quadruple the price at $182.69 on the same online retailer. The KII offers a segmented color-coded LED display with lower levels displaying green, mid levels displaying yellow, and high levels displaying red. In contrast, the Mel meter offers a backlight digital display with actual numeric measurements. Ghost hunting teams often will purchase and use both kinds of EMF meters in an investigation because they serve different functions. KII meters best capture sudden EMF spikes, useful as a medium for spirit communication during EVP sessions (e.g., one fluctuation indicates "yes" answer, two fluctuations indicate a "no" answer), whereas, Mel meters best capture actual measurements, which is useful in conducting baseline readings of ambient EMF levels.

[55] Moreover, there seems to be a major second-hand market for these tools on E-Bay and other similar venues, where these tools can be purchased at an even lower price.

ghost hunters who purchase these meters often already have a working knowledge of their operation and functions from viewing these shows.[56]

There are two competing theories that support the use of EMF meters within a paranormal investigation. The first theory—dating back to Vitalism debates in the early 1800s and more recently popularized in the 1960s by the famous parapsychologist Hans Holzer—suggests that our "life force," or what separates the living from the dead, is the animating power of electricity (Holzer 1969:4).[57] Understanding our life force as "essentially electromagnetic in nature," many paranormal researchers believe that spirits (as disembodied invisible agents), then, could potentially use the ambient electromagnetic field to manifest and communicate with living persons (ibid). By contrast, the second theory, referencing unconfirmed military experiments, proposes that prolonged exposure to high levels of electromagnetic radiation can possibly cause

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[56] It is also worth noting that a significant number of my interlocutors (approximately one-fourth) are electricians, engineers, or carpenters who also use EMF meters in their professions. Therefore, they already have knowledge of where electrical boxes are located, how electrical lines are run throughout a home, and more significantly, where to look for "hot spots" or areas with concentrated electromagnetic radiation.

[57] The idea that our life forces was essentially comprised of electricity can be seen as originating in early Vitalism debates in the 1800s. At the heart of Vitalism lay the questions: What distinguishes organic from inorganic matter or vegetable life from animal life and human life? Early Vitalist speculations were brought to life by the experiments of an Italian professor of anatomy, Giovanni Aldini, attempting to re-animate the dead animal and human corpses with electricity (Holmes 2008:314).

wide-ranging physical symptoms: skin irritation, headaches, nausea, tinnitus, blurred vision,

fatigue and more significantly, psychological symptoms that might cause a person to believe his

home might be "haunted," including hallucinations and feelings of being watched, paranoia, and

uneasiness.[58]

Following after these two theories, ghost hunters use EMF meters during paranormal

investigations to fulfill two distinct and seemingly unrelated functions: EVP sessions and

"baseline readings." Ghost hunters use EMF meters, specifically KII meters, during EVP

sessions to mediate communication with spirits. The flashing lights of the KII meter's segmented

color-coded LED display, unlike audio recordings that must be reviewed later, offer immediate

responses to "yes" or "no" questions posed by the investigators.

Conversely, ghost hunters also employ EMF meters, often the Mel meter (offering

numeric measurements), to conduct "baseline readings." This ensures that the ghost hunters have

accurate measurements of the ambient electromagnetic field to compare with possible

fluctuations later in the investigation. Baseline readings also allow the researchers to identify

potential "hot spots" with abnormally high levels of electromagnetic radiation, usually alarm

clocks or iPod docks placed near headboards, that might cause a person to hallucinate ghostly

apparitions or believe they are experiencing paranormal activity.

EMF meters, therefore, are particularly emblematic of the paradoxical relationships

between ghost hunters and their precision instruments. EMF meters are the quintessential

precision instruments used by ghost hunters. And yet, they are ultimately ineffective for

determining the "haunted" status of a location. The two theories that support the use of EMF

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[58] The theory that EMF exposure might be harmful to our health might not be as "pseudoscientific" as we might think. According to science journalist Martin Blank, neuro-oncologists are now studying the health effects of long-term exposure to electromagnetic fields and electromagnetic radiation emitted by microwave transmitters (e.g., cell phones and other Wi-Fi devices). See: http://www.salon.com/2014/04/12/your_cellphone_is_killing_you_what_people_dont_want_you_to_know_about_electromagnetic_fields/ .

meters within paranormal investigations are speculative and more significantly, they are mutually exclusive. Perhaps not surprisingly, these theories support contradictory measuring practices within an investigation: on the one hand, EMF fluctuations are used to verify a haunting and on the other, they are used to debunk paranormal activity.

Moreover, EMF measurements are further rendered unreliable because electromagnetic fields, unlike temperature or humidity, are especially susceptible to other environmental factors and variables. For instance, transmitting devices (e.g., cell phones) can cause a sudden spike in the electromagnetic field, possibly causing a "false" reading. [59] EMF measurements, then, have the potential to index *causes* of hallucinations, *effects* of ghostly manifestations, and "false" readings. For these reasons, ghost hunters defer their causal interpretations until more information or other kinds of evidence (e.g., photographs) become available. Tim explained the difficulties of differentiating between a "real" haunting and a "false" haunting within short-term investigations:

> "How do you make a decision? That's the thing; it's just a suggestion. If there is nothing there, there's nothing that we can say to [a client regarding] if [their home] is haunted or not…the only thing I can tell [our clients] is that on our investigation, we don't think that there is something here. I can't flat out tell someone, 'hey, your house is not haunted,' because I don't live there. I am not there every single day…but during our investigation, this is what we came up with. These are our suggestions of what we recommend […] unless we can [investigate] a place for so many days in a row, that's the thing"

Given these difficulties and the seeming untethered indexicality of EMF measurements to point toward the "real" and "false" hauntings, Tim can, at best, as he puts it, offer "suggestions" that might resolve the case and improve his clients living situations. However, he cannot offer them a diagnosis or definitive solutions.

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[59] EMF measurements are particularly unreliable because ghost hunters do not know the full range of what kinds of transmitting devices might affect a reading or at what range these devices might affect a meter.

"A Big Electromagnetic Field"

Returning to the paradox posed earlier, Tim and other ghost hunters seem to engage with the hypothetical nature of electromagnetic radiation quite differently than they engage with house cleansings. What is particularly striking is not necessarily how Tim arrived at his suggestions amidst the uncertainties and contingencies of paranormal phenomena, but rather, the *kinds* of suggestions that he feels comfortable offering his clients. If the theories that support cleansings are as equally as conjectural as the theories behind electromagnetic radiation, then why does Tim believe it is acceptable to suggest moving furniture, but not the use of "healing" crystals or burning sage?

The simple answer to this question can be found in Daston and Galison's insights upon the moral comportment of the "objective" scientist. Tim' suggestions can be seen as reflecting scientific ideals of self-humiliation and self-restraint. More specifically, it reflects what he believes to be a morally responsible resolution for his clients. Tim provides them with concrete tasks under their control (e.g., rearranging furniture) as opposed to unnecessarily stoking their fears by suggesting that their homes are haunted and more pressingly, that they need the help of a specialist to banish intruding spirits and restore order. On a symbolic note, debunking— predominately undertaken by skeptics and scientists—is seen as an act endorsed with scientific authority. It is an act that aligns him with longstanding scientific practices and scientific virtues of self-abnegation, skepticism, empiricism, and reason (Hunter 1975:17).

Furthermore, Tim's suggestions take advantage of what Stephen Jay Gould refers to as the "allure of numbers" (Gould 1996:74). Gould connects numbers to three notable virtues: "the faith that rigorous measurement could guarantee irrefutable precision," the measure of mental

and moral worth, and the embodiment of objectivity (ibid). Borrowing from Gould's insights, Tim can be seen as evoking the symbolic power of numbers to substantiate his claims. The "allure of numbers" obscures the conjectural relationship between electromagnetic radiation and paranormal activity. And perhaps more significantly, it obscures his suggestions as having a basis in impersonal "data" as opposed to subjective opinions and beliefs.

His suggestions are presented to his clients as the outcome of "objective" measurements obtained through the use of EMF meters. This "objectivity" can be seen as located within the procedural use of technologies and the symbolic power of these technologies to produce measurements uncontaminated by human inference, interpretation, or intelligence (Daston and Galison 2010:17). Consequently, it is also located in the erasure of the "willful self"(ibid). Mechanical objectivity, therefore, shifts the locus of expertise from theoretical knowledge of why electromagnetic radiation might cause clients to see shadows or feel paranoid to practical knowledge of following rules, locating potential "hot spots," and operating EMF meters to collect measurements.

Seen in this light, EMF meters symbolically function to transform particular and variable client homes into "neutral" spaces for measuring and experimenting. As Porter notes, "any domain of quantified knowledge, like any domain of experimental knowledge, is in a sense artificial" (Porter 1996:5). Baseline readings (measurements of the ambient electromagnetic field and other variable), then, create seemingly "controlled" spaces for paranormal investigation. More specifically, these measurements allow Tim to envision his client as living in what he called "a big EMF field," creating a norm for him to compare potential anomalies (e.g., sudden spikes) within a homogenous space.

"It is precisely the stripped-down simplicity and invariability of labs, their placelessness," Kohler argues, "that gives them their credibility" (Kohler 2002:7). The neutrality and homogeneity of "a big EMF field," therefore, allows Tim to offer his suggestions without having to acknowledge the physical realities of client homes or the skilled labor, "professional vision" (Goodwin 1994), and intuition used to know where to place tools or locate "hot spots." Baseline readings do not simply create the conditions of possibility for an "objective" investigation and generalizing within individual cases. They also create the conditions of possibility for ghost hunters to envision generalizing more broadly in the form of statistic analysis (see Visions of Future Science).

The Chelsea Case

There was a heat wave sweeping across New York City. I had been conducting interviews with Gabriel, the founder of Gotham Paranormal Research (GPR), for about a month when he received an unexpected phone call from a potential client named Lucy.[60] Lucy's phone call was unexpected, he explained, because it was the "slow season" for paranormal investigations. Most people spent their summer outdoors, he added, and "were too distracted to notice every little creak in their homes."

"Late at night," Lucy recalled, "I walked into my bedroom and saw a man and a young girl kneeling beside my bed." On four separate occasions, Lucy and her roommate had seen three distinct ghostly apparitions—a man, a child, and a woman—in their small apartment. "From the day I moved in," Lucy reported, "I have felt a presence," She also reported witnessing an olive oil bottle "thrown" from a kitchen shelf and experiencing what she called a "door fight" with an invisible force. She struggled to hold shut a door that refused to stay closed. Upon giving up,

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[60] I conducted these interviews during my preliminary fieldwork in the summer of 2009.

Lucy described, "it suddenly flew shut." She was soon moving out of the apartment, she told

Gabriel, and before leaving, she would "really like to know if the apartment is haunted."

Prior to the investigation, Gabriel conducted a phone interview with Lucy.[61] As with all

of his potential clients, he asked about her medications, possible history of mental illness, and

drug and alcohol use. He was also interested in her (if any) previous paranormal experiences,

exposure to paranormal movies and television programs, and her initial reasons for contacting a

team. Beyond her personal details, he wanted to know if there had been any recent renovations or

electrical work done to her apartment or discernible patterns to the paranormal activity (e.g.,

occurring at the same time). These factors all served to indicate to Gabriel both the most

probable reasons to account for Lucy's paranormal experiences and her credibility as a client.

He also researched the history of Lucy's apartment building in Chelsea. Built between

1876 and 1878, the structure originally served as a boarding house. In 1967, the building became

privately owned and converted into apartments and has remained a residence ever since, though,

it has passed through the hands of three successive owners. Perhaps more importantly, Gabriel

notes, there have been no reported deaths on the property—suicides, murders, accidents, or

natural causes. Gabriel was quick to note, however, that there is a nightclub on the bottom floor

and "someone was gunned down on the sidewalk in front of the building in the 1980s."

On the day of the investigation, I met with Gabriel in his Brooklyn home to review the

details of the "Chelsea" case. He flipped open a thick black three-ring binder and began to recite

handwritten measurements from his case report:

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[61] Preliminary client interviews via phone, email, or surveys are standard practice for private home investigations. These interviews often extensively cover a client's medical history, childhood, religious affiliations, previous paranormal experiences, current paranormal experiences, and the history of the home (e.g., previous owners, previous deaths on the property, recent renovations). This information all serves to help ghost hunters assess the credibility and mental state of the client and the most probable causes for their paranormal experiences. Moreover, it also guides how they conduct research in particular homes, including where to look for hot spots, where to place cameras, what questions to include during the EVP session, etc.

"Temperature: High of 80° F with thunderstorms. Humidity: 85%. Temperature at the time of the investigation: 76° F. Winds: NW. Precipitation: 80%. Lunar: Waxing Gibbous. Solar: 76% (no solar activity). Sunset: 8:12pm, Local Sidereal Time: 6:30pm."[62]

"All in all," Gabriel explained, "there were no geomagnetic waves today". He added, "pristine conditions for a paranormal investigation."

This binder was a familiar sight to me. Our interviews often involved Gabriel describing the details of his most remarkable cases. He relied upon old case reports to jog his memory. Paranormal research teams often use case reports to record data collected within their paranormal investigations. These case reports, to varying degrees of detail, include logs of numeric measurements detailing climatic and environmental variables, background information on clients (including interview responses), and personal impressions of the investigation.

GPR case reports are in the form of multipage lined sections and labeled grids that Gabriel and his team members fill in by hand. Gabriel standardized the format of his case reports about two years into his fifteen-year paranormal research career. He has recorded and cataloged his past one hundred cases using this, more or less, streamlined process. The dozen or so black binders lining the bookshelf at the GPR headquarters do not simply represent that team's past, but perhaps more surprisingly, they also represent their future. The measurements collected in these case reports represent Gabriel's larger efforts toward causal knowledge and more significantly, to gain legitimacy for the paranormal field.

I must admit that I was less interested in meteorological details than in our client's personal life. I found it curious that up until this point, Gabriel had failed to mention his phone interview with Lucy. When I pressed Gabriel for details, he responded that she seemed "normal

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[62] A popular paranormal theory proposes that ghosts are most active at 3 a.m. Given this theory, Gabriel (and others) have taken to paying particular attention, or sometimes holding EVP sessions, in their investigations at 3 a.m. in the local solar time (the conventional clock) and sidereal time. Sidereal time is based on the Earth's rotation relative to fixed stars rather than the sun.

and genuine." When I prodded further, asking if Lucy or her roommate had any drug or alcohol related issues, he answered that they drank moderately and drugs were not so much an issue that it affected their daily lives.[63] "They drink," he said, "they are like any other typical twenty-somethings." Gabriel's reticence, I surmised, could be due to the fact that he thought her physical and mental heath information was confidential. Or perhaps, she had simply passed his criteria for a "normal" client and did not think her details were noteworthy enough to share.

Lucy greeted Gabriel and me at the door when we arrived at her apartment. Due to her impending move, the apartment was covered floor to ceiling with cardboard boxes. Contorting his body around these boxes, Gabriel began the investigation by taking photographs of the near vacant rooms. "I never use a camera under five megapixels" he said, "and I avoid flash if I can help it." "Since flash has a tendency to distort the photo by creating orbs," he explained, round circular dots in photos that are interpreted to be ghosts. "When in actuality," he added, "they are dust particles that reflect the light of the flash."

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[63] I am not sure why I asked about drugs and alcohol other than the fact that it was the first thing to pop into my mind. Perhaps, I had identified it as a key factor that would make a client's testimony unreliable.

He set a DVR camera atop a tripod to film Lucy's room (where most of the apparitions were sighted) and he placed a smaller flip camera in her roommate's room. Above the sink, he also hung a digital barometer, which continually emitted a "beeping" noise. This "beep," Gabriel explained, helps him gauge the location of disembodied voices or sounds by noting their clarity vis-à-vis the barometer.

As Gabriel arranged his equipment around the apartment, he and Lucy traded ghost stories. Lucy "oohed and aahed" in disbelief as Gabriel recounted the more exciting moments of his past paranormal investigations. "I wish I would have called earlier," Lucy confessed, "but I was afraid that if you guys would have found anything, I would be so scared!" A metal folding chair unexpectedly fell onto the tiled kitchen floor. The loud crash sent her running into her

bedroom. When she returned to the kitchen, Lucy revealed that she was a "bit" scared that the spirits might follow her to her new apartment. She nervously pleaded with them: "This is your home okay? This is your home."

Figure 10 Gabriel collecting and recording baseline measurements.

The light-hearted mood quickly vanished when Gabriel began to collect baseline readings. Without warning, he transformed from a long-time friend jovially swapping jokes into a serious paranormal researcher. This transformation became apparent when I noticed that he had stopped responding to Lucy, ignoring her questions until after he completed his measurements. In one hand, he held a pencil and in the other, he cradled a binder. The blank grids of the GPR case report lay opposite an—somewhat precariously balanced—assortment of meters. As he jotted down the measurements, Gabriel noted the status of each variable:

"EMF: abruptly spiked when moving from Lucy's room into the kitchen. Nothing abnormal. ELF (extremely low EMF frequencies): nothing abnormal. Natural EMF (geomagnetic fields): nothing. Sound (measurement of airborne sound): high, but probably due to the three air conditioners blowing into the apartment. Luminescence: untestable. Body voltage (measuring the effects of EMF radiation on the body): a bit high in the kitchen and abnormally high in Lucy's room. Negative and positive ions: untestable. Temperature: normal. Humidity: normal."[64]

In particular, Gabriel expressed disappointment at the missed opportunity to use his air ion counter, a meter measuring levels of positive and negative ions, during the investigation. "The apartment needs to be completely empty," he explained, for the counter to accurately measure ion levels. Since Lucy and her roommate were in the process of moving, he added, this would be "too much of an inconvenience."[65] Recent paranormal theories have linked high levels of negative ions to similar physiological and psychological reactions as electromagnet radiation. Aligned with Gabriel's larger aspirations toward causal knowledge, he had intended to use his counter on "all of his investigations," in order to gather a large sample size and more importantly, to establish potential patterns between ion levels and alleged paranormal activity.

Gabriel also explained to Lucy that he discovered unusually high levels of body voltage in her bedroom.[66] He attributed this to the tangle of extension cords near her entertainment center. "You should avoid this in your new apartment," he warned her, "it's a fire hazard." But more importantly, he added, this could account for why she "always felt a presence" around her. "It could be due to the high amounts of electrical waves."

When Gabriel completed the baseline readings, he switched on the audio recorders. He also asked Lucy to temporarily shut the overhead lights and air conditioning units. For the next

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[64] During the investigation and afterward, I was not able to note the actual numeric measurements Gabriel collected during the Chelsea investigation. Though, I did record his comments on the measurements in my field notes and audio recording.

[65] It was unclear, however, what Gabriel meant by "completely empty," whether referring to inhabitants or both inhabitants and things.

[66] More specifically, body voltage refers to the amount of electromagnetic radiation a person absorbs into his or her body through contact with high levels of electromagnetic fields.

twenty minutes, the three of us sat on the kitchen floor to conduct an EVP session. Gabriel explained to Lucy that in this portion of the investigation, he likes to "sit in silence to see if we feel anything" and of course, to try to communicate with spirits. He began by asking, is there anyone here?" No response. "Would you like to communicate with us?" No response. "There are audio recorders switched on," Gabriel explained, "I would appreciate it if you speak into the microphones." Again, there was no response.

Trying a different tactic, Gabriel asked, "if someone is here, will you give us a sign? Anything will do." A minute passed. There was a loud thump on the kitchen floor. "If that was you," Gabriel followed up, "could you give us a more definitive sign? Maybe flicker or dim the lights, drop something, talk into the [microphone]?" Another minute passed. The stove light dimmed from a bright white light to a pale orange glow. Gabriel did not seem to notice this until I brought it to his attention. "I know this is too much to ask, but if that was you, could you please give a more definitive sign, maybe move something?" No response.

As a last measure Gabriel pulled out a pair of dowsing rods. He admitted that he was not entirely sure if they were effective in detecting ghost, but felt compelled to use them to "cover all of his bases." However, he quickly remarked that they were "good at detecting water." Gabriel demonstrated this by leading us into the restroom, where the parallel rods crossed near the toilet bowl. I am not sure what Lucy thought of this demonstration. But it occurred to me that he was trying to prove to us—and perhaps more so to himself—the worth of his toolkit.
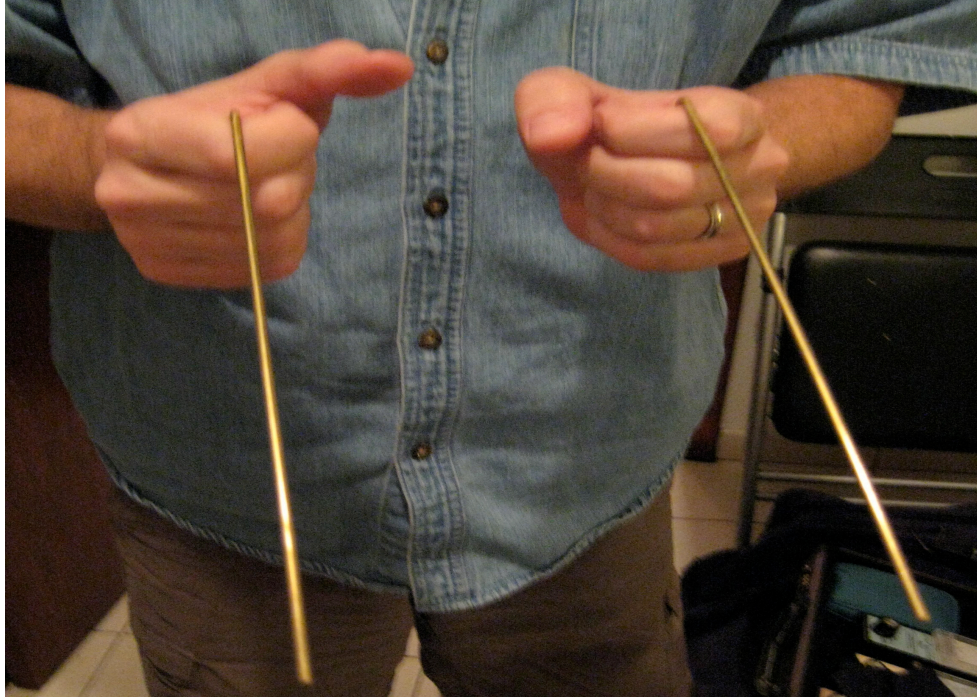
Figure 11 Gabriel using dowsing rods to communicate with spirits.

The investigation ended three hours after we arrived. It was a short investigation owing to the small space of the apartment and more decidedly, the dearth of material evidence. Gabriel concluded that Lucy's paranormal experiences were most likely caused by hallucinations experienced during a hypnagogic state. Her encounters with ghostly apparitions, he explained, occurred in the middle of the night, "between sleep and waking states." These apparitions, he suspected, were visions seen in an altered state of consciousness, "similar to a state of deep meditation or hypnosis." He added, "I have visions too when I meditate." While this explanation did not account for all of Lucy's paranormal experiences, it seemed to somehow satisfy Lucy, or at the very least, bring her some peace of mind. When a roll of packing tape fell to the floor, she joked, "oh that's the ghost of gravity, it is just gravity."

Signs of Spirit Communication

The resolution of the Chelsea case fell onto the well-trodden yet unmapped psycho-physiological phenomenon of hypnagogia. Hypnagogia, also referred to as "phantasmata" or the

"borderland of dreams," encompasses liminal mental states, including lucid dreaming, hallucinations, and sleep paralysis (Mavromatis 1987). Perhaps not surprisingly, it has been associated with well-established and longstanding paranormal theories; first linked to ghostly apparitions by occultists and spiritualists in the mid-nineteenths century. [67]

This seeming non sequitur, in many significant ways, resembles the suggestions made by Tim concerning high levels of electromagnetic radiation (see Hypothetical Hauntings and A Big Electromagnetic Field). Gabriel's explanations can be seen as a strategy of legitimation. For instance, it offers what Gabriel believed to be a morally responsible resolution in the form of a "natural" as opposed to a supernatural explanation. His explanation no doubt demystified Lucy's visions of ghostly apparitions and empowered her with a new vocabulary to describe her anomalous experiences. Moreover, it debunked paranormal phenomena. This "rational" act of debunking can be seen as also rewarding Gabriel, like Tim, with the prestige of scientific authority and scientific virtues of objectivity and self-abnegation.

The resolution of the Chelsea case, then, seemed to have very little to do with the personal details of the client or the alleged spirits. [68] I was especially perplexed by the lack of details concerning Lucy's paranormal encounters (e.g. time of occurrence) and the appearance of the apparitions: What did they look like? What were their ages? What kinds of clothing were they wearing (e.g., to assess the historical period in which they lived)? [69] More confounding still was Gabriel's lack of interest in the loud thump or dimming light that occurred during our EVP

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[67] In 1848, physician Alfred Maury first coined the term "hypnagogic" (denoting the onset of sleep. Soon thereafter, the term "hynopompic" (denoting the onset of wakefulness) was coined by F.W.H. Myers, founding member of the Society for Psychical Researchers (SPR). Many of the SPR's early investigations examined the links between ghostly apparitions and hypnogogic states. Their findings were published in *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney et al 1886).

[68] For instance, he did not know Lucy's occupation.

[69] Instinctively, I would think that some of these details are crucial in trying to weave together a full story. I guess this shock is good for thinking about the questions that ethnographers ask or neglect to ask when forming narratives.

session. He seemed not to place any weight on these "signs" of spirit communication or see any remarkable coincidence in their timing. [70]

Gabriel's behavior raises some important questions about the kinds of data ghost hunters consider crucial, superfluous, or outright dubious when trying to weave together the most plausible explanation for their clients' anomalous experiences. More broadly, Gabriel's lack of interest in these possible "signs" brings into sharp relief the fact that perception is seldom a straightforward endeavor. Sitting on the cold kitchen for those twenty minutes, we were so attuned to every slight bump, thump, footstep, door slam, voice, and noise that makes up ordinary New York apartment life. Almost with heightened sensitivity, we scanned the darkened room with our eyes and ears, eagerly trying to see or hear something, *anything*, which might be construed as a "sign" of spirit communication. Therefore, his lack of interest can be seen as revealing the ways in which perception is contingent upon material conditions. And more significantly, how perception is never truly "objective," but inextricably colored by past experiences, desires, and the imagination.[71]

But perhaps more surprisingly, the resolution of the Chelsea case seemed to have very little to do with the measurements so meticulously and painstakingly recorded by Gabriel before and during the investigation. This is particularly striking because he devoted the bulk of the on-site investigation to taking stock of the various electromagnetic fields, temperature, humidity, luminescence, and sound levels of the small apartment. For both Gabriel and Tim, the measurements of environmental variables seemed to be prioritized over the details of their clients' lives or the alleged spirits haunting their homes. Unlike Tim, however, Gabriel did not rely upon these measurements to form the basis of his resolution. Despite noting briefly the

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[70] With the exception of whether or not the client was mentally sound.

[71] For a more detailed discussion of perception within paranormal investigations, see Chapter 3: Residual Hauntings.

unusually high levels of body voltage in Lucy's bedroom, he ultimately turned to the speculative yet somewhat established theories of hypnagogia to account for her paranormal experiences.

Gabriel's measurements, therefore, seemed to serve a function that was not immediately obvious during the investigation. To understand their purpose, we must first examine Gabriel's disappointment in the previous section (see The Chelsea Case). His disappointment stemmed from a "missed opportunity" to collect a large sample size of ion measurements and more significantly, to establish potential patterns between ion levels and alleged paranormal activity. The purpose of these measurements lay in their potential to elucidate causal knowledge of paranormal phenomena in the future. In fact, this aspiration for causal knowledge is common among ghost hunters and it is characterized by desires for advancements in technology and for statistical analysis.

Visions of Future Science

"In the 1980s we didn't have technology," Mimi from Beach Cities Paranormal Research[72] explained, "we didn't have […] the knowledge of technology and how to use it as far as this field is concerned." "Everyday you can see advancements […] on equipment." "One day there is going to be a tool," she added, "and we are going to have the answers I think." Tim also shared these sentiments, stating that he hoped to develop a tool that could "further the paranormal field."[73] "This piece of equipment," he said, "must be shared and open for other investigators to scrutinize."

In addition to advanced technologies, ghost hunters also shared aspirations for statistical analysis. "[Measurements] do not show causality," Tina explained. "In the future," she added, "I would like to see more correlational studies done with different [measurements] and trends with

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[72] Beach Cities Paranormal Research is a paranormal research team based in Orange County, California.
[73] Tim is an electrical engineer by profession.

different types of geomagnetic storms." Given the current uncertainty over the origins and mechanics of paranormal phenomena, she noted, as a more immediate goal "we can only focus on correlating our data."

Some ghost hunters, such as Nancy of the SCPS, are making strides toward statistical analysis.[74] She detailed her designs for a worldwide database where ghost hunters could log onto their individual accounts and report paranormal activity. "It would provide the online tools to manage cases online, share findings, and search for particular cases." She added, "the program would allow investigators to date, timestamp, map, and detail activity to trend […] solar flares, weather, earthquakes affecting people [with] who, where, hot spots." Moreover, she plans to include data of earthquakes and solar activity from the past ten years. This database would, as Nancy puts it, "pattern this altogether."

More promising than new technologies, Nancy argued, "data moves the paranormal back into the scientific spotlight." She further explained that the paranormal field's reliance on technology has resulted in no advancements and "it is starting to become a joke." Unlike Tim, Nancy interests lie solely in creating databases and conducting statistical analysis, rather than developing new tools.

As research advances in technology or statistical analysis, Ned speculated, other kinds of data currently deemed pseudoscientific (e.g., utterances from a spirit box) might "one day" be considered a legitimate form of spirit communication and labeled as evidence post hoc. "If enough people do it for a long period of time and they come up with enough circumstantial data," he said, "then it would turn into light." "Right now," he added, "paranormal researchers can only rely on tangible evidence, such as photographs."

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[74] Nancy is a software programmer by profession.

The aspirations of ghost hunters toward advanced technologies or statistical analysis offer insight into how they speculate about the future. In other words, these aspirations reveal what they imagine as remote possibilities. Ghost hunters aspire to, as Ned puts it, "one day" contribute substantively to a tolerant future science. This aspiration is particularly highlighted in Tim's desires to develop new technologies or in Nancy's efforts to build a database in order to "move the paranormal back into the scientific spotlight."

By the same token, ghost hunters also hope that this imagined future science might "one day" provide them with answers to questions of the afterlife. While ghost hunters are making strides toward developing new technologies or databases for statistical analysis, they also envision future science as providing them with additional technologies—and more importantly, casual knowledge—to interpret their current data. Thus, the efforts of ghost hunters to collect and record measurements for the posterity of the paranormal field reveal their predictions, expectations, and fantasies about the future.

"We can't imagine the future," Judith Berman writes, "if we can't even look at the present" (Berman 2005:342). Speculations about the future do not merely encapsulate our hopes and desires for what may come; but rather, they also actively make our present. Speculations of a tolerant future science act as what Kitzinger and Williams call "an imperative to action" (2005:731), pressing ghost hunters toward certain kinds of research practices for the posterity of their field. Moreover, these speculations reveal dominant ideologies of science, particularly notions as "scientific knowledge," that shape how ghost hunters conceive of and do the work of paranormal research.

Speculations about the future take form as imperatives to action by orienting ghost hunters toward particular research practices and strategies of legitimation (Kitzinger and

Williams 2005:731). In particular, they orient to the future by investing in a wide range of precision instruments in order to compile measurements as "anticipatory knowledge" (Lakoff 2008:401) for statistical analysis. But perhaps more significantly, hunters make strides toward scientific legitimacy by privileging quantitative data over other kinds of data. As seen in the Chelsea case, Gabriel dwelled on the climatic and environmental measurements but barely elaborated on Lucy's interview responses, witness testimonies, or our personal experiences. The anticipation of causal knowledge, therefore, impacts how ghost hunters allocate their time and resources, interact with clients, and make claims using provisional paranormal theories. Even more striking, these speculations allow ghost hunters to indiscriminately collect measurements—indefinitely deferring causal interpretation—with the promise that their efforts will become meaningful in the future.

Close attention to how ghost hunters imagine scientific futures also brings to light what Grant Shoffstall has termed the "ideological effects" of science (Shoffstall 2010:287). The strategies for legitimation used by ghost hunters show how scientific technologies and technical practices have become proxies for science and scientific knowledge. This relationship is apparent in the ways ghost hunters marshal their resources (as seen with Ned spending $10,000 on a thermal imaging camera). And it is particularly apparent in how they make claims (or "suggestions") and formulate provisional paranormal theories. More specifically, ghost hunters frame spectral apparitions and other anomalous experiences in relation to naturally occurring environmental variables (e.g., electromagnetic fields, positive ions), thereby transforming them from seemingly supernatural phenomena into preternatural phenomena. Scientific technologies, therefore, are exalted with the power to mediate the material and the immaterial and more significantly, science and the supernatural.

But perhaps more subtly, these strategies for legitimation reveal that scientific knowledge *is* causal knowledge. It is knowledge that orders the natural world. The preconditions for causal knowledge, as Daston argues, are two-fold: first, is the notion of statistical regularities and second, is the belief in the existence of homogenous categories to which the regularities apply (Daston 2008:7). Ghost hunters attempt to fulfill these preconditions through collecting and recording measurements in their paranormal investigations. Baseline readings transform "haunted" sites into controlled spaces for investigation and "neutralize" environmental variables, transforming their human meanings (e.g., cold spots) into homogenous categories and portable numbers divorced from their contexts and material conditions. Given their homogeneity and portability, these measurements have the potential to create and be compared to norms (Porter 1996:19). Thus, the future orientation of ghost hunters elucidates how scientific knowledge is sustained by virtues of objectivity, rationality, and above all, a deep "moral repugnance for contingency" (Daston 2008:14).

Conclusion

"We started doing this stuff and then *Ghost Hunters* came out," Peter recalled his start as a paranormal researcher, "it got really popular and everyone started calling us." "We had a big article on us on the Daily News and a little skit on the Letterman show, we had all of these things and you know, we just blew up and we started having investigations two or three times a weekend—it was chaos, chaos and not fun." Moreover, he reflected on his earlier cases:

"We thought we were being scientific but we weren't. It's impossible to do this and use the scientific method, which most paranormal investigators do not know what the scientific method is.[75] But they will throw the phrase around. So we thought we were being scientific and we weren't. We were well intentioned, ill-informed, eager to learn, but didn't want to let on that we were learning. We wanted people to take us serious[ly], so we knew everything we needed to know, so now I look back on some of the stuff we did and I don't know how we did it. I would love to go back to some of these places much more experienced now."

At best, ghost hunters are seen as amateur naïve empiricists using high-tech gadgets to blindly collect evidence in the hopes of confirming paranormal phenomena (Roach 2005). At worst, they are seen as entrepreneurial con artists thriving on sensationalism and manipulating evidence to dupe their audiences (Houran 2004). In both cases, ghost hunters are depicted as unreflexive and uncritical researchers with methodologies that lack the means for falsification and overall empirical rigor. They are unequivocally portrayed as pseudoscientists.

Peter's quote above, however, brings to light a more complicated and nuanced relationship between ghost hunters and "science." It reveals that ghost hunters are not simply dupes of their own desires for scientific legitimacy. In fact, it shows that ghost hunters are highly aware of their fringe status. And more importantly, it shows that they recognize the prestige associated with technologies. Ghost hunters know that merely using re-purposed scientific instruments and taking measurements does not make them "scientists." Nonetheless, the prestige of these technologies does (to a certain degree) grant them an aura of scientific authority and legitimacy in the eyes of their clients and the general public. In other words, it inspires others to as Peter puts it, "take us seriously."

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[75] It should be noted that this is a common assumption held by many ghost hunters. In my interviews, it is a recurring theme that ghost hunters often believe that they know what "science" and the "scientific method" is whereas other ghost hunters are only claiming to do "science" while being wholly ignorant of the process. In other words, it is a common insult hurled at other paranormal investigators.

The complex and often, paradoxical relationships between ghost hunters and their precision instruments bring attention to popular trends (e.g., latest tools or theories) sweeping the paranormal research community at the moment. But more significantly, these intrinsic contradictions also expose the fact that ghost hunters have yet to reach a consensus on their methodologies, research protocols, or standards of evidence. Moreover, these contradictions betray the complementary, supplementary, and contradictory ways in which ghost hunters mobilize traditional religions, New Age philosophies, and perceived scientific methodologies to grapple with the contingencies and uncertainties of paranormal phenomena.

Beyond pointing to contradictions, this chapter examined the kinds of work precision instruments accomplish for ghost hunters. Precision instruments, such as EMF meters or air ion counters, act as powerful and polyvalent symbols of mechanical objectivity and thus, scientific legitimacy. Ghost hunters take advantage of the symbolic power of precision instruments to evoke the moral and epistemic values associated with "objective" scientists. On a more practical note, precision instruments transform environmental variables (e.g., fluctuations in temperature) from meanings tied to personal experiences, contexts, and material conditions into portable and reproducible numbers with the potential to create and be compared to norms. And in doing so, they transform particular and variable client homes into "controlled" sites for paranormal investigation.

The symbolic meanings ascribed to precision instruments also offered a window into how ghost hunters speculate about the future. They are particularly indicative of their hopes and anxieties about the posterity of the paranormal field. In particular, these speculations reveal desires of ghost hunters to contribute—through their efforts to indiscriminately collect measurements, compile databases, or develop advanced technologies—to a tolerant future

science. And conversely, they reveal what ghost hunters desire from this future science; namely, to provide them with the technologies and the causal knowledge to interpret their current data.

Whether or not ghost hunters are naïve empiricists or entrepreneurial con artists matters very little. What matters is that many Americans, who subscribe to paranormal beliefs, are in fact taking it upon themselves to prove or deny the existence of ghosts, believing that it is a worthwhile endeavor and anticipating that one day they will find answers to their questions of the afterlife. Ghost hunters' visions of a tolerant future science, therefore, beg the larger question: what is really at stake?

The speculations of ghost hunters do not simply "register possibilities" for the future, but rather, actively shape the here and now of the paranormal research community (Markley in Shoffstall 2010:287). As Shoffstall argues, speculations about the future can bring attention to a different set of questions—"asking what the practice is itself, the claims of its advocates and practitioners, and the various discourses they have and continue to incite, are doing, while attending to how it is being done (Shoffstall 2010:286). Future speculations create present realities through the "strategies of legitimation" employed by ghost hunters. In particular, they influence the ways ghost hunters interact with clients, marshal resources, make claims, draw upon provisional theories, and privilege certain kinds of data over others. More striking still, these speculations reveal that scientific knowledge is causal knowledge. It is knowledge with the power to order, objectify, and rationalize paranormal phenomena.

But perhaps more broadly, the spectacular relationships between ghost hunters and their imagined scientific futures reveals the conflation between science and technoscience. In other words, it shows that scientific knowledge is inextricably tied to scientific technologies and technical practices. This is particularly apparent in how ghosts and other paranormal phenomena

are increasingly understood through and in terms of precision instruments, measurements of environmental variables, and probabilities of most likely "suggestions." Ghost hunters' visions for future science, then, offer a glimpse into how they grapple with a proof-oriented society in which the afterlife and matters of faith are now subject to scientific rhetoric and the logics of positivism in order to gain validity. In doing so, they open up potential lines of inquiry to explore the ways technologies have come to invade, mediate, and reshape virtually every sphere of human existence, even the metaphysical spheres previously mediated and given meaning by traditional religions.

CHAPTER 3

Residual Hauntings: Making Present an Intuited Past

"Such is the human ontological imagination and such is the convincingness of what it brings to birth. Unpicturable beings are realized, and realized with an intensity almost like that of a hallucination. They determine our vital attitude as decisively as the vital attitude of lovers is determined by the habitual sense, by which each is haunted, of the other being in the world. A lover has notoriously this sense of the continuous being of his idol, even when his attention is addressed to other matters and he no longer represents her features. He cannot forget her; she uninterruptedly affects him through and through" (James 1986:66)

There is a well located behind a row of workhouses on Ferry Street. The modest brick house at 63 Ferry Street belonged to the foreman of the sawmill and his wife. It was a well-known secret amongst neighbors that the foreman's wife had an affair with a mill worker and became pregnant with her lover's child.

One bitterly cold night, the neighbors were awakened by the screams of a woman, followed by the thin wails of a newborn infant emanating from the foreman's house. It is unclear how the foreman discovered his wife's secret affair or the true paternity of the infant. But in a fit of uncontrollable rage, the foreman had thrown the infant against a wall, shattering his small delicate skull.

The next morning, neighbors found the home abandoned. The foreman and his wife were gone. Rumors swirled as neighbors speculated the couple had to escape the stigma of his wife's indiscretions. An older woman in the crowd, though, insisted that she had witnessed the foreman carry a small bundle to the well. The bundle, she thought, was the baby.

This local legend was told to me by Rick, the lead investigator of Second Sight Paranormal, upon recounting his experience on a ghost tour in New Hope, Pennsylvania.[76] On

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[76] Second Sight Paranormal is a paranormal research team based in Staten Island, New York City.

Halloween night about twenty years ago, he found himself tightly packed with fifteen other tourists in a small alley on Ferry Street. Admittedly "not the tallest guy in the world," from the back of the crowd, he remembers struggling to hear the tour guide narrate the tragic history of the foreman's house, when, to his surprise, he began to hear the sounds of a crying baby. "My first thought," Rick remembers, "was that someone in the tour had an infant that I didn't see, so…I am getting aggravated because I am trying to hear, I am trying to see." Prompted by his annoyance, Rick began searching for the source of the crying:

> "It was down this narrow alleyway to the back of this particular building, so I said, you know what, I am here in the back and I am going to look at everyone who comes out. So I said to the tour guide, 'you know I heard a baby crying.' She said to me, and this was after [the tour], '[another] woman also said that on the tour. And there was no baby there.' So I don't know, that could be paranormal, couldn't be paranormal. But that stuck in my head that I would hear this residual [crying], or what I think now might have been a residual haunting."

Popular depictions portray hauntings as a form of reckoning, when an unfinished past returns to unsettle the present. Recently, however, paranormal researchers, popularly known as "ghost hunters," have begun to think about a new kind of haunting in terms of "residual energy." While the postmortem survival of the human soul continues to dominate the cultural imaginary, "residual hauntings" have emerged as a serious alternative to make sense of encounters with ghosts and other paranormal phenomena.[77]

Ghost hunters share a common goal: to prove or deny the existence of ghosts. What ghosts are, however, remains unsettled (see Introduction).[78] Given this uncertainty, ghost hunters must often operationalize their intuition as one meaningful resource amongst other more

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[77] In interviews, interlocutors have identified 0-10% of their cases to be caused by residual hauntings.
[78] Ghosts are treated as potentially ontologically real (returned spirits), psychologically real (existing only in the percipient's mind), or unexplained natural phenomena (the imprint of emotions on the electromagnetic field). Despite this ontological and consequently, epistemological uncertainty, ghost hunters adhere somewhat to a standardized methodology, research protocols, and standards of evidence (e.g., toolkit).

recognized or codified resources (e.g., precision instruments, audio-visual recording devices) in order to collect, classify, and interpret data and to determine particular kinds of hauntings.[79]

In this chapter, I will examine how ghost hunters use what I call "authoritative intuition" to guide their technical practices and to know a place as a site for residual hauntings, as opposed to other kinds of hauntings.[80] "Authoritative knowledge," Bridgette Jordan defines, is "the knowledge on the basis which decisions are made and actions are taken" (Jordan in Davis-Floyd and Davis 1996:238). Understanding authoritative intuition to be pragmatic and strategically applied to uncertain situations, I will trace the evidentiary value placed on intuition and how it is formalized in relation to other technologies and forms of reasoning (e.g., induction) toward a diagnostic goal.

Residual Hauntings

There is much disagreement within the paranormal research community as to the cause of residual hauntings. A popular definition of residual hauntings proposes that the life force, or amorphously referred to as the "energy," of all sentient beings, past and living, is imprinted upon the Earth's magnetic field. Residual hauntings, as theorized by the famous parapsychologist Hans Holzer, "rests on the assumption that people leave a film of their past thoughts, actions, emotions, and images upon anything they touch, handle, wear, or come into contact with" (1967:3). Even, he elaborated:

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[79] For a detailed analysis of "uncertainty" as the driving force of knowledge production, see Rheinberger 1997, Beck 1995, and Button 2010. Also Karen Barad (2007) writes about the distinctions between "uncertainty" and "indeterminacy" as modes of knowing.

[80] I am particularly indebted to Davis-Floyd and Davis' (1996) article "Intuition as Authoritative Knowledge in Midwifery and Homebirth" for the framing of this article and for conceptualizing intuition as a resource in addition to more standard protocols for "normal birth." And I would also like to thank Valerie Olson for the framing of intuition as technical practice and as an authoritative knowledge using the term "authoritative intuition," as distinct from other forms of intuition in its pragmatic force, corroborative nature, and diagnostic goals.

> "…a room they have entered once, provided that there is some emotional involvement between them and their surroundings, an event, or even in today's parlance, a "happening" of some sort, be it sad or joyful, so long as it employed the emotions of the one concerned" (ibid).

Residual hauntings, then, occur when a place partially absorbs and retains what Holzer called a "film," recording events in the lives of their past inhabitants. [81]

Moreover, percipients, or the experiencing persons, encounter residual hauntings predominantly through sensory impressions, such as the faint trace of an unknown perfume, inexplicable orbs of light, or in Rick's case, the disembodied sound of a crying infant. Perhaps more interestingly, though, residual hauntings are also experienced through the perception of past emotions imprinted upon the material surroundings. What is encountered, Holzer speculated, "is nothing more than human emotions, frozen in time, tiny electrical impulses left behind and coating the [place] upon which actual tragedies had played out" (1967:94).

In a 2010 interview with Gabriel, the director of Gotham Paranormal Research, however, he offered a different account for the *modus operandi* of residual hauntings. "Residual hauntings," he states, "feels like something was there before you." What the percipient actually experiences is not the residual energy of past events imprinted upon a place. But rather, he explains, it is the projection of his "own feelings and perception."

"An old building retains an energy that might not have anything to do with residual hauntings," Gabriel recalls an instance to illustrate what he believes to be the true nature of residual hauntings. In 1988, he worked as a carpenter renovating rooms at the historic Plaza Hotel in New York City. Built in 1907, the hotel was designed to provide all of the opulence and grandeur of a French chateau and housed kings, presidents, celebrities, and writers, including F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway.

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[81] Holzer's use of "film" seems to take on the meaning of both a substance that coats a surface and a film, like a movie recording.

"You feel different walking in there," Gabriel said, "the appearance of the building takes you to a different time, old structures visually bring you back to an older time." "You look around and take everything in like a movie." Gabriel attributes this movie-like quality to the fact that his visual, mental, and emotional connections to the Plaza Hotel are always already mediated by past experiences and popular depictions primarily culled from films and television shows. Since we are cut off from the lived experiences of past historical moments, he explained, "we can't fully know another period" and therefore, must necessarily rely upon collective representations found in popular media to connect with other temporalities:

> "So when I encountered a room from the 1940s, that [referring to collective representations] is the only connection that I have to that time period, so my imagination might go a little wild and I might imagine what people looked like or their emotions. But because I have never lived it, I could only assume it or get information of it from other stories that I have heard."

In the absence of direct or lived experience, Gabriel proposes, percipients attempt to connect to perceived residual energy through "visual, audio, all of their senses." "It's not just the [sensorial], he explains, "but also your [own] emotions that can be misunderstood for a residual haunting.

The considerable differences between the two explanations provided by Gabriel and the more popular account (as proposed by Holzer) can be seen as indicative of the complexities, and larger uncertainties, that defined residual hauntings as a paranormal phenomena. There is, however, a common thread running across these diverse features: they involve not only physically, but also mentally, emotionally, and sensorially inhabiting a place, or what Michael Polanyi has termed "indwelling," in order to make present an intuited past. To apprehend an object intuitively, Polanyi argued, involves incorporating our bodies or extending our bodies to

include it, so that we come to dwell in it (Polanyi 1966:18). "That it is not by looking at things," Polanyi wrote, "but by dwelling in them that we understand their meaning" (ibid).

The Problem of Intuition

Intuition and intuitive insight seem to be everywhere and yet, nowhere in anthropology.[82] Upon closer inspection, intuitive thinking (though often not referred to explicitly) begins to appear in such diverse worlds ranging from Micronesian navigation to public sector banks in Egypt.[83] Anthropologists studying practical reasoning and common-sense knowledge, or "knowledge in action," have long focused on local, moment-by-moment, determinations of meaning in relation to open-ended and unchartered settings (Frake 1964, Gladwin 1970). For instance, Edwin Hutchins describes Micronesian navigation as reliant upon envisioning a canoe's movement across a two-dimensionally rendered sequence of stars within the "mind's eye," demonstrating that cognitive activity is embedded within a "cultural code" (Hutchins 1980 and 1995). Similarly focused on everyday cognition, Jean Lave and others studying "situated learning" shift the focus of attention to participatory contexts and everyday situations, arguing that cognition occurs in relation to tacit knowledge and coparticipants (Rogoff and Lave 1984, Lave and Wegner 1991).

A more recent line of inquiry places cognition within the context of a "semiotic community" (Kockelman 2005:261-262). Engaging with the works of Michael Polanyi and Friedrich Hayek, Julia Elyachar examines the workings of tacit knowledge within public sector banks in Egypt, detailing it as decisively intersubjective, spontaneous, embodied, and collectively inherited (2012). Understanding cognition to be dependent upon semiotic resources,

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[82] With the exception of Davis-Floyd and Davis 1996.

[83] See Hutchins 1995 and Elyachar 2012.

Keith Murphy analyzes "the imagination in action" within architecture firms in Los Angeles, arguing that imagining is a social and embodied activity, supported by material objects, mediated by gestures, initiated by conversation, and held together by pragmatic force (2005). Further emphasizing the embodied qualities of knowing, Tim Ingold and others involved in the "bodily turn" in anthropology have highlighted that skillful human participation is inextricability tied to corporeality and "being in the world" (Ingold 2010, Csordas 2002, Merleau-Ponty [1962] 2002).

As one can see, many of these literatures do not explicitly mention intuition or reference intuitive insight as a source of inner knowing, be it inference, tacit knowledge, the imagination, or otherwise. At the heart of these works, however, is a deep concern for locating cognition and other knowledge processes not simply within individual minds, but also in the "real world" in which knowing is often goal-oriented, provisional, intersubjective, and socially embedded. Through sharing these intellectual stakes, these anthropologists in their own ways dissolve dichotomies between subject and object, inside and outside, embodied and cerebral. I situate my own interest in intuition within these broader conversations because of a shared commitment to understanding how implicit or not readily articulated thought processes are distributed across bodies, environments, technologies, and communities.

While my on position follows from these others in questioning the individual as the locus of cognition, I complicate matters by closely studying how a semi-legitimate form of reasoning is used by ghost hunters, who are often perceived as naïve empiricists at best and at worst, as entrepreneurial con artists or tricksters. [84] I specifically focus on intuition because ghost hunters most often cite it as their source of inspiration or insight. [85] Further, it seems to best encapsulate their descriptions of a primal, emotion-fueled, process of knowing, which does not need to have

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[84] See Roach 2006 and Houran 2004.
[85] Ghost hunters most often refer to intuitive insight in terms of feelings, sensations, and the mind's eye.

a basis in implicitly acquired knowledge or concepts grounded in visualization. [86] Thus, authoritative intuition can be seen as a particularly fruitful line of inquiry to understand situated or distributed cognition because it illustrates how inner knowing (e.g., memories, personal experiences, gut instincts) is operationalized alongside collective knowing (e.g., collective memories, semiotic meanings). But perhaps more significantly, it also illustrates how inner knowing works in tandem with positivist thought processes, offering insight into how boundaries between semi-legitimate and legitimate knowledges are invoked, negotiated, and mutually constituted in the "real world."[87]

"Intuition has been described by writers as the only certain road to absolute truth," Malcolm Westcott writes, "and by others, equally serious, as the path to absolute nonsense" (1968:1). Philosophers in particular, Westcott notes, have been concerned with intuition as the way to attain perfect knowledge of reality, beyond the knowledge of senses (1968:2). For instance, Henri Bergson privileged "artistic knowledge," or knowledge in the form of gut instincts, hunches, and the imagination to be the most fundamental form of intelligence because of its capacity to grasp "inner-reality;" and thus, provide "absolute knowledge" of an object (1975:25). As Joseph Chiari notes, Bergson considered artistic knowledge as not opposed to intelligence, but as a form of intelligence (ibid).

But perhaps most predominantly, intuition has traditionally been opposed to abstract reasoning, logic and the intellect (Kline 1976:451). In his book *Intuition: how we think and act*, Tony Bastick details this opposition:

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[86] For a concise definition of the differences amongst the imagination and intuition, see Virtanen 2010.
[87] I would like to thank George Marcus for the framing of intuition as "semi-legitimate."

"The intuitive thought process is contrasted with analytic thought on several properties of intuition. Intuition has emotional involvement. Analytic thought is 'cold' and emotion-free. Intuitive thought is dependent on past experiences and the present situation of the intuiter, whereas analytic thought is considered independent of personal experience and the immediate environment" (1982:51)

As a thought process primarily informed by emotions and past experiences, the driving force behind intuitive thinking can be seen by what Bastick calls "empathic projection" (1982:280). Empathy, as defined by Rosalind Dymond, is "the imaginative transposing of oneself into the thinking, feeling, and acting of another" (Dymond in Bastick 1982:283). In other words, it is through the evocation and projection of subjectively appropriate feelings onto the object by the subject that applies intuition to the apprehended object.[88] In addition to "empathic projection," Bastick identifies other properties of intuition to include: preverbal, preconscious, kinesthetic understanding, sudden or immediate insight, and intuition need not be correct[89] (1982:50).[90]

In many ways, intuition and intuitive thought defy precise definitions and formal theorization. Indeed, some scientists and scholars have proposed additional research is needed to ascertain whether intuition is a single, somewhat complete cognitive function or whether it is a step in a larger process (Frick 1970:36).[91] Ghost hunters' use of authoritative intuition toward diagnostic goals shows the complex and often idiosyncratic nature of intuition. More precisely, their practices reveal two facets of this multi-faceted thought process, both of which are salient in

[88] For a more detailed discussion of the role of empathy in intuition and perception, see Bergson 1978, Spence 1960, Dymond 1949, Polanyi 1966, and Gell 1998.

[89] There is considerable debate on the "correctness" of intuition. As Bastick notes, "intuition is defined by some writers as necessarily correct, whereas, other's disagree, saying that intuition is like an educated guess and is a useful guide often right, but sometimes wrong" (Bastick 1982:305. The discussion of correctness exceeds the scope of this chapter for two reasons: first, intuition does not make use of publicly verifiable data and second, being correct or incorrect does not seem to affect the ways in which ghost hunters deploy intuitive thinking. As such, subjective certainty of correctness or verifiable correctness will not be used as defining characteristics or criteria to analyze authoritative intuition amongst paranormal researchers.

[90] For a complete list of properties, see Bastick 1982:25.

[91] Bastick notes, "the variety of conceptions of intuition arises within a long history of serious concern about phenomena which originates in very different contexts, but which have been given a common name. In her review of the literature on intuition, Lorraine Bouthilet argues whether it makes sense to even encompass such a wide-ranging mental phenomena into a single definition. "The review of the meaning of intuition showed the futility of attempting to encompass the concept of intuitive thinking into one all-inclusive definition" (Bouthilet 1948:50).

guiding how ghost hunters conceive of and do the work of paranormal research: situated

knowledge and partial knowledge.

Situated knowledge, or what Bastick describes as "dependence on the environment," as a

property of authoritative intuition brings attention to the fact that "degrees of intuitive awareness

may be affected by such factors as time, place, mood, attitude, states of consciousness, and

innumerable idiosyncratic variables" (Bastick 1982:85).[92] The material environment, therefore,

can be seen as a contributing factor to the mental lives of percipients and insight gained from

intuition. Given the speed of the intuitive process and the degree to which it is affected by

external stimuli, Carl Jung and others have linked intuition to perception as parallel thought

processes (Jung 1971).[93] As parallel thought processes, the conditions and degree of intuitive

awareness is not only shaped by the material surroundings, but also the collective memories and

semiotic meanings that the environment bring to mind.

"[Collective] memories are everywhere," Charles Golden notes, "we are surrounded and

enveloped by mnemonic devices" (Golden 2005:272). With the ubiquity of mnemonic devices in

our material surroundings in mind, collective memories are located in the relationships between

"signs of memory, signs of history, and individual and group understandings of the past"

(Golden 2005:273). Collective memories, as meaningful bridges between the individual and the

collective, are particularly vital to accessing otherwise inaccessible temporalities.

Authoritative Intuition in Paranormal Research

Without direct or lived experience and consequently personal memories, paranormal

researchers must often use their intuition and imagination as resources to, as Gabriel puts it,

"relate to other [time] periods." The imagination, for Gabriel, is especially grounded in the

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[92] My understanding of "situated knowledge" is indebted to Donna Haraway's (1988) theorizing of embodied
feminist objectivity as situated knowledge.
[93] See also Board 1958.

assumptions and information gleaned from collective memories that he has predominantly encountered through films and television shows.

In the face of partial knowledge, authoritative intution does not simply lead ghost hunters to the perception of probability; but rather it can also lead them to the perception of possibilities, that is, to new lines inquiry through imagined past worlds. Authoritative intuition transforms residual hauntings from objects of thought (to be wholly grasped) into portals:first, as portals transporting percipients to past moments in their own lives and second, as portals to otherwise inaccessible temporalities. "Time is not a general framework," Bruno Latour argues in *We Have Never Been Modern*, "but a provisional result of the connection among entities" (Latour 1993:74). Taking seriously Latour's recognition of our experiences of time as shifting and multiple, residual hauntings can be seen as providing one instance, which illustrates that time is not linear or stable; but rather, a multiply coexisting, or what I call "paratemporal," outcome of particular entanglements amongst personal experiences, collective meanings, and imagined possibilities.

The power of authoritative intuition to conjure past worlds resides in its qualities as an intersubjective and communally negotiated mode of thinking that is distributed across environments, technologies, social histories, and forms in inner-knowing, such as personal memories, gut instincts, and the imagination. Authoritative intuition, then, can be seen as creating the conditions of possibility for the ghost hunters to engage in a "living dialogue about the past" with the paranormal research community (Golden 2005:272). And it creates the conditions of possibility to bring into existence paratemporal landscapes, emerging from a present made meaningful by the past and an individual made meaningful by the collective. To

know residual hauntings through authoritative intuition, thus, reveals thought processes that connect subject and object, perception and projection, and material and spectral.

In what follows, the next section will discuss the emergence of residual hauntings as a theory to explain particular kinds of paranormal phenomena through the peculiar "art" and "science" of psychometry. The remainder of this chapter will follow Long Island City Paranormal Investigations (LICPI) on their paranormal investigation of the former New York Slave Market. It illustrates how ghost hunters use authoritative intuition, alongside other modes of reasoning, to guide their methods and forms of evidence. More precisely, it traces the efforts of paranormal investigators attempting to manage the insights and uncertainties associated with intuition. Though the "Old Slave Market" investigation, I analyze the role that intuition plays, despite a dearth evidence and perceptual cues from the material environment, to transform historical locations into meaningful sites for residual hauntings.

A Brief History of Psychometry

American physician Joseph R. Buchannan first coined the word "psychometry" in 1842 from the Greek *psyche* (soul) and *metron* (measure), literally translating to soul-measuring or more practically, measuring by the soul (1893:3). But the idea itself, as Deborah Blum argues, "was woven through folklore from many cultures and many, many years past" (Blum 2007:103). Generations of ghost stories," she adds, "derived from the belief that a building could contain memories of murder, that terror could inhabit a place for years to come" (ibid).

To explain the phenomenon, Buchanan theorized that all objects have souls that retain a memory. A New York Times article published in 1878 described psychometry as "the power of apprehending objects at a distance without the assistance of external senses" (New York Times

1878). This apprehension largely rested on the abilities of psychically gifted individuals to "read" or re-experience past events by coming into contact with an object or place.

For Buchanan in particular, psychometry promised to utilize the psychic faculties of mediums in conjunction with the "soul of things" in order to shed insight upon disease, physiology, history, paleontology, philosophy, medicine, anthropology, and geology, alongside theology, supernatural life, and destiny (Buchanan 1893:4). Other early theorists of psychometry included Gustav Pagenstecher, a German physician, who believed that psychic mediums could tune into the "experiential vibrations" condensed in an object.[94] Perhaps not surprisingly, psychometry captured the imagination of speculative psychologists, biologists, and writers, including Edgar Allen Poe, who was described as the movement's "most brilliant adherent" (New York Times 1878). For many adherents, psychometry stood at the very center of religion-science debates between free will and an enduring soul on one side and on the other, biological determinism and the materialist theories of the modern medical community.[95]

The promise of psychometry for explaining trance phenomena also caught the interest of the American Society for Psychical Research. Established by a small group of prominent scientists in 1885, the society applied the principles and techniques of modern science to investigate exceptional mental states, such as trance mediumship, phantom limbs, and hypnosis. In particular, the Committee on Mediumistic Phenomena, led by American psychologist and philosopher William James and Reverent Minot Savage, investigated the relation between spirit communication and psychometry in their twenty-five year long study of the Boston medium, Leonora Piper (see Chapter 1).

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[94] See "Psychometric Analysis – A Brief History."
[95] The mind-body debates in the wake of Darwin's theory of evolution exceed the scope of this paper. For a more detailed discussion of these debates, see Slotten 2004, Fichman 2004, Gauld 1968, Schneewind 1977, and Daston 1978.

In an anonymous séance with Savage's daughter acting as the "sitter," or participant,

Piper was presented with three locks of hair placed in the front, middle, and back of a book (so

that the pieces did not come into contact with each other). Prior to the séance, Savage's daughter

knew nothing of the locks of hair, not even the fact if they were cut from the heads of people

living or dead. After Piper had gone into a trance, these locks were placed into her hand, one

after another. Describing the psychometric encounter, Savage wrote:

> "[Piper] told them all about them, gave the names of the friend who had asked my
> daughter to bring them, told whose heads they were from, whether they were dead
> or living, and in regard to one of them asked why they had cut it off at the
> extreme end of the hair where it was lifeless, instead of taking a lock nearer the
> head" (1902:78).

The notes taken by his daughter, Savage added, "found that Mrs. Piper had been accurate in

every particular detail" (1902:78)

In his own experiments with Piper, James had also encountered a "fair evidence of the

reality of psychometry" (1986:359). He theorized that our actions leave a trace on the material

universe. Describing the interconnectedness of our mental and physical lives, James wrote:

> "During your life the traces are mainly in your brain; but after your death, since
> your brain is gone, they exist in the shape of all the records of your actions which
> the outer world stores up as the effect, immediate or remote, thereof, the cosmos
> being in some degree, however slight, made structurally different by every act of
> ours that takes place in it" (James 1986:359).

Furthermore, James believed that the sitter's body acts "psychometrically" as a beacon to attract

spirit communication varying in strength and clarity, much like radio signals. More specifically,

he understood psychometry as the encounter between the psychic faculties of a medium and

traced parts stored in a universal memory or what he would later call a "cosmic consciousness."

And as such an encounter, psychometry had the potential to theoretically account for the

difficulties, vagueness, and idiosyncrasies of spirit communication as a "system of physical traces corresponding to the given spirit" fleetingly and imperfectly aroused (James 1986:359).

The belief that human consciousness can be imprinted upon the material world continues to persist amongst contemporary psychical researchers and parapsychologists. In recent years, though, they have turned to more scientistic language to explain psychometry.[96] For instance, Michael Talbot and Lynne McTaggart in their book *The Holographic Universe*, borrow from the scientific knowledge that all matter on a subatomic level exists essentially as vibrations to assert that consciousness and reality exist in a hologram that contains a record of the past, present and future (Talbot and McTaggart 2001). Using psychometry, one could potentially tap into this record through the "vibrations" of objects.

By far the most popular theory to emerge within the current paranormal research community is the understanding of our life force or "energy" to be electromagnetic in nature. In his book *Window to the Past*, Hans Holzer argued, "only a brief contact with an object is required to start the flow of electrons from person to object, coating and pervading it in its entirety very quickly, and permanently" (Holzer 1967:4). "In my view this is entirely reasonable," he added, "we already know that man's brain, through his mind, emits extremely short waves which can be measured by the electroencephalograph" (ibid). For this reason and perhaps others, electromagnetic field (EMF) meters (traditionally used by electricians) are now the quintessential tool for paranormal researchers to "detect" ghosts and other paranormal phenomena.[97]

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[96] Michele Hanks notes in her study of ghost tourism in Britain, tour guides often define paranormal science as a "legitimate mode of inquiry and identify the ghostly phenomena in question as objectively real and collectively observable," counting among its chief virtues objectivity, scientific rigor, and concrete evidence (2011:128)
[97] Other possible reasons include the popularization and circulation of this theory through the Internet and mass media, particularly television shows, such as *Ghost Hunters, Paranormal State, Ghost Adventures*, etc.

Harkening back to the promises of psychometry advanced by Buchanan, Holzer proposed to utilize psychometry as a form of "psychic archaeology." "Touching the walls of an emotionally potent building," he suggested, "might conceivably produce some of its history" (Holzer 1967:5). "In turn, part of that history might not even be known to our researchers, and in turning up new material we might enrich our knowledge of the past (ibid). For Holzer, the proof ultimately lies in the discovery and verification of historical information first fathomed through psychometric means. "It is as if we are privileged to be present at the events, catapulted back in time, eavesdropping and observing without being seen, but recording for our time that which is of another time" (Holzer 1967:245).

The difficulties associated with psychometric research can be attributed to the conflation of psychometry as the object of analysis and as the mode of analysis. This creates a black box between the objects handled by psychic mediums and their afforded psychometric insights. Perhaps accordingly, there continues to be a great effort by investigators to link psychometry to observable, and thus verifiable, natural phenomena. Psychometric insight must necessarily be scaffolded by other kinds of evidence, often in the form of expert testimony and historical validation, to not simply analyze, but also operationalize psychometry in experiments. In many ways, contemporary ghost hunters have inherited this burden of proof and continue to grapple with intuitive insight, much like psychometric insight, which they can operationalize (with the aid of other resources), but cannot explain.

Hidden Histories

New York City is, not surprisingly, a city that holds many secrets. Perhaps one of its better-known secrets is that it was once home to one of America's most active slave markets.[98] In 1711, New York fully established its first official slave market (Lydon 1978:394). Later known as "The Meal Market," the city council erected a market house on the East River to supply dual demands for slaves in the West Indies and southern colonies and for slaves in New York. In all, "the total black entrances to New York from all sources probably reached 6,800 between 1700 and 1774" and that, as historian James Lydon notes, "is a minimum estimate."[99] In February 1762, the city's aristocracy successfully petitioned to close the Meal (Slave) Market, citing that it "occasions a dirty street, offensive to the inhabitants of each side and disagreeable to those that pass and repass…" (Wakeman 1914:22).

Located near the corner of Wall and Pearl Street, below the towering bank buildings, the remains of the Slave Market now lay buried in an anonymous intersection.[100] In the past three years, however, the market has received renewed attention from the New York City paranormal research community. "I picked all of this historic sites," explained Greg, the lead investigator of the Long Island City Paranormal Investigations (LICPI) "because even though this is New York City, no one has ever explored these places." Explaining the virtues of obscurity, he elaborated:

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[98] New York City was ranked second only to Charleston in the number of slaves owned by its inhabitants (White 1990:1). More reliant on slave labor than any other region in the North, historian Shane White writes, "the slave trade fast became one of the cornerstones of New York's commercial prosperity" (White 1990:xx).

[99] The years 1700 to 1744 denote the years in which New York was an active slave port, including the years prior to the establishment of The Meal (Slave) Market. "Approximately 2,800 arrived from Africa and perhaps, 4,000 from American Sources" (Lydon 1978:387).

[100] In recent years, the market has also received renewed attention largely due to the efforts of the Occupy Wall Street movement, with protestors pressuring city officials to erect signage explaining New York's role in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Along with Occupy Wall Street supporters, the market has also attracted the attention of local tour companies offering bus rides to "The Slave District," hoping to profit by exposing tourists to a darker side of the city's history, the "NYC You Don't See."

"So many of these [paranormal] groups, they just want to go to Gettysburg and places, its kind of like spectral tourism, they want to go to Shanley Hotel, they want to go to Mount Holly because they know people have done it. My group likes to go out and find things that nobody has ever found before. 'Cause I don't have a whole lot of interest in going to say, Eastern State Penitentiary, haunted places like that are like going to Africa and wanting to go on a big game hunt and you go to a preserve and they pull the elephant up and you shoot it in the head. You know, its been done…because the thing is, we are going to places that no one has ever gone before and we are not guaranteed to find anything, most of the time we don't."

More than commemorating or bringing attention to a distinct historical moment, Greg and his team conceptualize the market as a site for paranormal investigations, that is, as an experimental space to re-experience and potentially reveal new aspects of a history, which for them, is still very much alive. History, in this sense, is more akin to collective memories, defined by Golden as "selective reconstructions of past events that serve a present collective need" (Golden 2005:271).[101] As a site for paranormal investigations, the ghost hunters use authoritative intuition to demarcate and bring into existence a paratemporal space where past tragedies exist simultaneously with present exigencies.

The appeal of the Slave Market resides in its dark history and its relative obscurity as a haunted location. Unlike Gettysburg or the Eastern State Penitentiary, the market and other uncharted locations are ideal sites for paranormal investigations not because they promise dramatic ghostly encounters or plentiful evidence. Instead, they provide a space for ghost hunters to "access, revisit, recombine, reshuffle, and reinterpret temporality" (Latour 1993:74) free from the established lore and *a priori* conclusions of more popular locations. In other words, the relative obscurity of the market offers the opportunity to, as Greg puts it, "find things nobody has ever found before" as opposed to corroborating or contradicting the accounts of previous

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[101] Distinguishing history from collective memory, Charles Golden writes, "history is perceived to be more 'factual' and thus more correct than memory, which is a malleable perception of the past" (Golden 2005:272).

paranormal research teams. The promise of original findings, for Greg, outweighs the risks of coming up empty-handed from an investigation.

The Old Slave Market Investigation

Standing in front of the Citibank Tower on a cold March evening, a dozen of us have gathered here to join a paranormal investigation of the "Old Slave Market" hosted by LICPI. Greg, highlighting our ignorance of New York City, provocatively explained:

> "Really? Slavery in New York City? That can't be possible! New York City is a liberal Northern city that was founded by the Dutch, colonized by the British, and built up by hard-working European immigrants. Right? Well not exactly."

Unlike Congo Square in Philadelphia, Bradley pointed out, "it is obvious that New York City doesn't want you to know that it existed because they don't mark it in any way and it's really just a street corner."[102]

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[102] It is interesting to note the disjuncture between actual history and the version of history mobilized by paranormal investigators. Greg mobilizes current and popular understandings of New York as a liberal state opposed to slavery in order to shock his fellow investigators. Historically, however, New York State was politically divided (almost evenly) between those who supported the Civil War and those who supported the peace movement in the mid to late-war years.

Gesturing toward the East River, he invited us to imagine the bustling port activity: ships sailing, ships docking, the excited crowds, the general din of the market. But more importantly, he wanted us to imagine the first-hand trauma of being a captured slave:

> "You know, you are brought over from Africa where half the slaves died and [were] dumped onto the docks and then you were physically sold. You had no say over who was going to buy you or what they were going to do with you. You are basically property."

To aid our visualizations, Greg passed around laminated images of slave ships and the Slave Market in its heyday (mid-1600s). "This place was probably a very horrible place to be, a lot of people died here," he told the group, "so there has to be a lot of [residual] energy at least." The objective of the investigation, Greg explained, was simply "to see if there is anything attached

here in the middle of Manhattan amongst skyscrapers." Though, he was especially keen to determine the exact location of the platforms were the slaves were auctioned and sold. [103]

Walking along Wall Street with digital audio recorders, infrared cameras, camcorders, and EMF (electromagnetic field) meters in hand, the paranormal researchers hoped to encounter the market's ghosts in the form of atmospheric anomalies: sudden temperature fluctuations, disembodied voices, or unexplained orbs of light. The investigators had also hoped to achieve more dramatic encounters by contacting spirits through an electronic voice phenomena (EVP) session.

Figure 13 LICPI members collecting EMF measurements.

"EVPs are unexplained audio events (e.g., disembodied voices, music, footsteps)," Melissa Ellis explains in her book *The Everything Ghost Hunting Book*, "which can sometimes

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[103] Historians note that due to overcrowding on the docks, the majority of slaves were actually auctioned and sold on slave ships, rather than at the market house, to save on costs of housing ashore (Lydon 1978:392). This highlights that investigations are often guided by assumptions and information gleaned from depictions in popular media rather than in-depth historical research.

be heard as they are happening but more often go unheard until the recording is played back during evidence review (2009:100).[104] Following in the tradition of séances, EVP sessions are a technique used by ghost hunters to direct communicate with spirits (see Chapter 2). Unlike séances, however, EVP sessions are not mediated by psychic mediums, but rather use an audio recorder to "record voice messages from the spirit world during investigations" (ibid). Given the post hoc nature of audio evidence, ghost hunters use authoritative intuition to imagine their spectral audience and to discern the most compelling questions that might elicit a response from the market's spirits; in this case, especially appealing the emotional states of former slaves. Huddled in a small circle on the sidewalk, the investigators each took turns asking questions: *Is there anybody here with us? Why are you here? What is your name? How did you die? Were you scared? Did you come here alone or with you family?*

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[104] Melissa Martin Ellis' *The Everything Ghost Hunting Book: Tips, Tools, and Techniques for Exploring the Supernatural World* was required for "Ghost Hunting 101," a training course taught by Greg to new members of LICPI.

Figure 14 LICPI conducting an EVP session.

More striking than the promise of tangible evidence or spirit communication, however, were some of the participants' encounters with what Juan, a recent member of LICPI, called his "mind's eye." "In my mind's eye," Juan said, "I can see a black slave." "I can feel the overwhelming sense of hopelessness, cruelty, and despair that permeated the market." He added, "it is all residual energy." "There is powerful residual energy here," Jeff, a long-time LICPI investigator also concluded, "if there is any paranormal activity here at all."

More specifically, Jeff opposes residual hauntings to more conventional, or what ghost hunters predominantly refer to as "intelligent" hauntings.[105] Intelligent hauntings are treated as ontologically real and are characterized by interactive, and thus seemingly "intelligent" paranormal activity, often in the form of spirit communication with the alleged return souls of

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[105] I also refer to "intelligent" hauntings as ontologically real hauntings (see Introduction).

dead persons. In contrast, residual hauntings are characterized as an emotional or psychic

imprint, Greg explained:

> "When something really traumatic happens to someone, a lot of the times,
> particularly when they die in a tragic way, they don't really haunt a place as an
> entity (or spirit); [rather, it] is haunted like a tape loop in a sense that [these
> events] are happening over and over and over again."

And as such an imprint, residual hauntings are inseparable from their locations. To further

emphasize the place-oriented nature of residual hauntings, Greg revealed that his first attempt to

investigate the Slave Market was unsuccessful because he went to the wrong location. He

elaborated:

> "Where I originally did the investigation, I didn't realize [that some parts of the
> city were underwater]. I thought [that the market] had to be on the river, but
> [instead, we] were investigating landfills. So we were investigating in the middle
> of the river and we found nothing."

The Slave Market can be seen as principally meaningful as a site for residual hauntings. The

traumatic history of the market is part and parcel of its status as a "haunted" location.[106] The

ghost hunters ascribe the market's status as a residual haunting from intuited connections with its

particularly dark history and the implicit understanding that this trauma must somehow leave

behind, as Tom explains, "a powerful residual energy" upon the material surroundings.

Portals to the Paratemporal

In order to understand how Greg and the other investigators diagnosed the market as a

site for residual hauntings, we must first understand ghost hunting as a pursuit that values both

intuitive and analytic forms of reasoning. The Slave Market investigation failed to reveal any

spirit communication or yield tangible evidence (e.g., photographs, audio recordings). Facing a

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[106] Early theorists from Buchanan to James speculate that human consciousness, including *all* emotions (joyous or sad), are imprinted upon the material world. Residual hauntings, as a theory recently popularized by ghost hunters, however, how now come to be exclusively associated with violent or traumatic emotions.

dearth of material evidence and perceptual cues from a landscape that no longer resembles a busy slave port, ghost hunters must necessarily rely upon authoritative intuition as an effective supplement to other technologies (e.g., EMF meters, audio recorders) and forms of reasoning (e.g., induction, inference) to know the market as a site for residual hauntings distinct from other kinds of paranormal activity.

Authoritative intuition fulfills two functions within a paranormal investigation. First, it creates a connection between individual and collective imaginaries. Intuition prompts ghost hunters to engage with collective memories—through imaginative speculation and empathic projection—to identify potentially "haunted" locations and thus, ideal sites for paranormal investigations. Further, mnemonic devices found in the material surrounding during an investigation, such as laminated images of slave ships, bring to mind iconic meanings as "ideological landmarks that keep an individual on course" (Levi-Strauss 1968:74). As ideological landmarks, collective memories inform ghost hunters on how they should feel, that is, their emotional involvement and gut instincts. But perhaps more significantly, these cultural meanings inform how ghost hunters intuit the appearances of former landscapes. This imagined landscape guides their technical practices, including the most probable kinds of paranormal phenomena they might encounter and "hot spots" to collect measurements, photograph, record, and conduct EVP sessions.

And second, authoritative intuition creates connections between a once perceived inert and inaccessible past with the exigencies of the present moment. It allows ghost hunters to invoke collective memories, alongside personal experiences and emotions, to access and reimagine temporality. Authoritative intuition, therefore, can be seen as transforming residual

hauntings into paratemporal spaces where the emotional resonances of past tragedies continue to be felt in the present.

Residual hauntings as paratemporal spaces are brought into existence through feelings of wonder and uncanniness, as Gabriel describes, "like something was there before you." "The paradoxical," Hugh Raffles writes in *In Amazonia*, "was often the defining trait of the wondrous" (Raffles 2010:125). Pursuing this insight, residual hauntings derive their paradoxical and thus, wondrous nature from their status as both single entities and as entities that are inherently empty.

On the one hand, residual hauntings are perceived as *sui generis* in their materiality and history. For instance, the New York Slave Market is singular in its status as a pivotal site for the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and as a particular intersection on Wall Street. The singularity of the market is particularly evident in Bradley's failed investigation at an incorrect location. Ghost hunters perceive the material landscape to be repositories for past tragedies. And as such repositories, the paved sidewalks, the river, and the skyscrapers betray a hidden history, bringing into sharp relief the excess of "human meanings, designs, and purposes" (Bennett 2010:125). It is this intuited excess, which sparks feelings of enchantment and wonder, transporting ghost hunters to another time and compelling them to seek connections with residual energy in the first place.

On the other hand, residual hauntings are inherently empty of meaning, in the sense that they do not possess enduring or essential qualities. Rather, residual hauntings are defined by encounters with their percipients, or what Bergson called, "the empathic coincidence of subject and object" (1975:25). Ghost hunters use authoritative intuition to know residual hauntings, not as objects of thought to be absolutely known; but rather, as portals transporting them to past worlds, whether located in their own personal memories or a seemingly bygone era. Residual

hauntings are experienced as paratemporal landscapes where past selves exist alongside present realities and imagined potentialities.

Seen in this light, ghost hunters know residual hauntings through authoritative intuition as guiding technical practices and as a form of reasoning that mixes personal intellectual, sensorial, and emotional meanings with impersonal collective memories and semiotic meanings. External representations, such as images of slave ships, are not simply distinct and separate, "just as prosthetic extensions of the body" (Lenoir in Rotman 2010:xii). Rather, they are embodied and enacted alongside subjectively appropriate feelings and potential empirical evidence, to know a place as a "haunted" site. Thus, the very act of thinking with authoritative intuition, then, distributes cognition across the boundaries between past and present and individual and collective.

Conclusion

There are many properties of intuition and intuitive thought processes that make it difficult to define or formulate into a formal theory. The subtleties of authoritative intuition within a paranormal investigation offer a small glimpse into the inner-workings of intuitive thinking in "real-world" conditions, which are often fueled by personal desires, beliefs, and stakes, in addition to the larger uncertainties and contingencies associated with ghosts and other paranormal phenomena. And in doing so, they opens up new lines of inquiry for other anthropologists in other fields studying epistemic and technical practices, which are multi-dimensional, culturally embedded, and perhaps most significantly, in which intuitive and abstract reasoning (while analytically separable) are in practice both integral and inseparable knowledge processes.

In this chapter, we have seen the trust that ghost hunters place on authoritative intuition when faced with a dearth of material evidence and a lack of perceptual cues from an anonymous intersection that seemingly reveals almost nothing about its hidden past. This trust, however, must be contextualized within broader negotiations and constraints, including research protocols and standards of evidence set by the paranormal research community, as ghost hunters attempt to navigate the burden of proof. As a pursuit that openly values both intuitive and analytic forms of reasoning, this article illustrates the myriad of strategies used by ghost hunters in their attempts to validate their "subjective" feelings with other kinds of more seemingly "objective" technical practices, such as photographing, audio recording, and measuring electromagnetic field fluctuations.

More specifically, the unfolding processes of authoritative intuition within paranormal investigations illuminate how intuitive and abstract thought processes are used to enhance the analytic power of the other. While abstract reasoning dictates how ghost hunters collect and scrutinize their data, intuitive reasoning brings to mind semiotic meanings and collective memories, particularly of something as salient as slavery in America, used to contextualize and transform data (e.g., measurements) into evidence for particular kinds of hauntings. As tandem processes of knowing, intuition as applied to empirical data and semiotic meanings reveals the situated nature of intuitive insight as contingent upon (own and co-percipients') bodies, technologies, material surroundings, and broader cultural meanings.

As a result, authoritative intuition can lead to a path of probability, but it cannot lead to a path of certainty. This is partially due to the fact that paranormal researchers make use of insight that cannot be publicly verified and must juggle competing tensions between subjective certainty and objective uncertainty. While this may seem inconsequential in other aspects of their lives,

the use of intuition as an authoritative knowledge and as a technical practice has profound

consequences for ghost hunters, especially for their larger efforts to substantiate their claims and

to gain public legitimacy.

Despite these limitations, however, authoritative intuition nevertheless plays a crucial

role for a methodologically reflexive community, which continues to revise core theories and

methods in their attempt to create ever more robust and nuanced explanations to account for the

paranormal. Authoritative intuition affords opportunities for ghost hunters to provisionally and

strategically encompass a wide range of seemingly paranormal and non-paranormal phenomena

as potentially relevant data. Moreover, it also allows them to grapple with cognitive processes

that are very much in flux—often vacillating between knowing and feeling, evidence and belief,

certainty and uncertainty. As processes of thinking and knowing that transcend these binaries,

authoritative intuition acts as portals to the paratemporal; thereby, creating the conditions of

possibility for ghost hunters to not only reimagine past worlds, but also the limitations of linear

time.

CHAPTER 4

The Train Conductor: A Case Study of a Haunting

"Chance has put in our way a most singular and whimsical problem, and its solution is its own reward." (Arthur Conan Doyle)

"Any truth is better than indefinite doubt." (Arthur Conan Doyle)

It was a slow afternoon. Gabriel, the director of Gotham Paranormal Research (GPR) and I met for our usual weekly interview at the basement of his Brooklyn home. We had run out of topics to discuss. I quietly stared at Gabriel as he thumbed through his old case reports of past paranormal investigations for inspiration. "This is the best investigation," Gabriel said, a memory suddenly occurring to him, "it was all so intense that parts of it, even 'til today were kind of unbelievable, like shocking. It would have made a great movie." "Would you mind pulling the file for that case?" I asked him. "I know it off the top of my head," he responded, "I can tell you the whole thing."

"I was called by a man who lived in New Jersey," Gabriel recalled, "and I think he was on disability at the time." [107] Prior to being placed on disability, Alan worked as a train conductor for the New Jersey Transit. A New Jersey Transit train speeds along its rails at seventy miles per hour. Alan's train was fast approaching what appeared to be a trash bag lying in the middle of the tracks. As the train drew closer, a young boy, about seventeen years old, stood up on the tracks. "He just stood there." Upon seeing the boy, Alan immediately pulled the brakes. "He was going to stop it," Gabriel explained, "but you know, it takes seventy five feet before a train can stop." The boy was instantly killed.

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[107] This paranormal investigation occurred in 2007.

Three years passed. Alan walked into his bathroom. There was a photograph lying on the tiled floor. He picked it up and to his horror, he recognized the person in the photograph. Staring back at him was the face of the seventeen-year-old boy who decided to kill himself on the night of his shift.

"There are weird things going on in my life," Gabriel remembered Alan telling him over the phone, "and I can't handle it."[108] Alan decided to contact a paranormal research team for help to explain the anomalous occurrences in his life. "I literally thought this guy was losing his mind," Gabriel recalled. He described Alan as a "nervous wreck" and a chain smoker. "He was one of those people who was always moving around, you could even tell over the phone, he didn't even pause in between sentences."

Recent events convinced Alan that the spirit of this young boy was "haunting him, tormenting him, blaming him for killing him." In particular, Alan reported the recurring sensation of pressure on his chest. "I keep getting this pressure on me," he described, "like somebody is sitting on me in bed." He emphasized this was not something that could be explained away by sleep paralysis. More striking still, Alan added that he had also found a photograph of a young boy on his bathroom floor. He told Gabriel of the train accident three years ago. "I got to the bathroom and found this picture and thought: what does he want? What does he want from me?"

"And now this is throwing me for a loop 'cause I thought a 'picture'?" Gabriel explained to me. "This is weird, this doesn't sound right, something is wrong that this guy could be having this type of experience." Gabriel's clients typically report more subtle paranormal encounters,

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[108] This narrative is told from Gabriel's point of view. Alan's quotes are in actuality Gabriel's recollections of what Alan said. For the sake of the narrative, however, I present Alan's quotes as in his own words.

such as an uneasy feeling, a sudden chill, or a fleeting shadow, which are highly ephemeral, subjective, and seldom produce any durable or permanent traces.

This case, then, seems especially "weird" because the materiality of the boy's photograph is in startling contrast the kinds of paranormal phenomena that Gabriel usually encounters in paranormal investigations. Moreover, this "weirdness" can be attributed to the fact that Alan's extraordinary account is further rendered dubious or unreliable by his behavior as a "nervous wreck." The appearance of the photographs on Alan's bathroom floor is particularity unsettling both because it falls outside of Gabriel's realm of possibilities within a paranormal investigation and because it points to possible disjunctures between Alan's mental state and "reality."

For the next three months, GPR embarked on what Gabriel called a "once in a lifetime investigation." They would attempt to resolve this "haunting" by piecing together both obvious and obscure clues to form a coherent narrative and thus, explanation to account for the mysterious appearance of the boy's photograph on Alan's bathroom floor. "We dug up information on the kid. We found out about his family life. We found information on his school. We interviewed his friends to find out about him and why he would you know (commit suicide)." And later, they would scrutinize Alan's personal details, social relationships, mental and emotional states, and even, the seeming gaps in his memory.

In this chapter, I follow GPR on what I have entitled "The Train Conductor" case, the paranormal investigation of a train conductor haunted by the spirit of a seventeen-year-old boy. This chapter mimics the structure of a classic detective story in that it presents the paranormal investigation in successive stages, saving for the end the "big reveal" or resolution of the mystery posed to readers at the start of the case. This narrative structure shows the progressively excessive or "nonsensical" elements of Alan's account. And it brings attention to the moments

when Alan's knowledge fails him; thus, requiring the help of Gabriel and his team to act as "detectives:" interpreting new clues, corroborating existing clues, and forming explanatory hypotheses in order to solve the mystery of the photographs.

A paranormal investigation occurs within an artificially (temporally and spatially) bounded nexus. Within this nexus exist multifaceted and interrelated sensibilities, methods, technical practices, and technologies that coincide and work synergistically in order to determine whether or not a site is haunted. Depending upon the idiosyncrasies of an individual case or the kinds of evidence available, ghost hunters will foreground certain methods over others (less useful to the immediate investigation).

"The Train Conductor" case focuses on methods and modes of analysis that closely examine the full extent of a client's personality or what I call "client-centered" methods. What I mean by "full extent" is that the concerns of ghost hunters are not limited to the details of their clients' paranormal experiences, but also the fabric of their social and mental lives. Client-centered methods include: interviews with clients and their family, friends, and professional colleagues; background research on their life history (including medical history); archival research; close observation of their client's habits and behaviors; and even, in Gabriel's case, applying psychoanalytic techniques and hypnotherapy. These methods allow them to collect data on their client's childhood, life history, lifestyle, previous paranormal experiences, and religious affiliations as well as their possible history of mental illness and their current medications.

Perhaps more telling than personal information gleaned from surveys or interviews are the clues that ghost hunters notice when they are observing their clients. "I had a feeling from the way [he was] describing things," Vince, the co-lead investigator of GPR, explained, "especially the gentleman's affect, the way he was talking, the way he held his head, that there was more

140

than met the eye." Subtle verbal, gestural, or behavioral cues, such as "avoiding eye contact, shyness, and indirect talking," can offer insight into a client's emotional or psychological state, why he might claim to have paranormal experiences, and more importantly, whether or not he is consciously or unconsciously withholding relevant information or fabricating his narrative. "The more intense [a client] is feeling their emotions (particularly traumatic emotions)", Gabriel claims, "the easier it is to identify them because [he or she] is giving you clues." Thus, ghost hunters transform social and psychological data collected from client-centered methods into clues that shed insight into their clients' unconscious desires, hidden psychic trauma, and the roots of their paranormal experiences.

The "Train Conductor" case is particularly indicative of how the paranormal has captured the imagination of the public and has not only influenced how they see the afterlife, but also their homes and the world around them. More than unsettling the boundaries between life and death, ghosts and other paranormal phenomena provide salient idioms for many people, who subscribe to paranormal beliefs, to make sense of their identities, relationships, and personal conflicts (see Psychological Hauntings). The twists and turns of this case reveal how ghost hunters and their clients conceptualize their paranormal experiences and negotiate between "what they see" and "what they know" (Gordon 2008: 24).

In particular, this case is concerned with the nature of what I refer to as "clues" or provisional signs that help ghost hunters determine whether or not a place is haunted and more specifically, the kind of haunting (e.g., intelligent, residual) present in their client's lives. It presents three overlapping narratives: Alan's narrative, Gabriel's narrative, and my own narrative. I present these narratives together in order to understand how GPR recognizes their client's habits, practices, behaviors, and language as clues that might point to realities that are

141

not immediately accessible to perception or empirical inquiry. More precisely, I am referring to infrapersonal states or subjective experiences, emotions, ideas, and beliefs of their clients. How does Gabriel make legible Alan's infrapersonal states as clues to solve the case? And more importantly, how do these clues index the reality of the unseen?

To answer these questions, I bring together the anthropology of religion and scholarship that connects psychoanalysis and the detective fiction genre (Landrum, Browne, and Browne 1976, Zizek 1990, Howe 2008). I borrow insights from anthropologists, such as Webb Keane and E. Valentine Daniel, who examine the semiotic relationships between religious experiences and beliefs and their bodily and material instantiations in order to understand how clues are constructed within paranormal investigations.[109] Moreover, I engage with historians and literary critics who analyze the detective fiction genre to understand how clues (in the form of bodily and material instantiations) function to index unconscious desires, hidden motivations, or inborn traumas.

Clues transform infrapersonal states into perceptible and analyzable objects (things, words, behaviors). Ghost hunters interpret their clues through two interrelated inferential processes. The first process connects infrapersonal states (emotions, ideas, beliefs) to perceptible signs (immaterial → material). And inversely, the second process connects these signs to underlying infrapersonal states, specifically unconscious traumas (material → immaterial).

The following section finds GPR in Alan's home. I show how Gabriel and his team build upon their preliminary hypothesis with new clues offered from the on-site investigation. More precisely, I examine how Gabriel borrows from techniques found within psychoanalysis and detective stories to create a satisfactory explanation to account for the mysterious appearance of the boy's photograph on Alan's bathroom floor and thus, put an end to his "haunting."

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[109] See also Csordas 1998 and 2002, Desjarlais 2007, and Robbins 2008.

The Train Conductor

"I can't wait for you guys to get here," Gabriel recalled Alan saying, "I can't even stay in that house." Alan owned another home at the Jersey shore. In a follow up conversation, he told Gabriel that he had been living there since he found a second photograph of the boy. "Do me a favor and scan both pictures," Gabriel told Alan. Now there were two photographs.

"Have you ever had any connection with [the boy's] family?" Gabriel asked, scrutinizing the scanned photographs. "No, I have never," Dom remembers Alan replying. "So you never met his parents?" "No." "Did you go to his funeral?" "I drove to it and never left my car." "At the beginning, it was driving us crazy," Gabriel explained to me, "because the pictures and then him saying that he never even went to the funeral, he never went to the [boy's high] school, he didn't know nobody."

After learning about the appearance of the second photograph, Gabriel set out to uncover what he called the "back story" of the boy's life. "I had to know, that if this boy was truly haunting him, I had to find out the reason why," Gabriel explained. "Like, why would the boy haunt him?" There seemed to be no apparent connection between Alan and the boy.

Gabriel and Alice, a GPR member, drove four hours to the boy's hometown in upstate New York. They went to the library to track down local newspaper articles that covered the train accident. Gabriel and Alice then drove past the boy's home. There they saw his father. "We knew that if we wanted to," Gabriel said, "we could have made up a story to get information out of his father. But there are certain lines you do not pass." They decided to not interview the family because as he puts it, that would have been in "poor taste."

Instead, Gabriel and Alice went to the boy's high school to interview his friends. "We had the newspaper articles," he noted, "but they didn't give out information about where he was

[on the night of his death]." So they interviewed his friends to learn more about the details of that night and to learn about his personality and private life more generally. "We asked people around if they knew so and so," Gabriel recalled. "Once we were led to people who knew him better, that's when we started conducting the interviews."

Posing as college students studying the history of train accidents, Gabriel and Alice explained to the boy's friends that there were collecting stories about suicides by trains. They did not reveal to the friends that they were ghost hunters gathering information for a paranormal investigation. "The one thing I notice," Gabriel said to me, "you never tell people that it is paranormal 'cause […] they don't talk to you." "So we were able to get a lot of information," he added. "The funny thing is that we were getting stories of other people who knew people whose friends jumped in front of a train and they were giving us their information too."

During these interviews, two high school security guards approached Gabriel and Alice. "But we explained things to them, one security guard was really good about it and he actually made sure the others would not bother us," Gabriel said, justifying his actions to me and perhaps, more so to himself. "[Be]cause technically, what we were doing was illegal." Quickly correcting himself, he added, "it wasn't on school property, I mean, it was outside."

But perhaps more unsettling than the quasi-legality of their actions, however, were the questionable ethics associated with their decision to knowingly deceive the boy's friends for interviews. While Alice and to a lesser extent, Gabriel did not "feel right" about their deception; they nonetheless deemed it necessary in order to obtain these interviews. "There was literally no other way of getting [the information]," Gabriel stated, "I didn't want to leave it where we didn't have all of the information." Further, he justified his actions:

"We didn't force them to say anything. We said you don't have to tell us anything. We are trying to piece together this whole entire story. And we were very open about it. And [the friends] gave us their phone numbers and said 'you know, if you want to know anything else, just call us, here's our number.' So we didn't force anyone to tell us anything"

From these interview, Gabriel and Alice learned that the boy had no intention of selecting Alan's train. "He was going to kill himself no matter what," Gabriel explained, "there were family problems he had already." Moreover, they found out that his girlfriend had recently ended their relationship. On the night of his suicide, he attended a party where he became very drunk. "He was depressed," Gabriel explained, "everybody at the party knew he was depressed." The boy told his friends that he was heading "straight home." He had to pass the train tracks on his way home. "He just decided at one point that he couldn't take it anymore," Gabriel added, "and he killed himself."

Gabriel pulled out scanned copies of the two photographs found in Alan's home. He showed them to the boy's friends. They confirmed the photographs were images of their friend. And unexpectedly, one friend recognized the photographs from the boy's funeral. "Those were family photos," Gabriel elaborated, "they put up a board 'cause it was closed coffin…that's probably where those pictures were from." Friends and family members removed the photographs from the display board to keep as mementos. "I described [Alan] to them," Gabriel added, "nobody remembers seeing this guy at the funeral."

While Gabriel was able to learn the "back story" of the seventeen-year-old boy, he had little luck extracting details from his own client. "It's still too fresh," Alan pleaded, refusing to elaborate further beyond what he had already told the team. In lieu of his testimony, Alan provided Gabriel with the phone numbers of his mother and his coworkers. Gabriel first called Alan's supervisor posing as a concerned friend. "I noticed him behaving oddly," he told the

supervisor, "and I am really trying to figure out what happened that day because he won't talk about it." "I can't really talk about him," the supervisor replied, "because he is still seeing a therapist." Instead, he referred Gabriel to Alan's partner, the co-conductor, who was with Alan on the train on the night of the accident.

"He was not right after that happened," Alan's partner told Gabriel over the phone. Even more telling, he revealed that Alan was placed on a psychological leave that required him to meet regularly with a work appointed therapist. At that moment, it dawned on Gabriel that Alan was placed on a psychological disability leave *not* a physical disability as he had originally claimed. Alan's mother, who incidentally was the only person who Gabriel did not need to deceive for an interview, also confirmed this fact. "She by all means wanted to help her son." Gabriel explained, regardless if this help meant participating in a paranormal investigation or through more conventional channels. "She told me everything that I wanted to know."

Gabriel's efforts to learn the "back story" of the seventeen-year-old boy and his client through archival research and a series of creative yet ethically dubious interviews ultimately proved successful in that they offered a number of important insights. First and foremost, they confirmed that the photographs found inside Alan's home were indeed images of the seventeen-year-old boy who committed suicide by standing in front of Alan's train. These interviews also confirmed that there were no connections between Alan and the boy. In other words, the fact that the boy selected Alan's train seemed to be an entirely random act. The boy was depressed and as Gabriel puts it, "was going to kill himself anyway." More significantly, these interviews revealed a major contradiction in Alan's account: he was placed on psychological *not* physical disability. Why did Alan feel the need to hide this fact? And more importantly, how does this affect the overall credibility of his narrative?

More troubling still, these facts seemed to shed little light into the mysterious appearance of the boy's photographs in Alan's home. Alan claimed that he did not attend the funeral nor did any of the boy's friends claimed to have seen him or anyone who fit his description there. Yet, the photographs found in Alan's home seemed to be the same photographs displayed at the funeral. Moreover, these contradictions are complicated by the fact that Alan's narrative is furthered rendered dubious by omissions or outright deceptions *and* by his friends and family confirming that he was "not right" after the accident. Before Gabriel can solve the mystery of the photographs and resolve Alan's "haunting," he must first reconcile these contractions and piece together the actual narrative of events.

To do this, Gabriel begins with the provisional hypothesis that Alan's narrative is unreliable. He suspects that as Alan as he puts it, "probably" attended the funeral and stole the photographs himself. At this point in the investigation, however, Gabriel does not speculate on how it is possible for Alan to not remember his actions or whether or not he is intentionally deceiving the team. Gabriel formulates his hypothesis by analyzing clues from his "back story" interviews; particularly, interviews with Alan's mother and partner detailing his disturbed mental and emotional state following the train accident. But perhaps the subtle clues found in Alan's demeanor—his refusal to speak about the accident or his lie about being placed on physical not psychological disability—made a more striking impression on Gabriel.

The Reality of the Unseen

Clues act as indexical signs that connect immaterial or in our case, infrapersonal states, such as emotions, ideas, and beliefs, to material instantiations found within Alan's seemingly

"odd behavior" or duplicitous actions. [110] As Keane argues in *Christian Moderns*, "semiotic forms require material instantiations" (2007:80). Or put differently, we can never fully separate material and immaterial forms or expect any provisional divisions between the two to remain stable (ibid).

Given these connections, clues are not abstract or arbitrary sign-object relationships. They are instead mediated by what Keane calls "real connections" (2007:22) or modes of signification between what is taken to be a sign and some actually existing object, be it in the mind or the material world. Moreover, he argues that indexical signs exist within webs of meaning or "representational economies" that function to "situate words, things, persons dynamically within the same world with one another" (Keane 2007:22). Semiotic meanings, therefore, are provisional and contingent upon the shifting norms, rules, logics, and conventions that govern a representational economy.

Following Keane's insights, clues can be seen as creating "real connections" that are made meaningful through our past experiences, subjective beliefs, memories, and imagination. Yet, they also impinge upon our perceptions in a manner that can be intersubjectively tested and corroborated by other persons or existing clues. With these qualities in mind, the act of inferring clues within an ongoing investigation entails both subjective and objective processes, which are inextricably tied to individual interpreters and the larger representational economies in which they are embedded.

Moreover, understanding clues as indexical signs embedded within a representational economy creates certain analytic affordances. First, it implicates ghost hunters within their own processes of signification, that is, it show they bring personal biases, preexisting knowledge, and

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[110] As Webb Keane and E. Valentine Daniel show in their works, the immaterial is not limited to infrapersonal phenomena (which is the narrow scope of this chapter) but can also encompass invisible agents, such as spirits or deities, and nonhuman objects, can change meanings and have a place in and shape reality.

past experiences to bear on current situations. It does not treat interpreters as distant observers privileged with an "objective" vantage point. As Daniel argues in *Fluid Signs*, "knowledge about the other, or object knowledge, is but an extension of self-knowledge" (1984:41). Moreover, he further argues:

> "Man himself is a sign. As a semiotic sign or symbol, he is not a closed, completed entity. He is ready and open to connect with, to enter into dialogical relationships with other selves and other signs" (Daniel 1984:41).

According to Daniel, "object knowledge" or knowledge of other persons and things, is inseparable from knowledge of the world, that is, the broader social and cultural norms and conventions that guide an interpreter's inferences and connects humans and signs within larger webs of meaning.

The second affordance is that it allows for flexibility, showing the unfolding inferential processes used by ghost hunters to interpret new clues in order to formulate explanatory hypotheses that can best approximate the "truth." Following Daniel's insights, meaning emerges from "dialogical relationships" between an interpreter and his human and nonhuman interlocutors. As a consequence, meaning is created through provisionally fixed interpretations that are subject to change with new interlocutors and shifting webs of conventionalized meanings.

With the addition of new cultural norms or rules, the meanings of clues are liable to change. In other words, their meanings are intrinsically subjective and provisional. The meanings associated with clues are never fully stabilized; but rather, exist virtually as potentialities for future signification. New clues can corroborate or change the meaning of existing clues. This dialogical or what Daniel calls "fluid" nature of signs is particularly evident in how Gabriel ascribes meanings to bodily practices, such as the speed of Alan's speech or his chain smoking,

as clues for emotional distress or unconscious desires. Moreover, these clues are transformed into explanatory hypothesis for deeper traumas as Alan's behavior becomes increasingly erratic and as interviews with his friends and family reveal the conscious and unconscious deceptions within his narrative.

While treating clues as fluid signs offers these analytic affordances, it also poses certain limitations: ghost hunters can never fully generalize about their clues. Clues act as provisionally fixed sign-object relationships that connect infrapersonal states to bodily and material instantiations within a particular (limited spatial and temporal) paranormal investigation. They take on very specific meanings that emerge from both intersubjective encounters and the material conditions in which they are found. What counts as a clue in one investigation, take Alan's chain-smoking for instance, might not hold the same significance or relevance in another investigation. Moreover, ghost hunters can never be entirely sure that their hypothesis reflects the "truth" or actual sequence of events. Clues can lead ghost hunters to formulate the "best" explanatory hypothesis or most likely scenario, but they cannot lead to "truth" itself. In short, it can lead to an asymptotic approximation of "truth."

This holds especially true when Gabriel attempts to infer Alan's infrapersonal states to build explanatory hypothesis, weave together a coherent narrative that account for the mysterious photographs, and ultimately, resolve Alan's "haunting." He borrows from the twin methodologies of psychoanalysis and detective work to understand trauma is mediated through clues and inversely, to interpret these clues to locate the "original trauma" (Howe 2008:2) at the root of Alan's paranormal experiences.

The Big Reveal

On the day of the on-site investigation, Gabriel and his team members, Peter, Mark, and Alice, arrived at Alan's home. He greeted them at the door wearing a three-piece suit. Alan is a short and stocky man in his mid-forties. He appeared to be as Gabriel described, "very nervous, very very nervous." "Thank God you guys are here," Gabriel remembered Alan blurting to him, "I don't know what I am going to do." He proceeded to talk uncontrollably.

"Sit down! Sit down!" Gabriel said frustrated by Alan's ranting, "I can't understand you when you are talking like this." A bit startled, Alan became silent. "What is going on with you?" Gabriel asked him, "we can't help you unless you calm down, the more tense you are, the worse it is going to be." This somewhat soothed Alan. "I just don't understand, I don't know why this is happening," he stated. "I found another picture." A third photograph. "Show me all of the pictures," Gabriel responded. Carefully turning them over in his hands, Gabriel closely examined the three photographs. There was nothing written on the back, he noted to himself, no messages, nothing remarkable about these photographs. "This is all very odd," he thought.

Alan stepped outside and lit his third or fourth cigarette. When he returned, the team began their investigation. "He was always right by my side, watching everything that I was doing," Gabriel recalled. As he surveyed the contents of Alan's living, he noticed a tray on top of the fireplace mantle. There was a small ring inside the tray. It appeared to be a child's ring. He picked it up and asked Alan: "Do know what this is?"

"I've never seen that before," Alan replied, alarmed at the sight of the ring. "Where did you find it?" He was becoming increasingly distraught. He began to hyperventilate. "Oh my god!" he exclaimed between short breaths. "Now he is putting jewelry in my house!"

"Are you sure there was nothing in [the tray] at the start of the investigation?" Peter asked Gabriel bluntly, attempting to regain order in what was quickly becoming a chaotic situation. "No I am not," Gabriel replied. "I can't say that [I am] one hundred percent sure that the ring was not there before."

"I don't know what to do," Alan cried. "The kid is after me!" He was inconsolable. And he was also ranting again. For the next half hour, Gabriel sat with Alan. He attempted to calm Alan by suggesting that if the spirit of the seventeen-year old by was indeed trying to communicate with him, he is not blaming him for anything. He suggested that it was possible that the boy did not know he was dead. He explained to Alan that when a person dies suddenly or traumatically, his or her spirit might not realize that it is dead. Gabriel speculated that the majority of intelligent hauntings that he encountered were not threatening or malevolent, but simply a spirit reaching out for help. Perhaps, the boy was confused and was somehow trying to figure out what happened to him.

Furthermore, Gabriel explained to Alan that the boy's suicide bore no relation to him. He did not deliberately or knowingly choose Alan's train. "If the train had not killed him that night," Gabriel said, "he would've found another way." "But that doesn't matter," Alan retorted, "he *did* choose my train." Nothing was helping," Gabriel recalled. "I mean this guy was just going and going and going."

Trying a different tactic, Gabriel told Alan, "I have methods where I can try to completely calm you down so I can figure out what happened." Gabriel is currently a professional hypnotherapist. At the time, however, he was about six months into his training. "I was a little nervous at the time," he confessed. "I didn't hypnotize him, but I got him in a relatively calm state." In this calm state, Alan confessed to something that he had never openly

admitted before. Alan admitted that he attended the boy's funeral. He drove to the funeral, got out of his car, walked inside the church, stood in the back, and shortly left without talking to anyone.

"Is there any possible way that you went to the boards and took the pictures?" Gabriel asked him. "Oh no, I would not do that," Alan replied. "Are you sure?" Gabriel prodded further. "I'm not." "What do you mean?" he asked. "I'm not, I'm not sure," Alan hesitantly admitted. "Is there a possibility that you went to the funeral and stole these pictures and somehow you have been scattering them around your house without knowing it?" Gabriel asked bluntly. "That has never crossed my mind."

The clues from the "back story" interviews and perhaps even more damning, Alan's own admission that he attended the funeral, all led Gabriel to believe that he had stolen the photographs himself and unknowingly scattered them throughout his home. Gabriel suggested that Alan had experienced what he called an "alternate reality" or an altered state of consciousness that was caused by his all consuming guilt after the boy's death. This guilt caused Alan to stage his own haunting in "another state of consciousness;" thus, never realizing that he was the responsible party. Moreover, Gabriel suggested that Alan's "haunting" was an unconscious cry for help. "The same person who [was] putting the pictures down," he joked, "is the same person who stole the pictures in the first place!"

Despite the fact that Gabriel attributed Alan's haunting to psychological as opposed to supernatural forces, the team went ahead with their paranormal investigation. He explained:

> "We had to do it anyway […] to form a complete conclusion, you have to do all of the testing. Even if the second we walk in and we know it's not paranormal, we still do all of the tests."

Mark and Peter set up the audio-visual recording equipment (e.g., camcorders, audio recorders, microphones) throughout the home while the others collected baseline readings. [111] After the investigation, Gabriel and his team reviewed and analyzed their data and compiled a report of their findings.

Gabriel told Alan that the team had failed to capture any evidence to support paranormal activity in his home. "We didn't pick up anything from the [baseline] readings or anything," he explained. However, Gabriel was also quick to point out that paranormal investigations rarely offer clients closure or definitive resolutions. They instead offer provisional findings and suggestions or as he puts it, "what we think now." Additionally, Gabriel suggested that Alan needed more help that what a paranormal research team could offer. In particular, he suggested that Alan see a different therapist to work through the tremendous guilt that he had been harboring since the boy's death. "This is what I think the possibility is," Gabriel told him, "if you go to a psychologist or psychiatrist, you might be able to get a lot more information."

"At no point in the case was it paranormal," said Gabriel, reflecting upon the investigation. "None of it." Noting that the irony of the case was not lost on him, he added, "I mean, I walked away from that being the most profound investigation without it being paranormal at all."

This case was profound for Gabriel because it offered him a glimpse into the power of our hidden mental lives to shape our everyday lives. "It was amazing for me to see how something perceived as paranormal turned out to be guilt," he explained, "you know, like such strong guilt." More specifically, he hypothesized that Alan was doubly traumatized. He was traumatized from his guilt, leading him to believe that he actually killed the boy. And, he was traumatized from the "haunting," leading him to believe that the boy was tormenting him,

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[111] For a more detailed discussion of the purpose and process of collecting baseline readings, see Chapter 2.

holding him responsible for his death; further exacerbating his guilt. Elucidating the connection

between Alan's guilt and "haunting," Gabriel explained:

> "Well I think he literally felt like he killed somebody. That traumatized him. It
> created this almost like alternate reality, like he couldn't face it, so he like
> invented it. An alternate reality! Something that he could like wrap his mind
> around. You know what I mean? If he could convince himself that the kid was
> haunting him because the kid was blaming him in some way, he actually thought
> maybe that would help him, you know."

"I have never seen a case like this extreme," he added, "like how much [guilt] could influence a

person to where you could have an alternate reality that you could literally place things into

[your] life [that could] case more stress, he literally couldn't let go."

Gabriel speculated that Alan was so traumatized by the train accident that he

unconsciously invented his "haunting" as a coping mechanism to deal with his guilt and

ultimately, to seek help. And as he points out, "it essentially did work." Alan's "haunting"

prompted him to seek out a paranormal research team that helped him realize his unconscious

trauma and it led him to seek additional professional help. Although he was treated by a work-

appointed therapist as part of his psychological leave, they had both failed realize to extent of his

guilt and trauma. "[Alan's guilt] was one of those things that he never admitted to anybody,"

Gabriel explained, "and it came out in a paranormal way [or] what he perceived to be

paranormal."

Alan's trauma manifested in subtle and not so subtle acts that disrupt the normal flow of

his everyday life. Since the train accident, he had suffered from anxiety, insomnia, sleep

paralysis, and a psychological disability that prevented him from maintaining his professional

life and that required him to regularly see a work-appointed therapist. More dramatically, it had

manifested in the form of a "haunting" or paranormal encounters with the spirit of a seventeen-

year-old boy who would "sit" on his chest as he slept (causing the recurring sensation of pressure

on his chest) and scatter photographs of itself throughout his home, leading him to fear living in his own home and eventually selling it.

Alan's trauma did not stem from a singular experience, but rather, from chronic encounters with a spirit that leave him paralyzed with fear. According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, trauma does not solely arise out of a one-time violent act, but the inability to transcend the past in order to live in the present moment (2007:99). Seen in this light, Alan's trauma does not exist as a dated moment; but instead, becomes a general manner of "being in the world" that informs all aspects of his everyday life: his perceptions, cognition, emotions, memories, and imagination.

More striking still, Alan's case shows how trauma can also color our unconscious mind, bringing to light the illusions of our consciousness as well as our hidden desires and motivations. According to Sigmund Freud, our incoherent or fractured narratives, omissions and deceptions, amnesias, ticks, self-destructive tendencies, and psychosomatic symptoms all point to an "original trauma." He further elaborated that our psychosomatic symptoms are the result of sensory hallucinations or repressed memories displaced onto innocent bodily sensations (Freud 1963:44); for instance, the recurring sensation of pressure on Alan's chest.

To this day, Alan does not remember stealing the photographs from the boy's funeral or scattering them throughout his home. Two months after the case ended, he told Gabriel that he sold his house because he "literally could not live there anymore." He also told Gabriel that he had begun to see a new psychiatrist. Together, they worked out that his actions were completely unconscious and if it were not for Gabriel's help, Alan would never have fully realized the depth of his emotional and psychological distress. They deduced that Alan never came to terms with his guilt and it manifested in this "alternate reality" that he could not control. Moreover, Alan

and his new therapist concluded that he needed to face his guilt in order to move on with his life. "Last time I heard from his was [four years after the investigation]," said Gabriel. "He said he's been working with it and life has been a lot better."

Psychological Hauntings

By debunking this case as emotional trauma and stress, Gabriel relegated Alan's haunting to the status of a "psychological haunting," a kind of haunting distinct from "intelligent hauntings" (returned spirits) or "residual hauntings" (unexplained natural phenomena). [112] Psychological hauntings provide a theoretical framework that makes it possible for Gabriel and other ghost hunters to understand paranormal experiences as a distinctive kind of trauma, a trauma that is expressed in terms of ghosts, demons, and other supernatural entities. More specifically, it allows them to connect paranormal experiences to various mental states, emotional distress, personal conflicts, and altered states of consciousness.

Psychological hauntings or sometimes called "emotional hauntings," refer to paranormal phenomena that are internally generated by clients, that is, a figment of their imaginations. In contrast to intelligent or residual hauntings, psychological hauntings can be caused by various factors within a client's life. For instance, they can be attributed to a client's mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia, depression) or side effects (e.g., hallucinations) of legal and illegal drugs, alcohol, or other mind-altering substances.

Moreover, psychological hauntings can also be attributed to clients who use paranormal phenomena as a proxy for their more deep-seated personal problems. Vince cleverly coined the term "Paranormal Munchhausen Syndrome" to describe this phenomenon. "Rather than

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[112] "Intelligent hauntings" refer to paranormal activity caused by the returned spirit of a deceased person who can interact with living person through manipulating the environment (e.g., Ouija boards). See Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of intelligent hauntings or "spirit-return." "Residual hauntings," in contrast, refer to paranormal activity caused the imprinting of a living or dead person's energy on material landscape. See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of residual hauntings.

admitting they (referring to his clients) are having these issues on an emotional or financial level," he explains, "it is easier for them to say we have an entity, we have a demon ruining our lives, than to take personal responsibility."[113] In cases of Paranormal Munchhausen Syndrome, clients deliberately fake a haunting as a means to seek attention and to displace blame onto demons or other supernatural entities for their own personal conflicts or misfortunes.

More predominantly, ghost hunters understand psychological hauntings to be a form of misrecognized fear or emotional distress. "Feelings make something real, fear twists belief," Gabriel explains, "most clients are stressed to begin with and this alters their perception." "A traumatic moment can create a stressful state of being that opens you up to different states of mind and altered perceptions." According to Gabriel's logic, psychological hauntings are caused by misrecognized fear or emotional distress that colors perception, leading clients to believe that they are being haunted. Perhaps a bit counter intuitive, ghost hunters believe that fear or stress can potentially cause paranormal experiences as opposed to the other way around, that is, paranormal experiences causing fear or stress to the client. Unlike Paranormal Munchhausen Syndrome, these clients, like Alan, seem to be wholly unaware that their hauntings are internally generated, a symptom of their emotional and mental state.

Following diagnosis, psychological hauntings are primarily resolved in two ways. Ghost hunters attempt to debunk their clients' paranormal experiences using mundane or natural reasons to demystify the "haunting." Or, they attempt to transpose their clients' fear and ignorance with agency and empowerment. There are several tactics used by ghost hunters to empower their clients. Ghost hunters can use hypnotherapy or psychoanalytic methods to identify the root cause of their client's paranormal experiences. And subsequently, they can also

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[113] Other ghost hunters, such as Connie from the Orange County Paranormal Club, have similarly described these clients as being "stuck in victim mode."

refer clients to professional therapists and religious specialists. At times, they even rely upon metaphysical techniques, such as the use of meditation, singing bowls, Reiki, Feng Shui, and home cleansings or blessings, in order to comfort their client and provide him with tangible coping mechanisms. Psychology and metaphysics, therefore, can be seen as working in tandem to resolve a paranormal investigation. "What I bring to an investigation is my ability to see the larger picture and help [a client] put their life back in order," Gabriel explained. "I can see a person and know their potential."

The common goal shared by these tactics is to reframe a negative mindset (thoughts, emotions, perceptions) into a positive mindset. It is the act of identifying the root cause of their client's paranormal experiences and substituting elements of their incoherent and fear-stricken narrative with a coherent narrative. As Vince explains:

> "We are into enlightening people, explaining to them what they are experiencing, helping them to understand and empowering them so that they are not afraid. That's definitely what it is about, it is about empowerment."

Demons or other supernatural beings that were once feared and thought to be malevolent or dangerous are rhetorically and thus, perceptually transformed into a guardian angel or deceased family member. "When a client rethinks his fear and changes his perspective," Gabriel elaborates, "he becomes less fixated on the paranormal phenomena that are disturbing him."

At the heart of these tactics are two main assumptions: the relativity of "truth" and the plasticity of the human mind. First and foremost, Gabriel and Vince's discourse on empowerment is inextricably tied to their belief in the relativity of "truth." As Gabriel explains, "everyone had their own truth, their own heaven, their own perception." On the one hand, Gabriel's premise that "everyone has their own truth" or what I refer to as the relativity of "truth" prevents ghost hunters from having a clear-cut and standardized program to treat

psychological hauntings. On the other hand, it is particularly advantageous because it allows them an incredible degree of flexibility to outright debunk paranormal phenomena *in toto* or to work within their client's own belief system, depending on the contingencies of the investigation or the individual needs of the clients. Unlike the "truth" of positivism or at the opposite end of the spectrum, nihilism, ghost hunters posit "truth" as subjective as subjective and experientially real, as something that produces real consequences in their clients' life. This harkens back to William James' pragmatic truth or Freud's argument that the "truth" of a diagnosis lies in its ability to affect change (e.g., thoughts, behaviors) in his patients' lives (1963:11). [114]

But perhaps more important than the relativity of "truth," is the assumption that the human mind is plastic and malleable. In many ways, this assumption follows closely with the American adaption of psychoanalysis with its emphasis on "adaptability" the ego (Heald and Deluz 1994:4). It is the optimism that a client is capable of affecting the course of his life and is capable of changing himself by changing the way he thinks. For Gabriel, the plasticity of the mind lies in the power of the imagination. More specifically, it is in the abilities of clients to change their mindset through imagining new scenarios and fixing new meanings onto their paranormal experiences. Gabriel and other ghost hunters help their clients imagine new scenarios by providing them with a new vocabulary to describe their anomalous experiences or strategies (e.g., meditations) to manage their fears and negative thoughts. The primary goal of a paranormal investigation is, as Gabriel puts it, "to change how people think, help them make new associations."

Psychological hauntings shift the focus of attention from collecting evidence (e.g., measurements, photographs, audio recordings) to what Emmanuel Levinas called a "medical

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[114] See Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of William James' pragmatic truth or see James 1907 and 1909. Other scholars have similarly discussed the relativity of truth; see Throop 2003, Desjarlais 1997 and 2003, Jackson 2009, Peirce 1957 and 1991, and Merleau-Ponty 1962.

gesture" or a "promise of help" (1988)[115] with the ultimate goal and overall success of an investigation resting upon alleviating the clients' fears. In other words, the objective of these investigations is to primarily help or as Vince puts it, "empower" their clients and secondarily, to collect evidence to prove or deny the existence of an afterlife. Given these objectives, paranormal research does not simply involve learning how to use the tools of the trade, but also, learning how to deal with clients. As Gabriel explains, prior to taking on a single investigation, he spent five years preparing as he puts it, "knowledge-wise" and "reaction-wise," for how he would handle his client relationships. "The team must be guided by compassion because at the end of the day it could all turn out to be fake," Gabriel joked, "even if this was all for nothing, at least we were able to help people along the way."

The Game is Afoot!

What I found most profound about "The Train Conductor" case is that it offers a grounded account of how GPR worked to interpret clues from Alan's hidden mental and social lives: personal details, subjective impressions, deceptions, omissions, nervous ticks, behaviors, and habits, which index deep-seated thoughts and emotions, even unconscious desires and motivations. Moreover, it shows how they used these clues to construct and more significantly, to convince Alan to adopt their coherent narrative accounting for the "original trauma" at the root of his paranormal experiences, solving the mystery of the photographs, and empowering him to change his life. As Peter explained, "[Gabriel] literally figured out the most likely scenario of what Alan was doing, to the point where he realized he was probably doing it." To understand how Gabriel and his team members construct a coherent and thus, empowering narrative, it is necessary turn to the twin methodologies of detection and psychoanalysis.

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[115] See also Seeman 1994.

As Slavoj Zizek notes, Freud was an avid reader of Sherlock Holmes stories, not so much for entertainment, evidently, as for pure methodology (1990:29). "Far from being a genre of ratiocination as [Edgar Allen] Poe called it," Robert Rushing proposes, "[detective fiction] is in fact a genre of misdirection and misrecognition [of desire]" (2007:4). [116] Using the language of Freud, Rushing shows that detective fiction and psychoanalysis both share similar cognitive processes and analytic devices. For instance, psychoanalysis and detection are fundamentally cognitive activities, using logic, deduction, and ratiocination to lend significance to odd or apparently trivial elements in a set of clues and reconstruct events within their patient-clients' lives. Moreover, they both assume that at the heart of their patient-clients' deliberate or unconscious deception lies a hidden truth, be it a secret or an "original trauma." In Alan's case, it is an original trauma, which he himself does not know.

"I begin treatment, indeed, by asking the patient to give me the whole story about his life and illness," Freud wrote of his methodology, "but even so the information I receive is never enough to let me see my way about the case" (1963:30). According to Freud, a patient engages in deliberate or unconscious deception for three possible reasons. First, a patient intentionally conceals his secret due to timidity or shame. Second, a patient does at occasionally have access to part of his "anamnestic knowledge," but this knowledge disappears when he is actually telling his story (Freud 1963: 32). This disappearance, however, is not due to conscious action or deliberate reservation on the part of the patient. And third, a patient experiences gaps in memory or "true amnesia" which can include both new and old memories (ibid). In these cases, habits, sensory hallucinations, and new conscious thoughts or what Freud called "pramnesias" form secondarily to fill in the gaps (ibid).

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[116] Edgar Allen Poe is credited to be the inventor of the detective fiction genre.

Psychotherapy and detective work, therefore, share the practical aim of transforming the patient-clients' seemingly nonsensical and fragmented narratives into coherent narratives. Differing slightly from detection, however, psychoanalysis aims to use these coherent narratives to empower or "cure" its patients. It returns to patients "forgotten memories that have resulted in pramnesias and other pathological psychosomatic symptoms (Howe 2008:3). The act of restoring forgotten memories replaces pathological symptoms with conscious thoughts; thereby, providing clients with an understanding of their own lives and thus, the power to change it. Harkening back to an earlier discussion on the relativity of "truth," "precisely that power to change [one's] life was Freud's test of truth [of his psychoanalytic interpretations]" (Reiff in Freud 1963:12) (See Psychological Hauntings).

As Alexander Howe argues, "trauma of the unconscious necessarily marks the place were knowledge fails" (2008:6). Thus, trauma is alleviated when "the patient and the analyst can articulate a hidden cause of the symptoms" (Howe 2008:1). Following Howe's argument, Gabriel's efforts to reconstruct Alan's fractured narrative can be seen as a therapeutic intervention or an attempt to alleviate his trauma in the following ways: he works to fill in the gaps of Alan's narrative by recovering events presumably lost to memory or consciousness. And, Gabriel works to supplant Alan's narrative that is rendered incomplete by fear and ignorance with a coherent and thus, empowering narrative. The result: illumination and the end of mystery or perhaps more aptly, the end of a "haunting."

Gabriel resolves Alan's "haunting" through two ongoing processes of inference. First and foremost, Gabriel identifies and analyzes seemingly obvious and obscure clues found within Alan's physical appearance, the content and form of his speech, psychosomatic symptoms (e.g., habits, behaviors, nervous ticks), and broader social relationships, which might index hidden

desires and motivations concealed by his seemingly insane description. In particular, these clues lead him to believe that Alan's narrative is unreliable, that is, filled with amnesias or intentional deceptions. And second, he reads these clues, as material and bodily instantiations of Alan's unconscious traumas, in order to formulate an explanatory hypothesis that accounts for the most likely scenario or sequence of events *and* the "original trauma" at the root of his paranormal experiences. Using these clues, Gabriel is able to convince Alan to accept his narrative in place of his own.

Hauntings, as Avery Gordon argues in *Ghostly Matters*, bring attention to "the very ways in which we discover things or learn about others or grapple with history is intimately tied to the very things themselves, to their variable modes of operation, and thus to how we would change them" (2008:66). As a result, acts of reconstructing narratives can be seen as defined by the "intermingling of fact, fiction, and desire," *and* toward particular pragmatic goals or ends (Gordon 2008:24). Borrowing Gordon's insights, reconstructing narratives entail specific challenges, including: non-linear temporality, irrationality, and non-discrete spatiality. And more generally, they raise important questions over "the always unsettled relationship between what we see and what we know" (ibid). In fact, this is particularly evident in Gabriel's efforts to create a coherent narrative to explain Alan's haunting, requiring him to grapple with the boundaries between cause and effect, past and present, and conscious and unconscious.

In many ways, Freud also recognized the limitations posed by the processes of inference used in psychoanalysis to fully know the mind, especially, the unconscious mind, of his patients. Like acts of interpreting clues as manifestations of infrapersonal states as discussed in the previous section, Freud did not believe that psychoanalysis could uncover an "objective truth." He instead believed that "truth" was found in the power to change his patients' minds and to

create the conditions of possible for them to change their own lives (1963:11). "Truth," then, is treated as a pragmatic force that has the power to shape beliefs: beliefs that can change a patient's perceptions, relationships to their own infrapersonal states, and thus, their reality.

These limitations are perhaps most acutely felt in the fact that Alan never *actually* remembers stealing the boy's photograph from the funeral or scattering them in his home. Seen in this light, "The Train Conductor" case is defined by what Howe calls a "conjectural paradigm" (2008:28). Gabriel's narrative or explanatory hypothesis, in particular, is constructed through a process of inference based on probabilities, not certainties. As a result, Gabriel's narrative of "alternate realities," albeit convincing, is ultimately conjectural in nature. Thus, he can never be entirely sure if his hypotheses reflect the "truth" of Alan's infrapersonal states or the actual sequence of events. This uncertainty, however, seems to matter very little in the end. In the end, Gabriel's explanations did seemingly put an end to Alan's "haunting." But perhaps more importantly, it provided an impetus for Alan to begin his self-transformation.

Conclusion

Following in the tradition of the detective fiction genre, "The Train Conductor" case began with a mystery. It began with a disjuncture between two realites: a reality as subjectively experienced and an "objective" reality dictated by reason, logic, and natural laws that posit photographs or any objects for that matter cannot simply materialize out of thin air. "In many ways," Larry N. Landrum, Pat Browne, and Ray B. Browne argue, "detective fiction is concerned precisely with this distinction between reality and image" (1976:1). It tends to create situations in which our reality is in conflict with the reality dictated by a mad killer or in our case, a train conductor who believes that he is being "haunted" by the ghost of a seventeen-year-old boy.

Differing from the classic detective story, however, this case presented three overlapping narratives: Alan's narrative of his paranormal experiences (as recounted through Gabriel), Gabriel's narrative of the events that led to his resolution of the case, and my own narrative. It presented a typical narrative arc following Gabriel as he attempted to reconcile the Alan's reality with his own reality (Landrum, Browne, and Browne 1976:1). And, it presented my own narrative analyzing the inferential processes used by Gabriel and his team to identify clues and explanatory hypothesis. In my own narrative, I explored the limits and affordances of these inference processes within an unfolding paranormal investigation in which the objects or "ghosts" are highly unstable and mutable in light of new clues. Within "The Train Conductor" case alone, Alan's "haunting" evolved in his perception from a vengeful spirit to an unconscious trauma.

When faced with a dearth of material evidence (e.g., recordings, measurements), Gabriel and his team turned to psychological as opposed to supernatural theories to account for their client's paranormal experiences. GPR uses "client-centered" methods to collect data and conduct their paranormal investigations. "Client-centered" methods served to embed Alan's paranormal experiences within the full scope and complexity of his social and mental lives. In particular, GPR privileged newspaper articles, gossip and second-hand sources, interviews, and close observations to search for clues that might reveal Alan's conscious and unconscious traumas. And, they used these clues to fill in the gaps of Alan's memory, build explanatory hypotheses to account for the mysterious photographs, and thus, put an end to the "haunting." Thus, the case is resolved when Gabriel expertly identifies and returns to Alan his "forgotten memories" (i.e., stealing or scattering the photographs) that have resulted in his haunting or perhaps more

significantly, when Gabriel changes Alan's mind or as Freud puts it, effects a "transformation of attitude" (1963:11)

"The Train Conductor" case revealed a different facet of paranormal research. It reveals a facet that is deeply humanistic, holistic, and surprisingly, secular. Unlike other kinds of hauntings, psychological hauntings are not solved through the use of repurposed scientific instruments of measurement or audio-visual technologies. They are instead solved through the interpretation of clues: clues that connect infrapersonal states to material instantiations and inversely, material instantiations to infrapersonal states. This shifts the focus of attention from proving or denying the existence of ghosts or collecting evidence for the posterity of their field to uncovering the emotional or psychological bases for their client's "haunting."

Following the use of clues within "The Train Conductor" case yielded a number of interesting insights. As C.S. Peirce argued, "though there are some notions, such as the idea of God, which are literally unthinkable and cannot be immediately present in the mind, they can nonetheless be represented and can therefore be an object of thought" (1991:14). With Peirce in mind, the most basic insight is that immaterial or in our case, infrapersonal phenomena can be known through perceptible signs. Psychological hauntings involve paranormal experiences that are profoundly personal and intimate, often connected to the depths of one's unconscious mind. Yet, they find collective expression in forms that enable intersubjective testing and more striking, in forms that can be transformed into objects of paranormal research.

Moreover, clues within psychological hauntings offer insight into how ghost hunters grapple with uncertainty that arises from both shifting representational economies and knowing the unconscious mind. This was particularly apparent in Gabriel and his team's efforts to infer the amnesias that comprise Alan's "original trauma" and fill in the gaps of his fractured memory.

This case showed how they treat their explanatory hypothesis as asymptotic approximations of "truth" and provisional most-likely scenarios or as Gabriel puts it, "what we know now." And, it shed light on how ghost hunters use the relative "truth" of their hypotheses as an advantage toward particular pragmatic and therapeutic goals.

To this end, this case interrogated the notion of "truth" within paranormal research. Similar to other paranormal investigations, this case too revealed that "truth" whether in the theories that ghost hunters adhere to or in the diagnoses that they offer their clients is unattainable and yet, ultimately unimportant. In cases of psychological hauntings in particular, the primary goal is to initiate a change in the client's perception or as Vince puts it, to "empower them so that they are not afraid." Ghost hunters accomplish this by outright debunking paranormal phenomena, as seen in Alan's case, or by creating a rhetorical shift, transforming malevolent or dangerous supernatural entities into guardian angels or a deceased loved ones. In short, it is to transform an uncontrollable situation into a controllable situation.

This case, then, offered an account of how ghost hunters grappled with relative "truth" within their paranormal research theories and practices. More specifically, it showed how Gabriel creates provisional solutions by supplanting Alan's memories with new memories; bringing to light his unconscious traumas and thereby, creating the conditions of possibility for him to improve his situation. But perhaps more significantly, this case revealed a fundamental assumption among ghost hunters: it reveals their optimism in the plasticity of the human mind. "Even smell and taste can be manipulated," as Gabriel explains, "all perception can change." It is the belief that people can change their minds and thus, change their lives.

CONCLUSION

Let us return to a question posed in the introduction: how are ghosts *made* real for ghost hunters living in a pluralistic, self-aware, secular, and scientific society?

Ghosts are no longer things that we merely believe in, they are things that we know; things that we can potentially measure, record, photograph, and prove. Ghost hunters who treat ghosts as empirical objects must learn to see differently, feel differently and think differently. They must learn specific ways of attending to their minds, emotions, bodily experiences, technologies, and material environments to find evidence of paranormal activity. And that as a result, they come to experience ghosts as real, knowable phenomena.

This dissertation approached the question of how ghost hunters experience ghosts as real, empirical phenomena through three overarching themes: the problem of scientific authority; the relationship between science and "other" knowledges; and pragmatic truth. Chapter 1 situated the origins of paranormal research within the efforts of William James and ASPR researchers to find scientific evidence of the postmortem survival of human consciousness. It traced how James vacillated between his own moral convictions and the burden of proof amidst larger debates on the nature of the human mind and more broadly, between scientific materialism and free will. While James' efforts to test the question of "spirit-return" were inconclusive, his studies established the existence of the subliminal mind and altered states of consciousness.

Contemporary ghost hunters have inherited this burden of proof. This is not an easy task given that ghost hunters do not actually know what are ghosts or how to accurately study them. Paranormal research is and has always been defined by two opposing forces: the search for scientific proof and the inevitable failure to find proof. These competing forces have led ghost hunters to create ever more sophisticated technologies and nuanced theories that surprisingly

concern human nature as much as they concern the nature of ghosts and other paranormal phenomena. More precisely, they have led to the proliferation of "ghosts" as ontologically real phenomena, psychologically real phenomena, and as unexplained natural phenomena.

Chapter 2 confronted the paradox of precision instruments: ghost hunters privilege precision instruments that are ultimately ineffective in performing diagnostic functions. It showed that ghost hunters are aware of their marginalized status and know that using precision instruments does not make them scientists; but it does grant them aura of objectivity and scientific authority. Moreover, precision instruments allowed ghost hunters to symbolically align themselves with a tolerant future science that might one day acknowledge their efforts and provide them with answers to their questions on the afterlife.

Given the seeming ineffectiveness of precision instruments and other technologies, ghost hunters must necessarily rely on "other" knowledges not recognized by the scientific method to determine the "haunted" status of a location. Chapter 3 traced the evidentiary value placed on intuition and how it is formalized alongside other technologies and forms of reasoning toward a diagnostic goal. Ghost hunters apply positivist logic to collect and scrutinize data and they must use their intuition to give meaning to their data. These tandem processes of knowing demonstrate the situated nature of intuition as contingent upon technologies, material surroundings, and broader cultural meanings. Moreover, they showed that intuition, as a form of knowing that cannot be objectively verified, can lead to a path of probability, but it cannot lead to a path of certainty.

The tension between subjective certainty and objective uncertainty was most acutely felt in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 followed ghost hunters as they resolved a case of "psychological haunting" using popular psychoanalysis to return to their client "forgotten" memories of an

unconscious trauma; thus, debunking his paranormal experiences. It revealed a deeply humanistic, holistic, and secular side of paranormal research, showing how ghost hunters uncovered the emotional and psychological basis of their client's haunting. It also revealed the power of pragmatic truth. The "truth" about ghosts might prove to be unattainable; yet, it is ultimately unimportant. Ghosts are whatever we believe them to be and that is what gives us the power to not fear them.

What ghosts are is constantly evolving. Ghosts are given shape and substance through the technologies used to "hunt" them and these technologies (e.g., EMF meters, thermal imaging cameras) increasingly frame ghosts as immanent, natural phenomena. We have seen ghosts in the form of fluctuating temperature and electromagnetic fields, changing weather conditions, and even recognized psychological afflictions. This shift is particularly evident in how ghosts and other paranormal phenomena are subject to strict standards of evidence (e.g., EVP classifications) and intersubjective scrutiny by experts within and outside of the paranormal research community. Ghosts are empirical objects of inquiry and more often than not, they are objects that can be debunked.

This shift is also obvious in the changing pubic attitudes toward ghosts. Luhrmann suggests that skepticism has made the supernatural safe, even fun: "It turns out that while many Americans may think that there are ghosts, they often don't believe that ghosts can harm them" (2014). Ghosts are no longer objects to be feared. They are instead mundane. These changing attitudes can be attributed to our growing comfort with invisible agents in our everyday lives (as seen in Jean's story in the Introduction). "Our world is animated in ways that can seem almost uncanny—lights that snap on as your approach, cars that fire into life without keys, [and] websites that know what you like to read" (Luhrmann 2014).

Figure 15 Paranormal investigation at Fort Totten. Queens, New York City

The ubiquity of ghosts in our cultural imagination can be seen in films and television, social media, and bookstores. They have even become staples at souvenir shops as museums and historical sites embrace their "haunted" histories to attract more visitors. In fact, I had attended annual Halloween event, created by Latesha, a Queens Nature Center coordinator, for local paranormal researchers and enthusiasts to investigate Fort Totten, a former U.S. Army installation in Queens, New York City. When I attended in 2013, the event drew in over seventy visitors.[117]

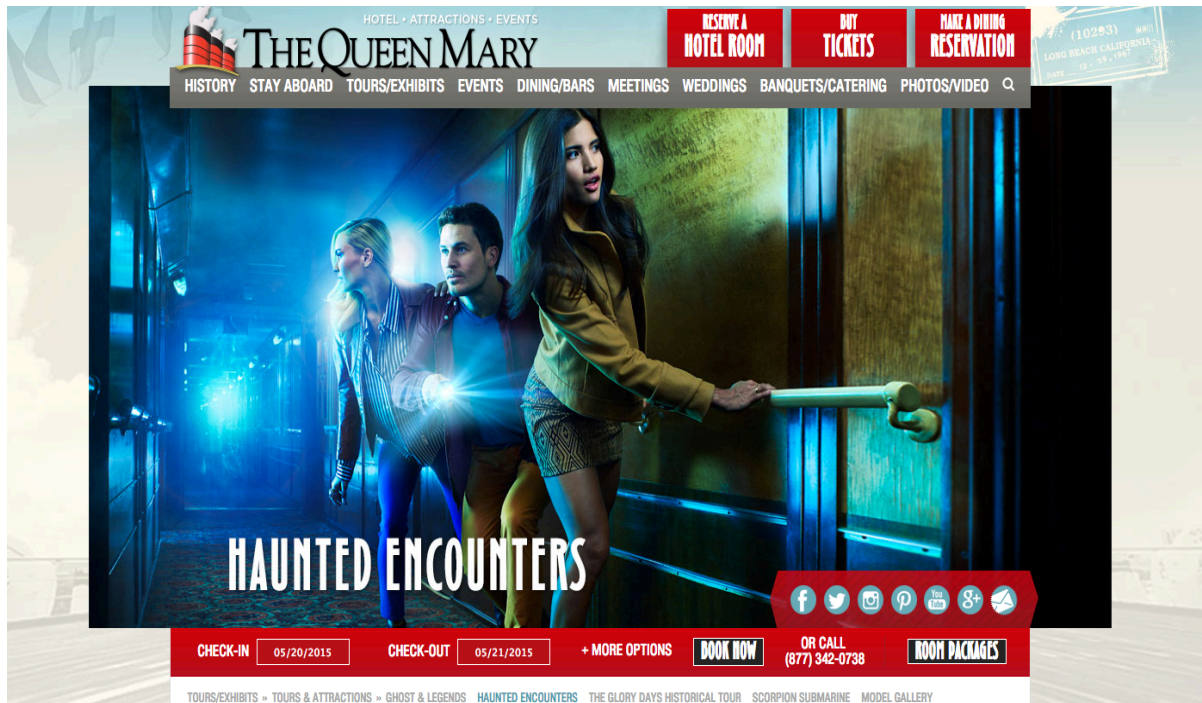[117] The Fort Totten investigation occurred on October 19, 2013.

Figure 16 Ad for "Haunted Encounters" tour aboard the Queen Mary. Courtesy of the Queen Mary website.

This shift from understanding ghosts as objects to be feared to mundane objects, even sources of entertainment will no doubt have profound consequences in how ghost hunters conceive of and do the work of paranormal research. This shift in attitude suggests that the pursuit for scientific authority and thus, legitimacy may no longer be seen as a defining feature of paranormal research. It also suggests that paranormal research will increasing be viewed by many as a recreational activity, as "ghost tourism" as opposed to a search for answers to questions of the afterlife and ultimate "truth." It is apparent to me that America has never has never been more haunted.

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