Shoot the Dead:

Horror Cinema, Documentary and Gothic Realism

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Abstract

This dissertation traces a "gothic-realist" genealogy in cinema that will help scholars to reconsider a whole series of horror and documentary films in the modern and postmodern periods and offers new possibilities to theorize the horror film. I explore "Gothic realism" in three paradigmatic forms. I first discuss its entry into 1940s fiction films that blend Gothic-horror's focus on individual and collective psychic trauma as a way of interrogating a troubled wartime and postwar reality (Chapter I). Second, I discuss avant-garde and pseudo-documentaries that adopt strategies of Gothic-horror to evoke unreadable subjects and/or undetected realities—products of a productive skepticism around American environmental, social and national stability from the 1970s, through the millennial period, and into the 21st century (Chapter II). And, third, I examine mockumentary and fake found-footage horror cinema that turns to strategies of documentary and factual discourse to express a generalized millennial and 21st-century archival anxiety around human interaction with recording technologies (Chapter III). These three manifestations of Gothic realism, I argue, adopt the mood, themes, and rhetorical strategies of horror and documentary to form a critical discourse that troubles the real—focusing spectatorial attention on the limits of representation, and the inability of representations to tell us what we want to know, and feel, about our reality.

This thesis explores Gothic realism as a critical disruption of the generic categories of documentary, avant-garde, and horror cinema, opening up possibilities to investigate the relationship between what might be called the "sensorial epistemologies" shared by all three forms. Gothic realism holds these sensorial epistemologies in liminal sway, an interaction that may best be investigated through the lens of Michel Foucault's notion of the "apparatus" (*dispositif*)—here, a conceptual site of critical intersections that work to defamiliarize the everyday, challenging our normal avenues for understanding the world through appeals to ambiguity of meaning, multiplicity of perspective, overdetermination of possibility, elusiveness of subject or event, and emphasis on spectacle and sensation. I focus on films that are exemplary of both a popular, highly visible cinema (e.g., *Citizen Kane* [1940], *Capturing the Friedmans* [2003], *Unfriended* [2015]), and of a more subversive, independent, B-movie tradition (*Bluebeard* [1944], *The Hellstrom Chronicle* [1971], *Lake Mungo* [2008]). Regardless of their production contexts, or status as "highbrow" or "lowbrow" cultural products, the films that I discuss deploy Gothic horror as a mode of inquiry into a reality that resists conceptual tracing and

positivistic strategies. In doing so, they disrupt the comfortable categories of documentary, horror and avant-garde, opening up possibilities to investigate the relationship between the sensorial epistemologies shared by the three forms. This study concludes that Gothic horror in fiction and nonfiction cinema becomes a mode of engagement with reality that operates as a critical discourse on mediation and sensation—on the real as always-already unreadable, overwhelming, uncapturable.

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Introduction:
Towards a "Gothic Realism" in Cinema

Something is pushing against the surface of things.

— *General Orders No. 9*

I. Preliminary: The Gothic-Realist Object

In the spring of 2012, I co-curated a program of films for the Sebastopol Documentary Film Festival devoted to the Gothic documentary or "gothumentary" film.[1] The conceptual framework we devised for the four films to be programmed included a stipulation that the selected films in some way work to defamiliarize the everyday, challenging our normal avenues for understanding the world through appeals to ambiguity of meaning, multiplicity of perspective, overdetermination of possibility, elusiveness of subject or event, and emphasis on spectacle and sensation. Among the films sent by the festival organizing committee for consideration was the evocative experimental documentary, *General Orders No. 9* (2009, Robert Persons).[2] I was enthusiastic about this poetic rumination on a vaguely sinister reality of urban degeneration and longing for an awakening to the damages of "progress" in the American South. While the film resists attempts at coherent synopsizing, it may be best described as an essayistic meditation on a sense of absence or lack—of an awareness of history, of human attempts to dominate the Southern, particularly Georgian, landscape. An associational juxtaposition of natural and artificial spaces—forests, fields, cabins, corridors, maps, highways—underscored by mournful choral interludes, and featuring the city (an unnamed Atlanta) as a kind of hollow relic at its center, Robert Persons' elegiac vision resisted narrative to rely entirely on an aesthetic of "attractions" (Gunning, 1986, 2006), confronting the viewer with sublime spectacle in place of didactic warnings of coming crisis. We recommended the film for our program, but the organizers ultimately turned it down, with the comment that the film was "not a documentary." I was to learn later that the film was uniformly rejected by the organizing committee, who were programming for a film festival with a local audience that was largely non-academic; thus, the committee was unsure and concerned about how the film might be promoted and received. Such concerns are a testament to the film's power as a hybrid object, resisting categorization and

encouraging a range of responses, sensations, and meanings that are not meant to result in hermeneutical closure. The goal of this study is to provide a way to approach such works through a critical lens that combines the Gothic horror and documentary forms.

The moving image works I discuss in this study vary from the popular to the experimental, from fiction to nonfiction. I focus, for example, on documentaries that turn to the language of Gothic horror to evoke meanings that lie in excess of what they can fully represent. I trace a similar strain of excess in Hollywood Gothic horror cinema's flirtations with a darker reality in the wartime and postwar 1940s, as well as late 20th-century and early 21st-century popular cinematic blends of horror and documentary. Within all of these explorations, we find a reality that can be expressed only through an increasing combination of excessive mediation, to locate subjects stranded in a mire of shadowy wartime cities, and the world of suspicion and surveillance that parallels them in the late-20th-century cultural imagination. While a key issue here is to outline the connections shared by horror and documentary cinema through a focus on troubling and troubled representation, this study is also an entry into the dialogue on cinematic realism(s). That is, I am interested in how documentary and horror traditions blend and share certain key concerns in the representation of reality that can be traced back to early cinema's blurred distinction between actuality and spectacle. The mixture of these traditions in 1940s Hollywood horror, the Gothic documentary, and the mockumentary and fake found-footage horror film (discussed below) highlight the persistence of what Tom Gunning calls the "cinema of attractions" throughout the 20th century in both documentary and horror cinema, where direct address and paradigmatic spectacle disrupt the narrative (or supplant it) in ways that can approach the experimental. This study concludes that Gothic horror in fiction and nonfiction cinema becomes a mode of engagement with reality—a Gothic realism—that operates as a conceptual site for bringing sensation and desire back to our understanding of the real. Before I move on in this introduction to outline the theoretical value of the Gothic as a critical-realist mode, I want to elaborate a bit on just what this hybrid, "Gothic realist" object looks like through further discussion of Robert Persons' challenging film.

General Orders No. 9 is part lyrical meditation on a fragile post-industrial present, part cultural critique of the obliviousness and lack of foresight that made this fragility possible; it evokes this sense of critique through the productive paranoia it generates from a collective uncanny. The film is also part Weird-travelogue, in the Lovecraftian sense of the "Weird"—that

is, its landscapes and spaces are made to stand as evidence of a kind of outré cosmic instability, where other dimensions of the real press upon humanity an awareness of its being dwarfed and diminished. Though it resists the documentary label in the strategies it employs, Persons' film does participate in what Michael Renov cites as the "modalities of desire, impulsions which fuel documentary discourse" (1993: 21). These, he adds, exist not only in the subject matter, but "*through and against* pleasurable surface" (Renov,1993: 25, original emphasis). There is here a frank admission that the documenting eye is less transparent than "transformational" (Renov, 1993: 33). In Gothic realism, this transformational element of documentary is fully acknowledged through medium and genre reflexivity. *General Orders No. 9* oscillates between two of Bill Nichols' documentary modes, the performative and the poetic. Nichols' poetic mode describes a concentration on documentary form as much as or more than on content or context (Nichols, 2010: 162). Persons' film, for example, employs repetition and lingering shots that encourage a critical spectatorship. It conjures a sense of an entire region of the South as a ruin, overtaken by a paradigm that privileges progress; yet the film itself is also a kind of ruin in that it is designed as an embodiment of an unspoken, secret or repressed history worthy of meditation.[3] Much of *General Orders No. 9* is made up of images so still they seem closer to photography than cinema: a single tree standing stolidly in a field of mist, an extreme close-up of an unearthed bullet held fast by fingers that share its wrinkled age, the prickly cylinder and minute metal teeth of the interior of a music box, a long aseptic corridor bathed in white, a leaden sky further bruised by fists of clouds, the jutting concrete curve of an empty highway onramp, a frozen weather vane. These images linger and repeat, encouraging the spectator to see their duration and juxtaposition as evidence of a reality that lies within and beyond them, that can only be suggested by them. Persons derives an expectation of imminent revelation from his stylistic tendency to linger. The protracted images in *General Orders No. 9* reach back to the stillness of the photograph to encourage the reinvigoration and infusion of a sort of magical, even spiritual, essence to the minutiae and spaces the film explores. The film's generation of such stillness heightens awareness of the sublimity in the forgotten minutiae of the everyday. In Walter Benjamin's terms, such images create an "unruly desire" to locate that "something that goes beyond testimony" and "something that cannot be silenced" that one finds in certain photographs—a "magical value" and a "tiny spark of contingency" (2006: 58). Its almost photographic stillness is also perhaps why Persons' film—despite being so lyrical and oneiric in these moments—has

been received as a documentary; for, as Francesco Casetti has observed in *Theories of Cinema, 1945-1995*, the particularly photographic nature of the cinema is what has "disposed [it] to become evidence, a document" (1999: 22). The sense of duration heightens the shots of quotidian natural and urban spaces to the point of banality in *General Orders No. 9*. But the continual prolonging of such imagery pushes the image to bear meaning beyond its status as evidence; accordingly, it also asks for more critical, interrogatory and introspective viewing strategies from the spectator.

In its decidedly poetical design, *General Orders No. 9* generates a meditative quality that relies on a degree of aestheticized distance from the historical, and calls attention to itself as an object worthy of meditation in its own right. It is, also, as with Nichols' performative mode, highly expressive, emphasizing "intimat[ion]" and "evocation" over "validation" (Nichols, 1994: 100, 99, 99). Its lyricism and emotional overtones evidence what Nichols identifies in the performative mode as "a shift in emphasis from the referential" that "blurs yet more dramatically the already imperfect boundary between documentary and fiction" and "makes the viewer rather than the historical world the primary referent" (Nichols, 1994: 94). Yet, the film also keeps the postindustrial Southern historical context that drives its melancholic vision in counterbalance with its poetic play with form. Persons' poetic monologue, however personal and subjective, calls out to the spectator to participate in its sensorial exploration of a hauntingly suggestive landscape, and a "ghostly longing." "What remains after all have gone? When each generation finds itself in unfamiliar surroundings?" its voice-over intones. "Could it have been some other way?" Pairing such plaintive interrogations of a troubled reality with its other expressive strategies, Persons' film maintains a dogged hermeneutical gap, a "stress on fragmentation and ambiguity" (Nichols, 2010: 165) that opens it up to the troubled and troubling discourse on representation and interpretation found in the Gothic's often highly-subjective, fragmentary, sensational accounts. The film's gestures to the historical may seem as oblique as its title—an allusion to Robert E. Lee's post-surrender speech at Appomattox courthouse in Virginia on 10 April, 1865—but the more poetic strategies here stress an occulted history and present—of, among other things, slavery, intolerance, and the revolutionary equal rights struggles that fought, and continue to fight this oppression—that beg to be acknowledged. The film's many references to maps and borders, for example, suggest a kind of unconscious need to metaphorically stamp artificial meaning and order onto an otherwise unreadable landscape.[4] Persons' film constructs a

"Gothic realism" that taps into Gothic horror as a mode for addressing a reality that is as suggestively layered and resistant to legibility as a palimpsest—a conceptual conceit that will inform the fictional and nonfictional works discussed in the following chapters.

II. Premise: An Alternative Realist Mode

This thesis explores Gothic realism as a critical disruption of the categories of documentary, avant-garde, and horror cinema, opening up possibilities to investigate the relationship between what might be called the "sensorial epistemologies" shared by all three forms.[5] Gothic realism holds these sensorial epistemologies in liminal sway, an interaction that may best be investigated through the lens of Michel Foucault's notion of the "apparatus" (*dispositif*). The apparatus indicates a conceptual site where different regimes of power—here, formal, rhetorical and generic—collide in a discursive space that opens up possibilities for questioning and debate. For Foucault, "the *dispositif* is the network that we can establish between elements" (1980: 194) that typically govern the strict boundaries of critical investigation, or that make certain statements possible within regimes of power. In Foucault's formulation, the apparatus concerns both physical or material elements—such as one finds in architectural embodiments of institutions—and discursive elements—such as the laws and official statements those institutions produce (1980). For the purposes of this study, the apparatus indicates a conceptual space of productive collisions among different powerful discourses on representing the real that parallel the colliding forces of gothic, avant-garde and documentary strategies used to evoke a troubled history and present. The productive space opened up in what I call Gothic realism revolves around how horror, documentary and avant-garde strategies can be deployed as a critique of didactic or positivistic realisms, such as one finds in 1930s social realist films like *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932, Mervyn LeRoy), or the popular U.S. Government-sponsored documentary, *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936, Pare Lorentz).[6] Gothic horror and documentary modes, in their strictest forms, both investigate and mediate the real through basic narrative characteristics that focus on mystery or quest structures. Both relate to what viewers want to *know* and *feel* about something. And both, to certain degrees, present the everyday world as "suddenly strange" (Gaines, 1999: 9), or infused with new and unsettling meanings. The horror quest will often lead the central investigators in these narratives to knowledge that may

overwhelm their fragile (because human) mental faculties; or, said investigators may confront an equally overwhelming resistance to their efforts to come to comprehensive conclusions based upon what they see, feel and sense about their experience. Certain avant-garde films, such as Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) and Stan Brakhage's *The Way to Shadow Garden* (1955), will adopt this investigative thrust through a highly subjective focalization, or "lens," that P. Adams Sitney likens to a "possessed quester" (Sitney, 2002: 328). Both filmmakers made hybrid works concerned with the unsettling of reality, often via a mobile, roving camera meant to embody the searching presence. Even the severe naturalism of Brakhage's silent autopsy documentary, *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1971), is overturned by lingering, probing camerawork extreme close-ups that emphasize the filmmaker's presence, and that highlight a particular concern with not merely presenting, but decidedly abstracting the corpse to emphasize tactility, shape, and surface. Highly interiorized, and following the more episodic, irrational logic of dream or nightmare, these films (like so many Gothic-horror films) explore reality as the product of a near-totalizing psychic projection, where dread and desire for knowledge about the world drive the 'possessed' investigating sensibility. Though my interest in this study is primarily concerned with more popular manifestations of Gothic realism, I highlight the expressionistic avant-gardist work by filmmakers like Deren and Brakhage, as their focus on chronicling experience as a form of combined investigation and introspection offers a parallel to the subject-as-witness so central to the concept. The quest paradigm in the Gothic becomes formalized through extended, sometimes obsessive acts of interpretation—especially of texts, but also of events, persons, spaces. This stress on extended acts of interpretation and investigation suggest the Gothic as an ideal form for troubling the certainties in what Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight (2001) call "factual discourse."

The Gothic subject is, perhaps above all, a *witness* who struggles to chronicle experience; as such, this subject-perspective offers interesting rhetorical strategies for works that wish to investigate the power and limitations of documentary representation. What we want to know in these forms may either elude us—evoking a Gothic sense of dread around what representations of reality simply cannot tell us definitively—or overwhelm us—requiring the visceral power of shock and terror to generate alternative understandings through affect. Either way, horror, documentary and dreamlike hybrids like *General Orders No. 9* and the Deren and Brakhage films depend on spectacle and sensation as a part of their design. As it comes into play in these works,

Gothic realism suggests elements in lived experience that are gleaned more through embodied, sensory experience and affect than through purely cognitive processes. These other realities lurk just beyond whatever margins are set up by the diegetic reality; they lie tantalizingly beyond the technological limitations of the apparatuses entrusted with registering them. Accordingly, Gothic realism will be skeptical of any positivistic approach to relaying knowledge about the world, and even more skeptical of texts and other technologies that attempt to relay such knowledge "transparently." In Gothic realism, whether fictional or nonfictional, a sense of comprehensiveness or conclusiveness, along with appeals to purely cognitive (logical and rational) strategies that remove sensation and embodiment from coming into knowledge—are wholly suspect and under constant scrutiny.

This study treats several distinct periods where cinematic horror diversifies or disseminates into an interrogatory mode for examining and evoking a reality characterized by generalized anxiety. Historically, these periods can be marked by advances in technology or traumatic events that suggest (or promise) a troubled reality: for example, the introduction of photographic and x-ray technologies, rapid late-19th-century industrialization, the mass trauma of WWI, the 1940s wartime period and the U.S.'s rise to global dominance, the first politicized intimations of potential environmental collapse in the 1970s, the millennial fears surrounding Y2K, and the multimedia event that was 9/11. The result is a Gothic reality that undergirds and unsettles notions of subjectivity, agency, history, event, and moment with a sense of coming crisis. Accompanying the Gothic real is a constant questioning of epistemological paradigms, especially in terms of the insufficiency of positivistic aims that exclude affect as a way of understanding the world. As in *General Orders No. 9*'s apocalyptic longing for rupture and renewal, for example, many of the works I discuss in the following chapters conjure a palpable sense of melancholia and/or dread in contemplating *lack* and *absence* as the central focus of their narrative or rhetorical thrust. This sense of there being nothing at the center of things is at the heart of Gothic horror's function as a mode within the types of films I discuss, including film noir, the paranoid woman's film, the gothumentary, the fake found-footage film, the mockumentary horror film, and the horror pseudo-documentary.

To speak of a cinematic Gothic-horror *mode* is to identify what Thomas Elsaesser, speaking of melodrama, calls an "expressive code" (1999: 359), a term denoting a specialized aesthetic mood and orientation towards a subject rather than a set of strict generic conventions.

Certain elements of a mode will be a response to a specific historical moment, an evocation of that moment, or a critical questioning of it via the "tools" offered by genres. Here, generic conventions become a sort of lens, offering a rhetorical structure, a vocabulary, and, perhaps above all, an attitude through which to orient the subject matter. Other elements of a mode will transcend the historical moment, calling upon audience knowledge of the multivalent possibilities of signature conventions (e.g., the haunted house, the monster, the quest narrative) in functioning allegorically. Gothic-horror's particular tonal variations on dread, shock, and terror—along with its tendency to render experience through violent emotions and bodily sensations—provide a critical lens through which to treat issues such as emotional and physical violence; inequalities based upon race, gender, sexuality, and class; and other shared traumas and conditions that signify a troubled present. In other words, rather than the fixed set of conventions that formalize generic content, Gothic horror operating as a mode indicates a critical alignment towards the subject matter that emphasizes conflict and debate, rather than offering reassuring conclusions.

Diverging from strict notions of genres as a fixed set of conventions, the notion of a mode shows works drawing upon generic forms to create a site of conflict and debate akin to the Foucauldian apparatus. In Gothic realism, certain key conventions of Gothic horror are repurposed, so to speak, to function as a conceptual site where reality takes on darker hues derived from horror's focus on a more emotionally-inflected reality: one of extreme mental and bodily states, where the present is burdened by traumatic histories, and where dreams and nightmares mesh uncomfortably with the waking world. Here, I think it helpful to turn to Rick Altman's view of genre as "a complex concept with multiple meanings" (Altman, 1999: 14). To speak of genre in terms of a conceptual site, is already to identify how generic tropes disseminate into a mode.[7] This is because concepts, as Mieke Bal writes, are "sites of debate, awareness of difference, and tentative exchange" (2002: 13). There can be discussion and variance within conceptual frameworks; they are not fixed, but instead are "dynamic" (Bal, 2002: 11) and "intersubjectiv[e]" (Bal, 2002: 13). Perhaps most importantly, they can "travel" (Blanco and Peeren, 2010: xi [citing Mieke Bal, 2002]) from culture to culture, and from discipline to discipline, to be repurposed—to take on new critical valances.

Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) is perhaps the most hyperbolic example of Gothic horror deployed as a mode. It figures its repressed histories and postcolonial dread in direct dialogue with the generic conventions of horror—specifically, a hopeful family struggling under

the weight of the traumatic history of a haunted hotel that, like Edgar Allan Poe's doomed "House of Usher," metonymically represents a degenerating United States of America. Here, the U.S.'s history of racial terror, colonial genocide and frontier struggle play out on a microcosmic level, where one family bears the implications of the bankrupt dead-end that is the American Dream. *The Shining* significantly *performs* Gothic horror in an upfront way that relies on the critical and evocative implications or connotations of genre and convention themselves. Psychic revelations, nightmare visions, confounding mazes, supernatural hauntings, cannibalism, Faustian bargains, and mythical fathers compelled to devour their loved ones, all come crashing down upon one working class family struggling not to be *overlooked* by a national and political narrative that favors "all the best people," as the Overlook Hotel's manager Mr. Ullman christens the hotel's famous guests. To be sure, *The Shining* dons its genre accouterments like a decadent old dame, flaunting its baroque horror excess as a clever critique of America's overwrought and paradoxical claims to being the world's greatest democracy built on genocide and slavery. But underlying its excessive performance of horror's most hallowed and visible generic tropes are the quotidian realities of uncanny domestic terror—where, for example, a child's psychic vision of a violent confrontation between his hopeless parents is but a supernatural dressing-up of a very common American domestic reality of internalized violence. Though such realities must remain hidden in the official narrative of "America the Beautiful," moments like this, the film implies, form America's rather ghastly *real* historical narrative, the result of the many impasses to which the American Dream leads its pursuers.

Films that are examples of Gothic horror as a mode will tend to construct their representations of reality via quotation of or allusion to horror conventions, or the generation of sensations of fear, uncanniness or dread typically evoked by horror conventions. Even the wide array of films discussed in this study—from 1940s B-movie programmers such as *Bluebeard* (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1944); to tabloid-influenced documentaries such as *Cropsey* (Joshua Zeman, Barbara Brancaccio, 2009); to the social media horror film, *Unfriended* (2015, Levan [Leo] Gabriadze)—deploy Gothic horror as a rhetorical strategy to examine through figuration and metaphor otherwise uncomfortable sites of investigation that undergird the real: these will most often revolve around issues such as race, class, gender and sexuality as they struggle, often violently, within and against official historical narratives and regimes of power. For example, while *General Orders No. 9* is no more a Gothic horror film than it is a conventional

documentary, it does generate a sense of apocalyptic dread and uncanny repetition and doubling that suggest the film works through its content with a Gothic sensibility. That is, the film speaks a Gothic language in that it resists narrative and thematic closure; creates a productive ambiguity regarding the questions it raises; longs for radical change; places its spectator in the role of not just curious onlooker, but active interrogator; and supposes a view of reality that is always-already haunted by both repressed history, and dreadful possibility.

While nothing like the baroque performance of convention that constitutes *The Shining*, *General Orders No. 9* is suffused with a Gothic sense of the real. Writer-director Robert Persons' difficult-to-categorize film presents a reality that is by turns, poetic, haunted, uncanny, and sublimely resistant to readings that attempt to circumscribe it within a ring of positivistic closure. It is, in the terms set out by this study, a Gothic documentary—or what I will term, "gothumentary" in Chapter II—as well as a work of archival anxiety. This is to say that it presumes a reality that both compels and resists representation; and, in confronting this reality, it appeals to the spectator through spectacle and sensation as much as to the conventional accumulation of documentary evidence. If anything, what accumulates here is an unsettlingly suggestive repetition of images, statements, and metaphors that ask for a sensorial spectatorship. Persons' film is also a deeply personal piece of *witnessing* that testifies to another, darker reality of America—one which resonates with the renewed trauma of remembering, and a real sense of a history that it is feared will be, or already has been lost, forgotten. Like *The Shining* with its terrifying scrutiny of the horror beneath America's frontiers, *General Orders No. 9* presents a haunting and poetic vision of the American South that presses upon the spectator a series of disturbing repetitions and patterns in urban centers, highways, architecture, abandoned spaces, impressionistic landscapes, detritus and minutiae. Taken together, these elements form an existential meditation upon a neglected reality that belies and undercuts the everyday. Persons' experimental combination of elegiac subjective chronicle, oneiric imagery, and poetic rumination, seeks in its spectator an active, embodied engagement with the fragments of the degenerating reality it traces.

While a key focus here is to outline the connections shared by horror and documentary cinema through a focus on troubling and troubled representation, this study is also an entry into the dialogue on cinematic realism(s). Contrary to its generic status as antirealist, the Gothic as a mode engages directly with the problems of realism, testing representation's limitations and

boundaries, and focusing directly on what Fredric Jameson in *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013) identifies as realism's negative (because "hybrid") center. "Realism," argues Jameson,

> is a hybrid concept, in which an epistemological claim (for knowledge or truth) masquerades as an aesthetic ideal, with fatal consequences for both of these incommensurable dimensions. If it is social truth or knowledge we want from realism, we will soon find that what we get is ideology; if it is beauty or aesthetic satisfaction we are looking for, we will quickly find that we have to do with outdated styles or mere decoration (if not distraction). And if it is history we are looking for—either social history or the history of literary forms—then we are at once confronted with questions about the uses of the past and even the access to it which, as unanswerable as they maybe, take us well beyond literature and theory and seem to demand an engagement with our own present. (2013: 119).

Primary among the conventions that suggest the Gothic's usefulness in terms of a sensibility or orientation—a mode—of investigating the real is a reflexivity that highlights the impasses outlined by Jameson. This reflexivity comes particularly in the Gothic's tendency to build the troubling and troubled representation of events into the fabric of its narrative, specifically through highlighting the act of storytelling as part of the conflict of its protagonist(s).

This reflexive bent singles out key Gothic horror conventions that become conceptually useful for a Gothic realism. These are: 1) the Gothic's focus on the difficulty of fully encompassing often extreme situations or excessive emotions in narratives and chronicles; 2) its central positioning of a narrator-witness who struggles to chronicle events, or to interpret similar chronicles by others; 3) the archival anxieties it conjures around the degree to which evidentiary materials—found documents, photographs, footage, fragments, testimonials—can create a comprehensive and rational narrative of events; 4) its willingness to explore the epistemological impasses raised by the difficulties of getting the story told; 5) its turn to sensation and affect to evoke shock and sublimity when contemplating such impasses; 6) its focus on the unwanted, the unspoken, and the unnoticed, things forgotten, alienated, or discarded by a culture; 7) its willingness to account for the degree to which irrational or liminal states, such as dream, nightmare, delusion, and trance, inform a sense of the real; and 8) its direct confrontation with truth-seeking beyond language, logic, and representation—a sublime, negative hermeneutics.

Most generally, Gothic-horror becomes useful as a mode in its *troubling the real*, critiquing any attempt to contain or circumscribe experience within comfortable, convenient categories. The Gothic-horror mode engages directly with the shared epistemological goals of horror and documentary. It asks, how do we approach the problems that cannot be traced or proven through appeals to evidence, and to logic?

The goal of this study is not to make a case for the inclusion of hybrids (documentary or otherwise) within the greater generic category of cinematic horror. Instead, I want to note the expansiveness and pervasiveness of Gothic horror as a mode that has been useful to fiction and nonfiction filmmakers working within and against traditions of cinematic realism. Of especial importance here is how the blending of horror conventions within documentary filmmaking has helped filmmakers to interrogate the degree to which documentary form and content (evidence, testimony, narrative) can function in less positivistic ways to address the historical world. *General Orders No. 9*, for example, draws upon Gothic-horror themes, conventions, and tonalities to address an occulted or unseen reality that, according to Persons' own script, "push[es] against the surface of things"—that calls out to be seen and felt, but resists full disclosure. The film confronts viewers with an associational structure that combines ominous music; lingering, almost static images of natural, urban and postindustrial landscapes empty of human forms; and a poetic voice-over monologue written in the reflexive-disruptive style of Debordian *détournement*: "You are not a witness to the ruin; you are the ruin. You are to be witnessed." Though spoken in somber tones by actor William Davidson, the film's voice-over is often delivered in such urgent, imperative terms: "Speak to them, because the dead pray for the living, and the living are the dead." Less an expository commentary on the images than an abstract reading of them, Persons' voice-over text imposes a meaning (though not always an assured, definitive one) onto the film's haunting, expressionistic visuals that, in turn, begs the spectator to search for further associations. Despite its deeply committed, personal reading of the content it presents, Persons' film invites its audience to question what lies outside the hermeneutical parameters of its analysis. That is, to ask, what haunts it?

The film's melancholic, spectral reality generates a productive dread characteristic of Gothic-horror convention. Its vision of the real is emotional, figured through loss (a melancholic longing for something that once was) and absence (the dreaded/desired coming of something that might be).[8] *General Orders No. 9* wants to unsettle its spectators. It is an apocalyptic dread film,

anticipating a sense of coming rupture that is as much desired as it is feared. The interrogatory stance of Persons' script—"Could it have been some other way?"—consistently encourages such mingled fear and desire. It does not ask spectators to languish in a poetic longing for a forgotten myth of the South, but to contemplate the conflicting sensations related to its gestures to another order of reality.[9] In so doing, the film holds critical dialogue between the legitimizing appeals to the factual discourse of documentary cinema, and the more sensational and fantastical discourses of horror. Horror and documentary are often driven by degrees of access to knowledge: of discovering too much, and of knowing too little, but also of the human (in)capacity to conceptualize certain kinds of knowledge—around death, for example, around the depths of the human psyche, or the insignificance of humans in nature, in deep history, or the cosmos. Fear and desire around knowledge gained through sights, sounds and sensations figure in both horror and documentary, and horror in particular explores the fearful connections between abundance and lack regarding the revelation of information. As Noël Carroll writes, the pleasure of the "disclosure" of knowledge in horror narratives comes always with an anticipated reaction of fear, disgust, and other unpleasant sensations associated with revelation (1990: 36-7). *General Orders No. 9* tends to be received as a documentary not only because it offers an essayistic text juxtaposed with images of the everyday, but also in that it creates a world on the verge of producing knowledge, revelation, or at least meaningful sensation. The implications are that this knowledge, if it were to burst upon the spectator fully, would be monstrous. The film combines the Gothic's liminal temporality of haunted back-looking and paranoid suspicions of a monstrous future with the "unknowable" element in horror that stokes curiosity (Carroll, 1990: 35). The truths at which it hints cannot be told directly, lest the full knowledge of catastrophe strike the spectator senseless. They instead must be evoked through a Gothic-realist lens that functions as a Foucauldian apparatus—here, a site of colliding discourses on representation.

III. Context, Corpus, and Structure

In this study, I address "Gothic realism" in three, paradigmatic forms. I first discuss its entry into 1940s fiction films that blend Gothic-horror's focus on individual and collective psychic trauma as a way of interrogating a troubled wartime and postwar reality (Chapter I). Second, I discuss avant-garde and pseudo-documentaries that adopt strategies of Gothic-horror to

evoke unreadable subjects and/or undetected realities—products of a productive skepticism around American environmental, social and national stability from the 1970s, through the millennial period, and into the 21st century (Chapter II). And, third, I examine mockumentary and fake found-footage horror cinema that turns to strategies of documentary and factual discourse to express a generalized millennial and 21st-century archival anxiety around human interaction with recording technologies (Chapter III). These three manifestations of Gothic realism adopt the mood, themes, and rhetorical strategies of horror and documentary to form a critical discourse that troubles the real—that focuses on the limits of representation to tell us what we want to know about our reality. While Gothic in its most conventional framings connotes a turn away from the quotidian to stylistic excess and ahistorical fantasy, I want to rethink these often reflexive elements of Gothic as a discourse that troubles—not turns away from—the real. In my framing, the Gothic-realist mode suggests that reality and experience are always in excess of what we can know and say about them. Language is suspect, texts and media are limited. The reality of Gothic is one that can be evoked, suggested, felt—but not entirely circumscribed.

In terms of offering Gothic realism as a conceptual site of colliding discourses—a critical space of networks as described by the Foucauldian apparatus—I often refer back to literary texts in this study as a way of configuring the dissemination of Gothic horror into a mode of interrogating the real. The conceptual bleed between the literary and cinematic Gothic—not just in terms of subject matter, but in terms of a focus on the limits of representation—is in full evidence in seminal Gothic-horror texts such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). *Dracula* is entirely constructed of mock-evidentiary texts—a suggestion that perhaps the closest cinematic adaptation of the novel's Gothic-realist attitude towards its subject matter should come in mockumentary form. Its narrative is a compilation of letters, news clippings, and journal entries that, combined, fill out the necessary details of a story. And while this epistolary method is fairly transparent and conventional in its accumulation of detail, the novel's hypermediated collection of accounts forms part of its performance of a reality recognizable to a late-19th-century reader.

In the U.S. literary tradition, an increasing focus on the gaps between such mock-evidentiary accounts in works such as Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), and William Faulkner's multiple-perspective novels, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), render the Gothic synonymous with a kind of investigative thrust, and hermeneutical failure. In this respect, these texts anticipate (and in the case of Faulkner are

fairly contemporaneous with) the narrative experimentations of Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*. The material world that falls under the Gothic lens becomes both more speculative ("hypothetical" in Eric Savoy's terms) and less readable as the investigative impulse driving the narrative proceeds to scrutinize it. Like zooming into an already-grainy photo, the more focused and acute the investigation, the more troublingly evasive, diffuse, or proliferating the evidence becomes. Add to this that the Gothic investigation tends to be filtered through intensely subjective perspectives, tinctured by the desired goals and obsessions of the perceiver-observer-witness-dreamer-chronicler, and the importance of the literary Gothic to the concept of Gothic realism becomes even more apparent.

Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) is one of the most profound investigations of a reality impenetrably resistant to hermeneutical efforts, as well as to the traveling power of concepts. It opens with a series of extracts—drawn from biblical, literary, philosophical, and documentary traditions—to attest to the persistent adaptability of the whale as a category-defying conceptual monster. Alongside an experimental narrative structure that diversifies perspective across subjects and approaches, the novel constructs the whale as a massive symbol consisting of multiple meanings and paradoxes, where even certain material aspects—its whiteness, for example—consist of unfathomable mysteries and contradictory meanings that grow greater as the analysis "dive[s] deeper" (Melville, [1851] 2002: 203), to put it in the novel's narrator, Ishmael's, terms. The filmmakers of the final film mentioned in this study, *Leviathan* (2013, Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Veréna Paravel), apparently conducted shouted readings from passages of the novel on the deck of the industrial trawler that serves as the site of their film; this detail itself suggests the clear lines of derivation of a Gothic-realist cinema from an earlier literary tradition (Hoare, 2013: n.p.).[10]

In light of this complication of the Gothic as a concept in even some of its most classic literary manifestations, Chapter I functions as something of a corrective on the term, "Gothic," which largely has been used in horror scholarship as a catch-word to indicate a theatrical set of conventions connoting the mythical and the fantastical. Castles, dungeons, windswept moors, doomed families, stolen or lost identities, brooding villains and questing heroines constitute the 18th- and early 19th-century vision of Gothic in these terms; while the Gothic since the Industrial Revolution typically turns to the links between the psychic and the real in the form of uncanny spaces and technologies, dream and nightmare states, slippages between reality and delusion, and

excessive pathology. The critical positioning of "Gothic" in horror studies as fantastical and decidedly anti-realist has undermined the conceptual potential for Gothic horror to function as an alternative realist mode in film cycles such as film noir and the paranoid woman's film in the 1940s, for example. To frame the Gothic as an alternative realism is not to turn entirely away from contemporary critical trends, however, particularly in the realm of Gothic studies. As early as 1996, Fred Botting has discussed the Gothic tradition's "diffusion" beyond generic status into a critical paradigm, even as early as the 19th century. Here, "[a]mbivalence and uncertainty obscure single meaning" (Botting, 1996: 3); norms, limits, boundaries, and categories fall under scrutiny; and the "coherence" and "order" that undergird such terms as "sanity, honour, property or social standing" come under threat of dissolution (Botting, 1996: 7). To put this more in conceptual terms—or those suggested by the Foucauldian concept of apparatus—for Botting, the Gothic becomes a kind of critical attitude through which to undermine oppressive social, cultural and political paradigms that become passed off as norms or certainties.[11] For Botting, the Gothic highlights the underpinnings of the "enlightened" moment or form; it makes us aware of the knowledge-producing apparatus that we rely upon—it highlights its epistemological power and undermines it at the same time (2008: 9). In the Gothic's postmodern forms, "the breakdown of modernity's metanarratives discloses a horror that identity, reality, truth and meaning are not only effects of narratives but subject to a dispersion and multiplication of meanings, realities and identities that obliterates the possibility of imagining any human order and unity" (Botting, 1996: 157). The intensely reflexive nature of the Gothic mode as Botting defines it is, I argue, what makes it useful to a critical alternative realism—one that examines the regimes within which knowledge, and reality itself, are produced.

Following the categorical rupture highlighted in this introduction by *General Orders No. 9*, Chapter I calls for a different genealogy of the American horror film. I depart from an established scholarship that misconstrues a small number of Hollywood horror productions during the 1930s as the categorical standard for the genre, to suggest that a Gothic-realist genealogy helps scholars to reconsider a whole series of horror films in the modern and postmodern era and offers new possibilities to theorize the horror film. I explore how Gothic has been used in horror scholarship as a "traveling concept"—Mieke Bal's (2002) term for a concept that offers theoretical potency and illumination across disciplines—to indicate non-realist strains and features in horror cinema. In horror scholarship's traditional formulations, "gothic" indicates

a subgenre of remote castles, often populated by mad scientists or alienated aristocratic monsters such as Dracula—a genealogy that conventional scholarly narratives would argue extends from *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* (both 1931) to the Hammer revivals of those Universal staples. This critical narrative ends with films of the late 1950s and early 1960s such as *Diabolique* (1955), *Psycho* (1960), *Peeping Tom* (1960), *Les Yeux sans visage* (1960), *The Innocents* (1961), *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962), *The Haunting* (1963), and *Dementia 13* (1963), despite their more realist focus on moral and psychological disintegration (especially within families). Ultimately, "Gothic" in contemporary horror scholarship—and perhaps beyond it—tends to indicate only a nostalgic throwback to an older time.

Contrary to this critical model, Chapter I recuperates the importance of Gothic-horror as a realist mode operating in the sometimes categorically slippery 1940s horror film. A reevaluation of 1940s horror is especially necessary in terms of that decade's turn to psychological and social realism in other realms, and in the retroactive assignation of sub-generic status to gothic-inflected horror films now labeled as "film noir" and "paranoid woman's films." I argue that the binaries dividing the Gothic in its most conventional and baroque sense, and "realism" in its most documentary sense, are broken down in the 1940s in ways that had not been manifest since the early cinema actualities and the attractions-based cinema in the Lumière and Méliès traditions. As this tradition of a horror cinema of attractions and sensation returns in the 1940s, the word "horror" disappears from scholarship on genre, leaving the 1940s to be represented by sequels to, and retreads of, the 1930s horror films.

The films I discuss in this chapter—*Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1940), *Bluebeard* (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1944), *House of Dracula* (Erle C. Kenton, 1944), *Phantom Lady* (Robert Siodmak, 1944), *Strangers in the Night* (Anthony Mann, 1944), *Hangover Square* (John Brahm, 1945), *Strangler of the Swamp* (1946, Frank Wisbar), *The Locket* (John Brahm, 1946), and *The Red House* (Delmer Daves, 1948)—turn to Gothic sensation and excess as a way of approaching a wartime reality of trauma and loss. Additionally, they pick up on the Gothic's inherent skepticism and investigation of conventional realist representation as the privileged mode for addressing the real. I situate *Citizen Kane*, for example, as a manifestation of a kind of clash between documentary and Gothic-horror as rhetorical strategies, or modes. While the film's first scene announces it as a potential example of high-Gothic—with its enigmatic central figure surrounded by a horror castle and grounds that replicate his diseased psyche—a sudden

disruption in style and tone shocks the viewer into a different viewing strategy when a *March of Time*-style mockumentary newsreel offers a confident and comprehensive account of Kane's political life. Yet, even this stark, seemingly holistic account does not suffice to truly capture the Kane story, and the film that follows makes the introduction of new struggles to mediate Kane's life central to its design. Welles's much-lauded film is part of a strain in the 1940s that will pick up on the insufficiencies of 1930s social realism to address the nascent anxieties of the wartime era. *Citizen Kane* becomes a very different film when repositioned among B-movie horror programmers like *Bluebeard* and *Strangler of the Swamp*, and more expensive, major studio-backed Gothic-horror hybrids such as *Hangover Square* and *The Red House*. Here, I show these other less-lauded films to be operating within in a 1940s epistemological anxiety that pervades its genre films. I locate a certain epistephilia and epistephobia as emergent in the horror films of the 1940s—especially in their turn to the conventions of Gothic realism that most trouble representation, including the deployment of frustrating symbolism, extended acts of interpretation, willingness to explore disturbing states of trauma and anxiety, and psychoanalytically-inflected narratives of memory recovery, subject construction, and detection.

Chapter II turns to experimental documentary works that expand and examine the ways we can understand the impact of the historical world on the subject by adopting the Gothic tradition's peculiarly revelatory and sensory reality, especially the turn to expressive—even excessive—spectacle, sensation, and sublimity that one finds in the 1940s Gothic-realist films. The "gothumentary," as I term it in this chapter, brings Gothic-realism to bear upon documentary subject matter (not necessarily horrific in content) in ways that further illuminate links between the epistemological, critical and practical concerns, of horror, documentary and pseudo-documentary cinema. I first came upon the concept of "gothumentary" as the result of including documentary films in my Dawson College literature course on the American Gothic. Certain films such as *Grey Gardens* (1975, Albert and David Maysles, Ellen Hovde, Muffie Meyer) and Jonathan Caouette's intensely personal *Tarnation* (2003), seemed to me to be exemplary not just of a certain set of Gothic themes and conventions, but of a paradigmatic way of presenting their realities via a sort of Gothic worldview. In other words, it was not just their troubling subject matter that called upon the Gothic tradition, but their troubling *vision of the real*. At the same time that these works generated unsettling sensory responses such as shock and uncanniness, they also suggested that the historical world itself was best represented by—that is, already showing

evidence of—a sense of collapse, rupture, fissure, and hauntedness. Adopting Gothic-realist strategies, these works highlighted the potential for critical engagement and possibility that opens up within the cracks between categories. They evidenced a tendency to unsettle the real and disrupt or examine the logical and positivistic claims of documentary.

A key factor of documentary aesthetics over the twentieth and into the 21st century is that it parallels an increasing emphasis on the medium/apparatus in our representations of reality as a way of exploring the critical capacities of sensation. What other functions do representations of reality serve other than to inform? How might we experience a sense of the real through feeling? Theorists such as Elizabeth Cowie (1999, 2011) and Tom Gunning (1999) have dealt with the degree to which the pleasures of spectacle operate within the traditional episteme of documentary. Important work has been conducted on the productive hybridizing of fiction and documentary. Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight's study, *Faking It: Mock-Documentary and the Subversion of Factuality* (2001) features one chapter on the darkly comical horror mockumentary, *Man Bites Dog* (1992, Rémy Belvaux, André Bonzel, Benoît Poelvoorde) as an example of the mockumentary's critical reflexivity, though largely the study is concerned with outlining the mockumentary as a critical mode, and establishing a comprehensive taxonomy for it. Gary D. Rhodes and John Parris Springer's edited collection, *Docufictions: Essays on the Intersection of Documentary and Fictional Filmmaking* (2005) discusses a wide range of hybrid texts, and features discussions of the pseudo-documentary and fake found-footage horror films such as *The Blair Witch Project* and *Man Bites Dog* (by *Faking It*'s Jane Roscoe). Rhodes and Springer's collection is broader in its inclusion of popular cinema than another key collection, Alexandra Juhasz and Jesse Lerner's *F Is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth's Undoing* (2006), which features important work by scholars on experimental films, but intentionally eschews the popular forms that would include most horror hybrids (2006: 21).[12] My dissertation is a contribution to these studies, but its extended focus on the intersection of Gothic horror and documentary is its key difference. Gothic realism allows for interrogation of the kinds of desire and dread shared by the two modes. And it does so "productively," without limiting the discussion exclusively to experimental work, at the expense of the popular.

Accordingly, the films I discuss in Chapter II capture a fairly broad range of filmmaking styles and audience appeal. There is an Oscar-winning pseudo-documentary, *The Hellstrom Chronicle* (Walon Green, 1971), and a film that draws upon the more ludic sense of the pseudo-

documentary to generate its Gothic sense of the real, *Cropsey* (Joshua Zeman, Barbara Brancaccio, 2009). Two expressionistic docu-fiction films, *Wisconsin Death Trip* (James Marsh, 1999) and *The Sound of Insects: Record of a Mummy* (Peter Liechti, 2009) rely on oneiric and nightmarish imagery in their explorations of extreme pathology, individual and collective. And both *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003, Andrew Jarecki) and *Must Read After My Death* (2008, Morgan Dews) are uncanny chronicles of secret histories and forgotten subjects that call out to disturb all notions of domestic security. These films carry with them the overriding presumption that the historical world is always-already sublime; that is, its immense scope, ephemerality and resistance to "capture" confronts the observer with an oddly pleasurable dread. They construct a subjectivity that is a perpetual play between acts of witnessing and chronicling. I selected these films not to generate a new category for horror cinema, but because they generate a gothic realism in their style and structure. I want to be clear that I am not claiming these moving-image works *for* Gothic realism, but instead showing them to be participating in a Gothic realist conceptual framing in generating their themes, and framing their subject matter and tone. As Mieke Bal cautions, "No concept is meaningful for cultural analysis unless it helps us to understand the object better *on its*—the object's—*own terms*" (Bal, 2002: 8). I have selected for this chapter a series of films that take on a certain approach to the real that derives from a Gothic-horror modality.

Chapter II also complicates a claim by scholars Alexandra Juhasz and Jesse Lerner (2006) that the fantastical pseudo-documentary—perhaps best exemplified by the Oscar-nominated *Chariots of the Gods?* (1970, Harald Reinl) and the television series it inspired, *In Search of ...* (1976-82)—does not lead to productive critical avenues for the spectator (2006: 19). Their view of the pseudo-documentary film as unproductive is based upon what they see as the "sensationalistic" intention to "deceive the audience" (2006: 19) inherent to the form. But this take illuminates a double-standard in cinema scholarship that Steven Shaviro identifies as a "barely contained panic at the prospect (or is it memory?) of being affected and moved by visual forms" ([1993] 2011: 13). For Shaviro, film studies is afraid of affect, afraid of pleasure, likening it to a form of "mystification" ([1993] 2011: 13), and thus it instead calls for distanciation from embodied viewing. Shaviro writes: "It is as if there were something degrading and dangerous about giving way to images, and so easily falling under their power. Theory thus seeks to ward off the cinema's dangerous allure, to refuse the suspect pleasures that it offers, to dissipate its

effects by articulating its hidden but intelligible structure" ([1993] 2011: 14). All of the films I discuss in this chapter (and this dissertation) presume—or construct—an embodied spectator. I conclude Chapter II, for example, with a film that Juhasz and Lerner cite as an example of unproductive pseudo-documentary bombast, *The Hellstrom Chronicle*, to illustrate the productive appeal to the senses in a pseudo-documentary that is stunningly shot, shocking, and unabashedly 'alluring' (Shaviro, [1993] 2011: 14). With its script by horror author David Seltzer, and its never-before-seen micro-imagery of the insect world, *The Hellstrom Chronicle* turns nature into an apocalyptic horror film that becomes an allegory for human inconsistency, violence and cosmic fear. The film imposes a totalizing apocalyptic interpretation of indisputably documentary footage of the insect world as a way of entering environmental and political critique. There are similarities here to the kind of vision presented by *General Orders No. 9.* As the fictional Nils Hellstrom's voice-over dictates meaning in its ostentatious, bleak, and darkly humorous reading of human inadaptability against stunning macro-lens imagery of the highly adaptable insect world, the spectator negotiates between seeking dreadful pleasure and empirical knowledge in *The Hellstrom Chronicle*—and perhaps opts for both.

Gothic realism is a space within which different methodologies interact, and are, of course, contested. It raises critical questions regarding documentary representations of the real by constructing a reality that frustrates the efforts of the subject to present it comprehensively or conclusively. Speaking specifically of the American Gothic, Eric Savoy identifies a characteristic "darkly hypothetical" (1998: 6) reality that strands the subject between sensorial and epistemological possibilities. This Gothic "other" reality can also be situated in the Gothic's fragmented narratives, and its use of, and skepticism around, the effectiveness of documentary "evidence"—in the form of found documents, letters, journals, articles, wills, and personal chronicles—to present the fullness of experience. Gothic theorists Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace (2001) link Gothic discourse directly to the concerns of the modernist text's attempts to parallel the free flow of thoughts, its challenges to narrative conventions, its anti-narrative experimentation, and its focus on the pleasures and torments of the act of storytelling. The Gothic text often strands subjects within overwhelming sensations that leave them at an impasse. The subject is left to confront profound experience that compels an act of chronicling, but without the means of fully, comprehensively representing this experience, which will always remain in excess of articulation. In fact, attempts to articulate the profound sense of the experience will

only ever diminish it. Gary Farnell (2009) discusses this particular failure in terms of the Gothic "unnameable [sic] thing which must be incompletely symbolized, ironically, so that we might come to terms with its radical strangeness. Hence," he adds, "the Thing might be said to both resist *and* provoke symbolization" (2009: 113-114). The Gothic Thing is that aspect of reality or experience which, like Jacques Lacan's "real," is an unrepresentable *something* that begs for representation, for presencing, even as it spectrally resists and lies outside of any attempt at doing so. Farnell writes, "this notion of the Thing in a new theory of Gothic [is] a way of helping to grasp such externalities as haunted spaces and decaying properties with absences at their hearts, and the other being's *or* the immediate subject's deepest and most imperceptible subjectivity, all of these familiar *topoi* of countless Gothic fictions" (2009: 113-14). The aesthetics of "absence" inherent to Farnell's framing of the Gothic Thing may or may not be quite so new, however, in that it sounds much like a derivation of longstanding debates on the sublime.

The discourse on the sublime, in its 18th century literary and philosophical forms, can be linked to the Gothic's unsettling of the real through a reflexivity that involves excess and transgression in both style and subject matter, factors that, as Fred Botting (1996) notes, promote the literary Gothic's conceptual *diffusion* into other forms. As I discuss in Chapter I, Gothic discourse has long been put into the service of problematizing textual representation as a reliable record of reality, and of figuring the real in terms of uncontainability within the boundaries of the text. George E. Haggerty in *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form* writes that "indeterminacy is inherent to [the Gothic-horror narrative's] nature" (1989: 8). Elizabeth Cowie links the documentary sublime particularly to just such issues of indeterminacy, (in)comprehensiveness and (non-) intelligibility. She finds in both the Burkean and Kantian traditions of the sublime a discourse on the limits of representation of "a sensible experience that lies outside sense or meaning" (Cowie, 2011: 11). As Cowie explains it, for Edmund Burke, the sublime is a form of mental "exercise" that "forc[es] reason to comprehend the senseless" (2011: 11) and, for Emmanuel Kant, the sublime results from "the failure of the imagination to grasp or encompass a phenomena—to represent it to the mind—which leads reason to recognize and conceptualize a beyond-representation" (2011: 11). The Gothic as a discourse of the sublime is a discourse of testing, skirting and trespassing across boundaries of the natural, the scientifically sanctioned, and the normative. Pleasurable contemplation of sublime experience does not come from ultimate comprehensiveness or "sense-making," but instead "by the apprehension of its very limits, that is, of senselessness as such"

(Cowie, 2011: 11). Aesthetically, to generate a dreadful pleasure in the "apprehension" of "senselessness" requires medium reflexivity—more specifically, an aesthetics of the sublime involves a "presencing" of the limitations of the medium to create a sustained act of hesitation among possible meanings that encourages active interpretation and contemplation on the part of the spectator. In Chapter III, for example, I will discuss how this presencing will come into play through haptic surfaces of glitch, blur, grain, and other hypermediation that asks the spectator to seek sought-after presences through the materiality of the medium itself.

Addressing this shift from diegetic indeterminacy to the limitations of the mediating device, Cynthia Freeland relates the cinematic sublime to "moments of the rupture of representation" (1999: 73). In Freeland's cognitive terms, the cinematic sublime is not just morally elevating but aesthetically elevating, "occurring when we shift from the perspective *within* the film to a perspective *about* the film" (1999: 73). Here, she distinguishes between "fiction emotions" and "artifact emotions" (Freeland, 1999: 76) related to the aesthetic object itself. There is both an aesthetic and cosmic component in contemplating the represented world as sublime in its resistance to capture. The effect is, then, both generative (the result of a hypermediated aesthetics of sublimity) and observational (a contemplation or evocation of reality as always-already sublime in its resistance to comprehensive representability). In its consistent delineations of a reality of uncanniness, dread and anxiety that suggests meaningfulness but resists capture, the 1940s Gothic-realist horror film (Chapter I), the gothumentary (Chapter II) and the fake found-footage and mockumentary horror film (Chapter III) work within this generative-observational dialectic to figure an always-already sublime reality sublimely, so to speak.

A kind of aesthetics of the Gothic sublimity—or "Thing-ness"—inherent to the real, Gothic realism's sensorial epistemology addresses a crisis of representation. Gothic texts make the limits of the medium part of the obstacle of their subjects' quests. In literary Gothic, the purloined letter, the discovered fragment, the news article, the private journal, and the limited-perspective first-person chronicle are all, variously, incomplete, partial, personal, subjective. The cinematic Gothic adds to these incomplete texts found-footage, photographs, crackly radio broadcasts and audio recordings, and, most recently, clips posted on social media sites such as YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr. Gothic realism in the fiction and nonfiction films discussed in this study is a realist horror that foregoes didacticism and mimesis, and instead highlights the

pleasures and torments of the act of mediation, like a scene expressionistically obscured through a filthy window that is, itself, stunning to observe. It evokes a reality that either overwhelms the subject with information, or impinges upon consciousness like a disquieting intimation. The Hollywood horror films that I discuss in Chapter I will tend to express this disturbing reality through stylistic excess that suggests a nightmarish reality of mixed dread and longing. The documentary and pseudo-documentary films that I discuss in Chapter II will turn to sites of investigation that resist the positivistic strategies that Poe called ratiocination, to suggest a reality that can only be brushed against by the documentary camera. And the archival anxiety that I identify in the fake found-footage and mockumentary horror films in Chapter III derives its obsessive camera-bearing subject from an obsessive need to chronicle this resistant reality. Compelled to inscribe themselves as witnesses to the historical record, and hoping that their acts of recording will somehow help to fill out a more complete or comprehensive narrative of events, these frenzied subjects, compelled to record, will always come up short. In some ways, all of the moving-image works I discuss are obsessively concerned with the exigencies of the subject's role as witness, perhaps the key anxiety underlying all Gothic-horror narrative (as Roger B. Salomon [2002] has argued), and a key feature that it shares with documentary. It is in this sense of Gothic-horror deployed as a mode of investigation into the shared role of witnessing in horror and documentary that this study departs most significantly from traditional, purely fantastical figurations of the term, "Gothic," in horror studies. In Gothic realism, Gothic horror in fiction and nonfiction cinema becomes a mode of engagement with reality that brings sensation and desire back to our understanding of the real—that reinstates the persistence of a cinema of attraction.

Chapter III extends the gothumentary's hermeneutics of suspicion and courting of spectatorial desire to millennial and post-9/11 horror cinema's profusion of mockumentary and fake found-footage horror films produced since 1999's *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick, Eduardo Sanchez). In *Diary of the Dead* (2007, George A. Romero), *Home Movie* (2008, Christopher Denham), *Lake Mungo* (2008, Joel Anderson), and *Unfriended* (2015, Levan [Leo] Gabriadze), another form of Gothic-realist horror cinema operates as an alternative discourse on realism that expresses the subject's relationship to a modernity that overwhelms in terms of its immensity, speed and recordability to form a reality of noise. The result is what I term an "archival anxiety," an existential dread to accompany the so-called post-cinematic age. These

contemporary horror films engage with millennial and Web 2.0[13] anxieties by adopting an aesthetics of hypermediation—multiple screens and windows; constant motion and reframing; shallow, haptic surfaces of blur and glitch—to present reality filtered through a Gothic lens darkly. That is, tinged with the skeptical tendency of the Gothic to investigate the sacrosanctity of all representations. In the new regime of reality implied by this hypermediated real, to be absent from mediation—from storage in the digital archive that stands in for history, memory—is not to exist. To confront an event that is not under surveillance—or that has not been recorded, archived and assigned to an appropriate space for posterity—is to leave one's experience invalidated as real, as actual.

I pick up here on the Gothic horror's conventional use of the chronicle as a metonym for experience seen as constituted by shock and trauma. Here, the subject experiences archival anxiety as an obsession with capturing experience visually. A crisis of witnessing informs the state of archival anxiety, where subjects feel that, to achieve agency, they must contribute evidence to a growing visual archive that comes to stand for reality itself. In this context, I discuss George A. Romero's polemical *Diary of the Dead*—a post-9/11 reboot of his zombie series that self-consciously places reality horror in the tradition of the full-scale media manipulation of Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds* (1938)—and Christopher Denham's *Home Movie*, which takes as its starting point the local, personal, and individual history-making characteristic of the amateur or home-movie tradition, and reads it through the troubling lens of the Gothic witness. Both films have something to say about the way that new media technologies form and inform our lives, and the potentially false sense of power and protection they offer. To this effect, *Diary of the Dead*'s promotional tagline, "Shoot the Dead"—accompanied on posters by an image of a video camera pressed against the face of a plaid-shirted, baseball-capped "redneck"—suggests complicated intersections around the potentially false sense of power and protection offered by new media technologies that form and inform our lives. I refer to this tagline in the title for this dissertation because of the many implications "Shoot[ing] the dead" raises around the (death-)drive to archive a reality that overwhelms. I suggest that we can learn from how films like *Diary of the Dead* and *Home Movie* turn our current conflicted relationship with visual technologies into a Gothic-realist aesthetic.

Both Laura Mulvey (2006) and Simone Natale have discussed what might be called a "new media imaginary" / "old media imaginary" that reflects the uneasiness attending new media

technologies, from smoke-and-mirrors spectacles of phantasmagoria shows, to photography, to x-rays, to cinema, to the digital age. For Mulvey, this is a "technological uncanny" that "waxes and wanes" (2006: 36), and for Natale, it is a period of sublime contemplation where fascination and fear attend the "prophecies" of new media possibilities and the "fantasies" that attend both the realization—and, later, the ostensible demise—of new media (2014: 205). I discuss two examples that frame a technological uncanny in terms of haunting. More recently, *Unfriended* explores the new media imaginary around social media's turning its users into ineffectual specters in a hypermediated world that has become more real than reality; and the earlier *Lake Mungo* turns to 19th and early 20th century spirit photography to remind us that such anxieties are nothing new. In both films, multiple screens, multiple interviews, multiple reenactments, and multiple associative materials are deployed to substitute for what is essentially a chronicle of ghostly absence, a documentary of a subject that is not available. Thus, the films—in a way parallel to *General Orders No. 9*—also encourage a scanning of the very surface of the media themselves for clues. Like the extremely popular *Paranormal Activity* series (2007-2015), especially, these films of ghostly invasion through media document the domestic realm itself, as much or more than those who inhabit it, through repeated imagery of rooms and spaces that uncannily become as familiar to us as the faces of the subjects whose story they support. Vacant space is alive with potential revelations in these films, activated by the concentration of visual technologies upon them. And the hauntings occur not just via the supernatural presences in both films, but via the presence of disturbing and disruptive visual technologies. Where *Home Movie* suggests a disruption of the norm with the invasive presence of the camera in the lives—and faces—of the family,[14] *Unfriended* and *Lake Mungo* take the premise of haunting technology to its end—the idea of haunt*ed* technology, of technology's revelatory powers. Here, I trace these archival anxieties back to the turn of the 20th century visual technologies such as the phantasmagoria shows in France by Etienne-Gaspard Robertson and, later, both spirit and memorial photography. Phantasmagoria shows were among the first "virtual" spaces, with, for example, images of specters or death masks of recently deceased historical figures (Warner, 2006: 147) projected onto roiling smoke and therefore surrounding the audiences. As visual technologies come into use in spiritual and memorial photography, a new technological uncanny is produced, where technology is, as Louis Kaplan (2004) has argued, both welcome in the personal lives of the subject and suspect as a tool for surveillance, either by one's dead loved ones, or as a

manipulative device invading the lives of unsuspecting believers in the promise of such technologies.

The dreadful desire created by this sense of visual technology is in part due to a current state of realism that combines what Richard Grusin and Jay David Bolter (1999) term "hypermediation"—an increased awareness of the manipulation and limitations of the mediating apparatus—with a sense that there is no object to be recorded. Instead, the object, not present, can only be presenced. This is in keeping with Shaviro's comments on the cinema itself as only presencing the object, not presenting it: "Cinematic images and sounds are neither immediately present objects nor their mediated representations, precisely because they are traces and reproductions of the real" ([1993], 2011: 38). Hence, "the image becomes an obsession, it *haunts* me" (Shaviro, [1993], 2011: 47). It is this state of hauntedness, extended to a full-scale view of a spectral reality itself, that the fake found-footage and mockumentary horror film render most apparent in their aesthetics.

Chapter III is an important addition to nascent work in studies of popular horror cinema that take on the attitude of factual discourse. Aside from Alexandra Heller-Nicholas's *Found Footage Horror Films: Fear and the Appearance of Reality* (2014), a study devoted specifically to what is most commonly known as fictional "found-footage" horror (a term for which I suggest a readjustment in Chapter III), no study has offered an extended consideration of horror cinema's relationship to documentary realism through Gothic's reflexive textuality. Linnie Blake and Xavier Aldana Reyes' *Digital Horror: Haunted Technologies, Network Panic and the Found Footage Phenomenon* (2015) is a recent study that addresses these issues in terms of digital technologies, specifically. Three of the articles in their edited collection come closest to some of the interests of my own study. Steen Christiansen's "Uncanny Cameras and Network Subjects" focuses on fears and desires around surveillance; Mark Freeman's "An Uploadable Cinema: Digital Horror and the Postnational Image" focuses on the horror aesthetic of "convergence" (Henry Jenkins, cited in Christiansen, 2015: 109) opened up by the global Internet archive; and Reyes' final chapter in *Digital Horror*, "The *[•REC]* Films: Affective Possibilities and Stylistic Limitations of Found Footage Horror" (2015) traces the extent to which the restrictive immersive environments of fake found-footage horror can be productive (Blake and Reyes 2015). I discuss these further in my focus on the new media anxieties revolving around fake found-footage horror in Chapter III. Accordingly, I see my own study as an important addition to these initial studies,

its uniqueness lying in its focus on the critically productive degree to which horror has engaged with documentary forms, and documentary with horror forms, to produce telling links between the ways both "modes" 1) rely on spectacle and sensation; 2) work through epistemological uncertainties; 3) explore anxieties (moral, ethical, aesthetic) around how to represent the historical world; and 4) evoke what might be called the reality of dread that results from a century of world wars, cold wars and, now, terrorist paranoia that some artists in the late 19th century seem to have predicted in their own uncanny use of new technologies. Important scholarship in this vein has been done by Tom Gunning (1986, 2004a, 2007) and Simone Natale (2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2014 [with Balbi], 2016), both of whom focus on early and proto-cinematic technologies, photography, phantasmagoria shows, and radio in terms of their simultaneous reception as science and entertainment. Jeffrey Sconce (2000) and Barry Curtis (2008), as well, have looked at the uncanny, the ghostly, the supernatural and the magical as ways of demonstrating the power of these new popular [and populist] art forms. I build upon the work of these scholars, especially in Chapter III, to suggest that Gothic realism is at least in part undergirded by anxieties around how new media have come to inform a kind of hypermediated phantasmagoria of the real.

As evidenced by this most recent formation, "Gothic realism" has critical currency in a number of areas related to film and media studies. As a conceptual framework for addressing a crisis of representation via dread and horror, it serves as a potential popular-culture interrogation of the kind of networked reality that Mark Andrejevic calls "digital enclosure," or a Web 2.0 reality that deludes the consumer with promises of immediacy and interactivity, but is ultimately a prison of surveillance "wherein every action and transaction generates information about itself" (2007: 2). As a popular fictional inquiry into cinematic truth-telling, witnessing and chronicling, it serves as an entry into long-standing debates in documentary theory and practice around the place of affect, pleasure, fiction and illusion in representations of real subjects and events; its built-in reflexivity around the democratic promise of the availability of new recording technologies helps us to assess the influence of reality TV aesthetics and politics not only on television, but also in the cinema; its gestures to Gothic themes and textuality in the form of absent, transgressive or unrepresentable subject matter suggests parallels to a similar deployment of horror conventions in documentary throughout its history; its figuration of unstable, even "haptic," visuality in the form of blur, fuzz, grain, blankness, blackness, first-person camera, multiple screens and constant reframing as a "new" form of realism suggests a necessity for the

application of new media terms such as hypermediation and remediation to studies of cinematic (and documentary) realism; its engagement with concerns over the revelatory or illusionary qualities of cinematic and digital images that parallel similar concerns around the photographic at the end of the 19th century, serves to diminish the eschatological framework encouraged by millennial cultural responses to so-called "new" medias' threat to ways of seeing, living and being.

The final chapter of this study functions as an epilogue that calls for further exploration of Gothic realism in current cinema, especially new forms of documentary cinema, with reference to Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Veréna Paravel's experimental documentary for the Harvard Sensory Ethnography Lab, *Leviathan* (2012). Virtually wordless, but aurally and visually visceral in every other way, *Leviathan* is characteristic of a turn to an ethnography of the senses that not only eschews positivistic closure, but encourages a fully embodied viewing. Both Scott Macdonald (2013) and Selmin Kara and Alanna Thain (2015) argue that the film privileges sound over image to fully immerse the spectator within its milieu of crashing waves, sloshing and swaying fish guts, impressionistic images of skies full of flapping gull wings, clanking chains and groaning industrial cranes, and drowned-out human voices among all the din. I would say that the film makes use of sound equally as much as it relies upon images that literally thrust the spectator under water, or to the heights of the mast, or directly out in front of the imposing prow of the hulking metal ship. In addition to these calls for a focus on the film's affective design, I want to suggest that *Leviathan* extends Gothic realism's focus on the text that resists hermeneutical closure—what Poe called the "text that does not permit itself to be read"—to its most critically productive extremes.[15] In turn, I hope to suggest that Gothic realism, and particularly the gothumentary, provides another way of assessing *Leviathan*'s sensory reality of shock and awe in confronting both the dying mechanized monstrosity that is industrial fishing, and the monstrous natural world that diminishes its bulky machinery as absurd attempts to dominate nature. The film eschews didactic rhetorical strategies; its political message occurs entirely through form. The film's content is deployed in ways that encourage immersion into the form—not only active looking, but a kind of scanning of the materiality of the medium. *Leviathan* encourages a sensory engagement with its visual and aural design that not only plunges spectators into its diegesis, but also asks them to ride the waves of the film's intensity and movement. And if there is any political argument here around capitalist alienation of its workforce, or cruelty to and decimation

of nonhuman animals, then it comes through in the film, not as a didactic text based on illuminating conclusive evidence, but instead through an embodied experience: through the ears, eyes, and gut of the spectator-witness.

Leviathan's combination of hypermediation and sensory overload suggests potential political and humanistic realities that remain in excess of what the filmmakers can trace through the limitations of their medium. Its Gothic realism is sublime in that it implies an overwhelming beyond-ness that resists representation, a viscerality and a fullness that compels the spectator to reach out through the senses. This sublimity is for Jean-Francois Lyotard the "spasm" of thought when it hits the limits of the absolute, where no relation or synthesis can be formed (quoted in Johnson, 2012: 121). An aesthetics of the sublime, then, is an aesthetics of what might be called the fullness of absence, the paradoxical "*presentation of the unpresentable*" (Johnson, 2012: 120). The heightened reflexivity of Gothic realism, for example, highlights the struggle to 'present the unpresentable'. For Lyotard, this negative hermeneutics is critical and productive. As David B. Johnson explains, citing Lyotard's *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (1994), "Rather than resulting in a kind of stultified impasse […], the irresolvability of this situation itself becomes generative: it produces a negative presentation of what exceeds presentation, 'a sign of the presence of the absolute'" (2012: 121). To return to the film that initiated this introduction, *General Orders No. 9* evokes in its sense of immanent revelation a kind of transcendental quality that occurs in contemplation of the cosmic or spiritual.[16] Its sense of the stultifying absolute comes in the coming crisis that it can only imply, that it cannot state directly because it is woven together from too many strands. *General Orders No. 9*'s Gothic realism is underscored by an existential longing that is also deeply spiritual, or at least seeking some sort of spiritual connectedness through dwelling upon the everyday to force a sense of the numinous to "the surface of things." The film's melancholic, dread-tinged contemplation of a diminishing world is in good part directed towards generating a kind of spiritual and existential malaise that situates the spectator in a productive sensorial web. Like *General Orders No. 9*, the films that form the corpus of this study—whether popular or experimental, fiction or nonfiction—all address the spaces between reality and our readings of it. As this study will show, these films come to the conclusion that this in-between space is not only our most critically productive space, but also the best representation of a reality always formed by intersecting lines of meaning.

Notes

[1] I co-curated the "Gothumentary" program of films with Papagena Robbins for the Fifth Annual Sebastopol Documentary Film Festival, which ran from 29 March to 1 April, 2012. The films selected for the program were: *Must Read After My Death* (2007, Morgan Dews), *Detroit Wild City* (2010, Florent Tillon), *Resurrect Dead: The Mystery of the Toynbee Tiles* (2011, John Foy), and *Girl Model* (2011, Ashley Sabin & David Redmon). I discuss the gothumentary film in Chapter II of this study.

[2] As this study is concerned less with directorial authorship than with form, mode, and context, I choose to stress the date of release rather than director name in parenthetical references for films.

[3] In this sense, the film is akin to what Renov terms an "analytical documentary," which "is likely to acknowledge that meditational structures are formative rather than mere embellishments" (1993: 31).

[4] Among certain paratextual materials produced alongside the DVD and Blu-ray transfers of the film are a booklet of the film's text, rendered in poetic stanzas, and a booklet entitled *Notes for a New Map*, compiled and edited by the film's director. The booklet includes text by Persons; poetry by D.H. Lawrence, Walt Whitman, and others; a state government Act from 15 May, 1821, which divides up territory acquired by Georgia from the Creek Native American nation into several counties; the text of General Robert E. Lee's "General Orders No. 9," praising and bidding farewell to his troops; and a series of iconic images juxtaposing the outlines of county and state borders with other images in silhouette, such as the pelvis of a cow, the flint tip of an arrowhead, the standard coat-of-arms shape of the U.S.'s Federal highway sign; and the typical and atypical arrangements of whitetail deer antlers. Among the suggestions that can be derived from this odd arrangement of texts and images is that a certain unconscious pattern emerges like an unseen reality that undergirds the more material, everyday real. One of the booklet's three epigraphs, from the poem "The Kingfisher" by Charles Olson (alluding to Heraclitus), makes this thematic reading clear: "Man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar" (Persons, 2004).

[5] I mentioned the anecdote above regarding *General Orders No. 9*'s challenge for Sebastopol's documentary festival organizers in a recent correspondence with its writer-director, Robert Persons, who responded: "I actually didn't consider the film a documentary either, though that

was the way it was usually programmed. But I do think it is clearly Gothic in the sense of unseen forces acting upon the surface of life or the pagan? [sic] aspects of nature (fecund and threatening) making themselves known" (2016: n.p.). The "pagan" aspects of nature that Persons indicates here come in the film's evocation of a sort of deep history, a sense of the cosmic that surrounds the film's poetic meditations on empty or abandoned urban spaces and landscapes encroached upon by nature. Persons' comments in a 2011 interview with *Filmmaker* magazine complicate his framing of the film above by highlighting several documentary filmmakers among the influences on the film: "[T]here were certainly a lot of films that we used to reference—a lot of Tarkovsky films, Herzog films, Chris Marker, John Grierson docs, the British Film Unit, David Lynch and Harry [Everett] Smith" (Persons, 2011a: n.p.). In the same interview, Persons calls the first section of the film "sort of like *The Plow that Broke the Plains* [1936, Pare Lorentz]. It's sort of a pedantic and dramatic old-school documentary making pronouncements about the land and so on" (Persons, 2011a: n.p.). Persons also cites as inspiration impressionistic photographic chroniclers of an abandoned, decaying South such as William Christenberry and Sally Mann (Persons, 2011a: n.p.). Elsewhere, the director reiterates what he sees as the film's particularly Southern Gothic aesthetic. In an interview with *Bomb Magazine*'s Montana Wojczuk, he explains, "I felt like there wasn't anything in film that corresponded with the literature of the South and I wanted to do something in film to fill that gap. […] I wanted to do something hyper Gothic, you know, just to roll around in southern melancholia and try to come out the other side. It's old, but it's new. The subject matter is not original at all, but I hope something in the experience of it is new" (Persons, 2011b: n.p.).

[6] Which, incidentally, Persons cites as an influence. The first section of the film, he has said, is "sort of like *The Plow that Broke the Plains*. It's sort of a pedantic and dramatic old-school documentary making pronouncements about the land and so on" (Persons, 2011a: n.p.).

[7] As Altman (1999) has suggested genres are more heterogeneous than the scholarly models that retroactively assign strict taxonomic structures to genres. In Altman's terms, the "multiple meanings" or connotations brought about by generic traits can be drawn upon to configure a particular conceptual approach. Altman sees genre as, by turns:

- a "*blueprint*, as a formula that precedes, programmes and patterns industry production";
- a "*structure*, as the formal framework on which individual films are founded";

- a "*label*, as the name of a category central to the decisions and communications of distributors and exhibitors";
- and as "a *contract*, as the viewing position required by each genre film of its audience" (14).

These factors render genres as compelling sites of conceptual debate, as well. And as such it becomes clear how certain of their features might be drawn out to create the particular orientation or worldview of a mode. Altman's notion of genre as processes (1998: 6, 1999: 64) shows matters of form to be in play with a variety of historical realities: industry concerns (especially insofar at genres are seen to offer Hollywood a vocabulary of conventions to be appropriated, recombined and repurposed into ever-shifting cycles, issues of audience reception (including, and perhaps especially, fan communities), and the contributions of critical and theoretical approaches. Important to Altman's conceptualization of genre is the degree to which hybridity is not so much the result of the end of cycle, but integral to the process of genrification itself. In Jacques Derrida's conceptualization, the "law of genre" has built into its very fabric this notion of mixing, of texts in conversation with other texts. In this sense, genres themselves are sites of collision that belie any sort of stasis, stability or "purity." Derrida imagines the idea of generic transformation as building impurity into the process of genrification, therefore undermining it. Altman, too, notes that it is often only in the *failure* of a genre to persist that enables its labeling as a "fixed" or "pure" genre, but the genres that thrive do so because they are in constant flux, and that part of the major shift in conceptualizations of genre is the acknowledgment that there is no linear way to conceive of the reception of genre by an audience—that, instead, genres come to audiences by way of intertextuality In these terms, it may always be more productive to speak of what we think of as genres, instead in terms of modes.

[8] In this way, the film both meditates on the present as a ruin—and aspires to be read as a kind of ruin itself. The ruin is evidence of a history that may not be accessible, and for which there may exist no witnesses; as such, it is a memorial to something lost. Its inability to speak its history marks it as a potentially dead object. Like the human skull for Walter Benjamin, Susan Buck-Morss tells us, it is evidence of "transience" and of "decay": "historical transiency (the ruin) is the emblem of nature in decay" (Buck-Morss, 1991: 161). But the ruin also has a present-ness that encourages meditative contemplation on history and memory. In the ruin, Walter Benjamin

tells us, “history has merged sensuously with the setting” (2008: 180). The ruin is a text that calls for not just for the pure logic of investigation, but also for an active, “sensual” reception. Persons’ diegetic world is largely bereft of people, placing emphasis only on either the used or abandoned structures they create, the objects and minutiae they collect, or the natural surroundings they attempt to draw lines around with their maps. In asking the spectator to contemplate these ruins, or potential ruins, Persons becomes like the Benjaminian detective. Rather than holding onto the images he presents as a collection of souvenirs of an abandoned past, Persons redeploys them as “charged” (Buck-Morss, 1991: 53) with a renewed awareness of the historical—not for the purposes of nostalgic longing, but as a revelatory revivification of the dreams and ideals of the past that call to be acknowledged in a troubled present (Buck-Morss, 1991: 212).

[9] Describing the film’s take on historical representation in a post on the *In Media Res* scholarly forum, Laurel Anhert cites Jonathan Flatley’s concept of "affective mapping,” which “sees history as layered rather than linear, painfully persistent rather than comfortably distant” (2013: n.p.). Anhert continues:

> I suggest that the film’s melancholic architecture resists conventional logic and instead asks viewers to simply ‘wallow’ in affective longing for (and aversion to) a vexed past that casts a long dark shadow on the present. The film does not necessarily make an argument about the social world, so much as amplify the affective and palympsestic [sic] structure of the social world—one that is policed by artificial boundaries and haunted by the absent bodies and lost histories on which the modern wealthy city was built. (Anhert, 2013: n.p.)

While I disagree with Anhert’s sentiment here that the film asks spectators to “‘wallow’ in affective longing,” I share her reading of the film’s structure as less rhetorically didactic or positivistic than paradigmatic and abstract. *General Orders No. 9* guides viewers into an emotional relationship of melancholic longing, but it also has a sharp, almost satirical, even plaintively humorous, edge in its dreamy visual presentation, repetitive script and imagery, and associational editing. In this sense, the film opens up spectators critically rather than trapping them in a vortex of longing.

[10] As I will have occasion to mention later in chapter I, scholars such David S. Reynolds (1988) will link the American literary renaissance to a tradition of true crime journalism and the "Dark Adventure" novels and thrillers inspired by it. As Reid, David and Jayne L. Walker (1993) have argued, the film noir cycle derives its morally murky rural and urban spaces from such "dark" traditions. As such, film noir becomes just one of the Gothic-realist addressed by this study that derive from a literary tradition.

[11] Botting discusses the Gothic's dissemination into a critical mode in terms that are useful for this study's investigation of cinematic works as diverse as the film noir, with its psychically-charged urban spaces; the pseudo-documentary, with its tendency to unsettle scientific certainties; and the fake found-footage horror film, with its intense skepticism of human interaction with new media technologies. "Less identifiable as a separate genre in the nineteenth century," he writes,

> Gothic fiction seemed to go underground: its depths were less romantic chasms or labyrinthine dungeons, than the murky recesses of human subjectivity. The city, a gloomy forest or dark labyrinth itself, became a site of nocturnal corruption and violence, a locus of real horror; the family became a place rendered threatening and uncanny by the haunting return of past transgressions and attendant guilt on an everyday world shrouded in strangeness. The attempt to distinguish the apparent from the real, the good from the bad, evident in the standard Gothic device of portraits assuming life, was internalised rather than explained as a supernatural occurrence, a trick of the light or of the imagination. Uncanny effects rather than sublime terrors predominated. Doubles, *alter egos*, mirrors and animated representations of the disturbing parts of human identity became the stock devices. Signifying the alienation of the human subject from the culture and language in which s/he was located, these devices increasingly destabilised the boundaries between psyche and reality, opening up an indeterminate zone in which the differences between fantasy and actuality were no longer secure" (Botting, 1996: 11-12).

[12] The two-part introduction to the collection is very clear about its focus on purely *experimental* hybrid films. In the first part of the introduction, Alexandra Juhasz states the collection's focus on "fake documentaries that are more productive than others" (2006: 16) and Jesse Lerner, in the second part of the introduction, labels such horror-documentary hybrids as *The Hellstrom*

Chronicle (discussed in Chapter III of this study) as among the more non-productive examples of the fake documentary (2006: 21). Writes Lerner: "If, in the end, this collection then neglects more mainstream film (the [sic] *Blair Witch Project* and *Spinal Tap*) in favor of more independent or underground fare, this is a loss we are willing to accept, as the latter films are more likely to ask and get the most from documentary and its phony kin" (2006: 21). This is an important collection, but the kind of anti-genre framing evinces a brand of elitism that I find limiting.

[13] A term denoting the paradigm shift from the Internet as primarily a space of social interaction, to a commercial space where interactivity is an illusion (Andrejevic, 2013) for consumers who are used as uncompensated content providers—digital "serfs," in the words of Astra Taylor (2012: 18).

[14] Incidentally, the introduction of constant recording into the household of the Poe family in *Home Movie* by father and minister, David Poe, also has supernatural undertones: it eventually causes David to skirt the reality that his children are psychopathic monsters, instead to assert that there is a demonic possession invading their domestic space.

[15] In "The Man of the Crowd" (1840). I discuss this importance of this story to the positioning of the Gothic spectator in Chapter III.

[16] I use "transcendental" here in the sense that Paul Schrader theorizes it in his 1972 study, *The Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dryer*. For Schrader, the transcendental style is an aesthetic of the "ineffable" (1972: 8) that provokes a particularly spiritual sense of what Rudolph Otto (1923) calls the "numinous." Similar to the Gothic sensation of the sublime, where meaning and sensation resist causal links, or rational means of categorization, the numinous spawns a sense of religious wonder that surrounds the idea of the holy or divine—an outer, other, or "second" space of the real that "transcends human reason (but which need not be the supernatural)" (Aguirre, 2008: 3). Schrader argues that the "Transcendent is beyond normal sense experience, and that which it transcends is, by definition, the immanent" (1972: 5). As a style, the Transcendent "seeks to maximize the mystery of existence; it eschews all conventional interpretations of reality: realism, naturalism, psychologism, romanticism, expressionism, impressionism, and, finally, rationalism" (1972: 10). Further, Schrader argues: "The concept of transcendental expression in religion or in art necessarily implies a contradiction. Transcendental

expression in religion and art attempts to bring man as close to the ineffable, invisible and unknowable as words, images, and ideas can take him. Like the artist, the critic knows that his task is futile, and that his most eloquent statements can only lead to silence. The critical inquiry, Roger Fry stated, ends at the gulf of mysticism" (1972: 8).

I.
A 'Darkly Hypothetical Reality':
'Gothic Realism' in 1940s Hollywood Horror

> Gothic is a discourse that shows the cracks in the system that constitutes consciousness, "reality."
>
> — Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*

This chapter investigates a number of 1940s Hollywood films that share a Gothic sensibility in their ambivalent, troubling, and stylistically excessive configurations of the real.[1] Some of these films, such as Orson Welles's now-universally-lauded *Citizen Kane* (1941), may at first seem an unlikely fit for a discussion of horror cinema that includes the B-movie programmers, *Bluebeard* (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1944) and *Strangler of the Swamp* (1946, Frank Wisbar). Yet, I want to argue that the focus here on the insufficiencies in representation of a reality undergirded by trauma link these and many other 1940s films to a Gothic-realist discourse. Welles's key trope rests on the hermeneutical limitations of the often-conflicting narratives around the figure of Charles Foster Kane, a conceit derived from what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies as the "difficulty the story has in getting itself told" (1986: 13), so central to the Gothic narrative. There is here a crisis of witnessing, and an archival anxiety about representing one's full experience, that also antagonizes the stranded central subjects of film noir and the paranoid woman's film, as well as the many 1940s films about recovering memory and identity—among them *Strangers in the Night* (Anthony Mann, 1944), *The Locket* (1946, John Brahm), and *The Red House* (1947, Delmer Daves). Such films figure wartime America through an investigative psychoanalytical framework that suggests a reality formed and informed by trauma and (sometimes purposive) forgetting. There may be a disturbing lack and/or overdetermination of information available to the witnessing-subject—in *Citizen Kane*'s multiple accounts, it seems there is both. That *Citizen Kane* also builds the mockumentary form into its investigation of Kane (through its parodic *News on the March* sequence, discussed later) testifies to the importance of the Gothic's skepticism and scrutiny of representation to documentary and other realist forms. The surfacing of these trends in 1940s cinema reveals the shared "sensory

epistemologies" of the Gothic-horror and documentary traditions, where coming into knowledge generates both desire and dread, where didactic or positivistic rhetorical conventions may fail to tell us what we want to know, and where spectacle and sensation often convey the profoundest awareness of a troubled reality. There are important implications here for the nonfiction and fiction films I discuss in Chapters II and III, which similarly configure the real as overwhelmingly resistant to "capture." In this chapter, I argue that the 1940s turn to a Gothic realism suggests the importance of 1940s horror cinema as a conceptual site of shifting realism(s), starting with the problematic way scholars have evaded discussion of the hybrid nature of 1940s horror.

Scholarship on American horror films has severely limited the ways we can talk about the presence of a horror genre in 1940s Hollywood cinema by positioning the decade as one of diminishing returns. As Mark Jancovich has observed, it remains common in current critical discourse to hold 1940s horror "in terms of imitation and corruption" (2008: 16) of a thirties horror canon (2008: 15). This critical narrative of 1940s genre exhaustion has left many 1940s horror films (especially those produced by the independent "Poverty Row" studios) underrepresented in, or overwritten by scholarship that fails to consider the dialogic nature of genre objects as they work within and against the cultural and aesthetic trends that inform and inspire them (Jancovich, 2008: 27).[2] In the 1940s, these trends revolve less around the idea that the "real" horrors leading up to WWII somehow displaced Hollywood horror, than they do around the effects of shifting conceptualizations of realism on Hollywood horror films. Many horror films of the 1940s share a sensibility that brings the Gothic mode's interrogation of the real together with the realist aesthetic and psychological focus that informs other Hollywood film genres and styles of that decade, such as film noir and the paranoid woman's film. This chapter thus calls for a different genealogy of the American horror film, departing from an established scholarship that misconstrues a small number of Hollywood horror productions during the 1930s as the categorical standard for the genre. I suggest that a "Gothic-realist" genealogy helps scholars to reconsider a whole series of horror films in the modern and postmodern era and offers new possibilities to theorize the horror film.

The Gothic mode is commonly understood as an aesthetic alternative to the mimetic and positivistic aims of the realist novel in the 18th century. George Haggerty has argued that the Gothic mode's aesthetic challenge to the realist novel was nothing short of a "formal insurgency"

(1989: 3), a paradoxical search for a new form through "formal instability and fragmentation" (Haggerty, 1989: 2-3). There was an inherent reflexivity in the Gothic that explored the limitations of literary (and, later, photographic and filmic) representation to capture events or subjects in any comprehensive way. The 18th century Gothic stressed sensation and excess of feeling, over rational cognition, as key to understanding the human experience. The interest here was less anti-realist, in other words, than an investigation into how reality might be experienced through more subjective, embodied means—through the senses. In the American Gothic literary tradition particularly—from its fictional origins in the oneiric post-Revolutionary landscapes of Charles Brockden-Brown (1771-1810), through the monomaniacal subjects and maddeningly opaque symbols of Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville in the 19th century, to the self-conscious Gothic theatricality of H.P. Lovecraft, William Faulkner, Joyce Carol Oates, Thomas Ligotti and others in the 20th century—the text is nearly always suspect as offering unfettered access to the real. American Gothic narratives are intensely interiorized projections of psychic trauma, especially related to the subject's witnessing, and subsequent struggle to chronicle, past events that have left psychological scars. Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) is arguably the prototypical American Gothic text in this vein, the ultimate vision of America as a ruin that both compels artistic expression and resists representation.[3] Both Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), for example, echo Poe's allegory of a family (and a national) history characterized by (in some cases, willful) forgetting, and yielding an infectious neurosis fueled by frustrated artistic creation, moral and physical degradation, and violence born of unfulfilled longing. Poe's short story is also an extended metaphor for the failure of witnessing and interpretation to yield a holistic picture of events: while its narrative is a sustained act of attempted interpretation, its narrator is unable to detect meaning in the many meta-textual hints offered by the story's landscape, house, bodies, music, musical lyrics, books, and paintings—that are ripe with uncanny suggestions. The House of Usher's reality is that of illusion, abstraction, and maddening suggestion. Eric Savoy argues that the American Gothic's "allegorical turn" in works like "Usher" "veers away from the clarity of denotation toward the ghostly realm of connotation: accordingly, the gothic registers a trauma in the strategies of representation as it brings forward a traumatic history toward which it gestures but can never finally refer" (1998: 11).

Reality in the American Gothic tradition is, like this "traumatic history," by turns, overwhelming, ephemeral and inscrutable in its haunting implications, characteristics that bleed into the style and structure of the texts themselves to form an early version of what Steven Schneider, writing of late-20th-century horror cinema, calls "uncanny realism" (1997).[4] Here, a darker reality undergirds and pervades everyday experience, but eludes representation; it pricks the observer with potential awareness but ultimately remains figural. In the American Gothic tradition, reality is thus stranded in a constant state of imminence that is both horrific and pleasurable to contemplate; the subject, taking on the role of a perpetual witness, becomes compelled to see reality as something to be chronicled for posterity or to warn future seekers and generations. There is both an epistephilic desire and epistephobic anxiety driving the American Gothic subject (and narrative), where coming into knowledge of one's world is attended by intense hesitation in fear of—and, oddly, a longing for—unpleasant sensation. As Noël Carroll has noted, emotional responses like "disgust" (1990: 37) are the expected outcome where the sought-after knowledge revolves around the disclosure of category-defying unknowns. "One wants to gaze upon the unusual," he writes, "even when it is simultaneously repelling" (Carroll, 1990: 39). Additionally, the Gothic subject feels compelled to act as a witness to events, but the textual tools at his or her disposal may continually fail to represent the overwhelming sensations and fullness that characterize that experience. Fredric Jameson mentions a "tension within traditional realism between the epistemological and the aesthetic [which] suggests [a] recombination or tendency that has not yet found its name" and advocates going to the language of documentary for where such a "recombination" might be framed or explored (1992: 161).

What I call Gothic realism compels a similar investigation of the epistemological paradigms shared by horror and documentary. Gothic horror's aesthetic engagement with the limitations of reportage and investigation, with the struggle to convey comprehensively a largely traumatic reality, and with disclosures of knowledge that generate unutterable truths and shocking frissons, suggests parallels between the narrative models of horror and documentary.[5] I begin this Chapter with an outline of Gothic realism's revelatory reality to suggest a potential reason for the apparent dissemination of 1940s horror across different sub-genres and cycles, assigned retroactively by scholars. The combination here of trends—hypermediated style, an emphasis on questing and interpretation of cryptic environments, a focus on the power of sensation at least as much as logic in determining one's reality, and the presence of both desire and repulsion in

conjunction with uncovering knowledge—all suggest an alternative realism that becomes a conceptual site where different regimes of power are in play. As in the Foucauldian apparatus's notions of a productive "network" (1980: 194) of colliding discourses, here the shared desires of horror and documentary are brought together to evoke a troubled history and present.

In his framing of the Gothic in works like *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Fredric Jameson problematically reduces the Gothic mode to an "exhausted paradigm" (Jameson, 1991: 288; quoted in Link, 2009: 70). Jameson's construction of the Gothic as a mode that momentarily subverts, but ultimately supports bourgeois norms will be familiar and frustrating to scholars of the Gothic and horror who long have moved beyond the popular view, especially in journalism, that Gothic horror is a formulaic genre, second only to pornography in its so-called exploitation of moral degradation and excesses. However, as Alex Link (2009) has argued, there is a tension in Jameson's work between what Link calls "Jameson's Gothic" and "*Postmodernism*'s Gothic," (or the version of Gothic that Jameson puts forth in *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*), in that the version of Gothic that Jameson outlines in the 1991 study—despite Jameson's intentions—frames the modernist project in terms of the same "inescapable threat to stable knowledge" (Link, 2009: 70) found in the Gothic mode's disruption of the order, normalcy and primacy of "totalising knowledge systems" (Link, 2009: 71). I would add that this Gothic disruption of epistemic paradigms also appears in the later *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013), where Jameson discusses realism in terms of a middle-ground of affect and present-ness that hovers between story and representation. This relationship between sensation and cognition—a liminal state where the subject is stranded between experience and its interpretation/representation—prompts Jameson to argue that notions of realism should be located in a struggle between experience and making meaning of that experience. In the diminished emphasis on narrative towards paradigmatic spectacle and affect, Jameson—inadvertently, it seems—highlights in realism the present-ness and presence of representation that occurs in many Gothic narratives' use of found manuscripts and epistolary forms that emphasize a struggle to chronicle experience. One finds here also the peculiar logic of hypermediation that Richard Grusin and Jay David Bolter (1999) identify in new media—that state of highlighting the struggle of representation itself as "reality." Jameson frames realism dialectically "in terms of the un- or not-yet-spoken" (1992: 167), a concept that "impli[es] the possibility of *knowledge*" (1992: 158 emphasis in the original). This realism of imminent

revelation presumes a reality that will always exceed the subject's efforts to wrest cognitive order from the sensations it produces. The simultaneous pleasure and terror in contemplation of the text producing a revelation of knowledge is endemic to Gothic's sense of the real, and marks its narratives with a drive to document potentially unsettling truths.

Many 1940s Hollywood horror films address the domestic horrors of wartime America by evoking a deeply unsettling reality that strands its subjects in a liminal present ripe with dreadful suggestions of coming crisis. The characters negotiating this reality of imminent menace often derive from the curious female questers of the literary Gothic, such as the titular character of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and the unnamed narrator of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938). In Mark Robson's *The Seventh Victim* (1943) and Robert Siodmak's *Phantom Lady* (1944), for example, female subjects become lost in morally murky and labyrinthine cities in uncanny quests that threaten not only their safety, but the slippage of their very identity into spaces and characters that deceive and mirror them. Both films manifest their heroines' confusion aesthetically in claustrophobic urban environments and interior sets, and chiaroscuro lighting that abstracts space and objects through deep shadows. Though these two films frame their everyday urban spaces as similarly nightmarish and rife with mentally disturbed "monsters," Robson's film (for RKO horror producer Val Lewton) is continually framed in scholarship as a horror film, while Siodmak's is most often labeled as film noir. Similarly, Alfred Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) and Frank Wisbar's *Strangler of the Swamp* (1946) both focus on the corrupted spaces of psychically-charged prison-house homes and rural areas, with female explorers confronting horrific truths about their families and communities; yet, again, Hitchcock's Thornton Wilder-scripted rural horror film is most often framed as film noir or melodrama, with Wisbar's atmospheric, painterly Poverty Row tale of a seemingly cursed swamp (made on the cheap by Producers Releasing Corporation) typically labeled as horror. John Farrow's melancholic and deterministic *Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1948), another horror film now characterized as film noir, may provide one of the best examples of Gothic realism's sense of dread-fueled menace in its evocation of wartime and postwar American subjectivity as characterized by feelings of anxiety and paranoia in the face of an ambiguous future. Here Edward G. Robinson, in a contrast to the amnesia-suffering character he played the same year in Delmer Daves' *The Red House*, is John Triton, a broken man with psychic powers who warns a couple of imminent danger that ultimately leads to his own demise. The film opens with a

thwarted suicide attempt by Jean Courtland (Gail Russell), whose desire seems to be to disrupt the flow of time. Referring to her watch, she says to her rescuer, Elliott Carson (John Lund), "At least I made it stop. They [the stars] kept right on." The film frames the present as caught in temporal limbo, and the characters continually express a near totalizing lack of agency to intervene in their own fate: "I hate this, this terrible resignation," says Elliott. "It's as though you're half dead already. You're like an automaton playing a part." The characteristic mood here is deterministic dread, as Mark Bould has noted of films noir (2005), tinctured with the Gothic's pervasive fear of the future being a mere projection or repetition of the failures of the past. The brand of determinism here is, however, not set or given; it is still, in Jameson's terms, a state of "the un- or not-yet-spoken," of possible knowledge. In Gothic realism, the conditions are complicatedly preset by a labyrinthine system of intricate order(s) that resist reading, remain unfathomable, and therefore strand the subject in a state of unpredictability.

The intertwining of Gothic and realist traditions in these and many other 1940s horror films reflects the epistemological paradigms at work in wartime America, where history is synonymous with trauma, and where narratives become extended pop-psychoanalytical explorations into a haunting or forgotten past, or a morally-suspect and threatening present.[6] The result is an aesthetic of realist horror that parallels contemporaneous national-realist traditions in French Poetic Realism and Italian Neorealism—both of which eschew the idea of a transparent realism by blending in degrees of lyricism, "transpos[ition]" (Colin Crisp, quoted in Bould, 2005: 35), "transfigur[ation]" (Andrew, 1995: 38), and melodrama (Bayman, 2009). As Dudley Andrew (1995) and Louis Bayman (2009) have argued, French Poetic Realism and Italian Neorealism, respectively, gesture towards the affective tendencies of melodrama as a way of evoking collective emotions to heighten the shocks posed by modernity. Both traditions serve to "transform the real" (1995: 39-40), as Andrew argues of Poetic realism, to "bring cinema closer to the lives of the people" (2009: 50), as Bayman argues of Neorealism. Gothic realism—like French Poetic Realism and Italian Neorealism—is a realism of the senses and of affect, veering away from rational strategies to appeal directly to the emotional lives of audiences. In Paul Wells's formulation, this is to see horror "as both spectacle and social mediator" (2000, 43). Wells notes the "sentimental apocalypse" in horror, "which both acknowledges consensus and constraint and simultaneously reveals *how it is possible* to feel" (2000, 51, emphasis in the original). Dudley Andrew explains French Poetic Realism's turn to affect as a way of

transfiguring the real in similar terms: "Poetic realism promises to deliver not a message about frustrated desire, or oppression, or bartered hopes, or helplessness, but the very experience of these feelings" (1995: 20). Andrew argues that Poetic realism "diffuses" Hollywood's "maximum shock effects […] in a warm mist of style that mutes the sound and brightness of every effect, even as it washes over us and seeps down to the roots of feeling" (1995, 6).[7]

Arguably, Andrew's description here is applicable to 1940s Hollywood films noir and paranoid woman's films, not to mention horror films of the era such as *Strangler of the Swamp*, *Return of the Vampire* (1943), *The Uninvited* (1944), and many of the productions by Val Lewton (discussed later). My interest here is how 1940s Hollywood horror's own flirtation with, and dodging of, what Andrews sees as conventional 'maximum shock effects' might speak directly to a 1940s American audience to evoke their felt experience during and after wartime. Following Andrew, I ask how the culture is "served" (1995: 43) by trends in horror that I associate with Gothic realism. With reference to scenes in several key films below, I suggest that the concept of "Gothic realism" can help scholars to interrogate the degree to which 1940s Hollywood offers examples of a varied and profoundly pervasive and subversive horror cinema that becomes seemingly diffuse in its permutations of the real, though nonetheless engaged with "reality."

My use of "Gothic" as a critical term is conceptual, not generic. It runs against the critical use of "Gothic" by horror scholars to indicate the conventions of fantastical horror; instead, it derives from applications of Gothic as a reflexive discourse on representation that challenges positivistic and "constructive" notions of a persuasive, even didactic realism. Gothic realism is an emergent 1940s realism that generates a sense of the real through sensation, and runs contrapuntally to the "association with realism and contemporary social commentary" that Jancovich (2007: n.p) identifies in the critical reception of 1940s horror. "Gothic" has been deployed by much scholarship on horror cinema to set up an oversimplified binary between 1) the supernatural ("Gothic") horrors of the Universal monster film of the 1930s, and 2) the 1940s shift to psychological realism in film noir and the paranoid woman's film, and to didactic sensationalism in the late-decade "documentary" thrillers of producer Louis de Rochemont.[8] In this scholarly narrative, "Gothic" in a contemporary sense can indicate only a nostalgic throwback to an older time. I use Gothic as a conceptual tool to highlight the hybridity of the 1940s horror film. A focus on Gothic realism thus allows for a rethinking of the history of the horror genre as it has been narrated. A reevaluation of 1940s horror is especially necessary in

terms of that decade's turn to psychological and social realism in other realms, and how that has resulted in the retroactive assignation of sub-generic status to horror films now labeled as film noir or paranoid woman's films. I argue that the ostensible divide between Gothic in its most conventional and baroque sense—and "realism" in its most documentary sense—collide in the 1940s in ways that had not been manifest together since the early cinema's attractions-based actualities and fantasies by the Lumières Brothers and Georges Méliès, respectively. As Tom Gunning (1986) has argued, films of actuality and illusion in the silent era share an emphasis on spectacle that survives in genres like horror. And Elizabeth Cowie (1999) acknowledges a similar attractions aesthetic in documentary cinema, where knowledge comes in through more than just appeals to cognitive processing. Yet, just as this tradition of a horror cinema of spectacular sensations returns in the 1940s, the word "horror" disappears from scholarship on genre, leaving 1940s horror discursively limited to sequels and retreads of the 1930s.

Through extensive research on the reception of 1940s genre films by reviewers, theatre managers, and publicity campaigns, Mark Jancovich (2008) has shown that most films that we now call film noir or paranoid woman's films, for example, were received as horror. According to Jancovich, "critics began to dissociate the thriller from Gothic fantasy" in the late 1940s, having assigned "thriller" to those films that moved towards realism, and "Gothic" to those films that maintained a degree of remove from the everyday (2012: 26).[9] At least one unfortunate result of this is the reduction of horror in the 1940s tends to just a few supernatural films like *The Uninvited* (1944), the sequels to 1930s Universal monster films, and a handful of "exceptions," such as the Val Lewton productions for RKO. The scholarship on horror film retroactively establishes a binary between the fantastical tradition of the Gothic horror film and the realist aesthetics of the 1940s genre films that tends to glance over the characteristics they share. Raymond Durgnat, in his seminal 1970 essay on film noir, for example, invokes the Gothic to reframe several wartime horror films as "thrillers": "A postwar subgenre is the thriller," he writes, "developed into plain clothes Gothic (*The Spiral Staircase* [1945], *The Red House* [1948], *Sorry, Wrong Number* [1948]). *Phantom Lady* [1944] (in its very title) indicates their interechoing" (1970: 51). Durgnat's combination of words here highlights the generic dialogism that makes such films difficult to label; his assignment of "thriller" to these (horror) films indicates their status as conflations of the "plain" (the contemporary everyday) and the "Gothic" (here used to indicate more conventional "horror"). What Durgnat misses here is the implications

his combination of "plain clothes" and "Gothic" have for a discussion of Gothic-realist trends in horror films. The "interechoing" he discusses in the title of *Phantom Lady*, for example, is an indication of hybridity—a combination of realist tropes (trauma, obsession, paranoia, violence) and the Gothic conventions most favored by horror (oneiric and psychically-charged landscapes, spectacle, female-centered narratives). Durgnat's usage of the Gothic tradition here will become typical of horror scholarship across the 20th century, where "Gothic" comes increasingly to be synonymous with supernatural horror, or psychological horror films that make ludic use of Gothic conventions (e.g., decaying mansions and haunted minds), such as *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) and *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (Robert Aldrich, 1960). Writing in 2007 of what he perceives as a distinction between 1940s horror cinema and film noir, for example, Rick Worland maintains Durgnat's usage of the term "Gothic" to indicate the conventions of supernatural horror: "Unlike gothic horror," writes Worland, "Film Noir overlaid expressionism's low-key lighting and skewed shot compositions onto contemporary crime stories generally considered 'realistic' in their day" (2007: 177).[10] In Worland's terms, "gothic" connotes the more fantastical conventions of the horror genre—labyrinthine castles and forests; an imaginary, vaguely European locale and sense of past-ness; and spectacular, category-bending monstrosity—that can be best represented by the Universal monster films of the 1930s and, later, the Hammer Studios remakes of those films in the 1950s. As a traveling concept, "Gothic horror" has thus lost connection to the Gothic mode's engagement with breaking down comprehensive claims to knowledge. Instead "Gothic horror" finds its critical currency as a keyword in scholarship for indicating illusion and allegory, along with an emphasis on a mythical timelessness that scholars oppose to the contemporaneity and locality that is said to underscore the cinematic realism of, for example, 1940s noir films.

Val Lewton's 1940s horror productions for RKO Studios have been instrumental as a critical reference point for scholarship that maintains this opposition between the Gothic and realist modes. *Cat People* (Jacques Tourneur, 1942) initiates a string of successful Lewton productions[11] that are typically seen as subtle, intelligent, psychologically nuanced and decidedly poetic alternatives to a general 1940s horror genre product that was (and largely still is) seen to be crude and formulaic. Notwithstanding his tantalizing suggestion that the Lewton films provide "the clearest link between 1930s horror and 1940s Film Noir" (2007: 178), Worland sees film noir less as a blend of Gothic horror's focus on repression, madness and moral degeneracy, than

as the *reapplication* of the expressionist style common to 1930s horror to form a parallel (and oppositional) set of realist conventions emphasizing the "psychological subjectivity pertinent to [film noir's] violent, sexually obsessive, or otherwise deviant characters" (2007: 178). What needs to be stated more explicitly—and what bears further analysis—is that the elements that Worland identifies here in films noir (violence, sexual obsession, deviance) are exactly the elements that characterize American Gothic horror. Despite their decidedly high-Gothic leanings—a chiaroscuro aesthetic, baroque mise-en-scène and set design, labyrinthine psychically-charged environments, and suggestively supernatural elements—the Lewton-produced films consistently have been framed by horror scholars as characterized by realism. This assessment derives primarily from a scholarly emphasis on what the Lewton-produced films withhold—not what they show. Secondarily, it derives from the Lewton films' placement of characters in urban settings with everyday jobs, in their skepticism and ambivalence around suggestively supernatural events, and in their narrative focus on rooting out the source of psychological trauma. In a fairly typical formulation, David J. Skal describes the Lewton unit films as "an artistically and financially successful cycle of atmospheric, psychological shockers, relying on shadows and understatement rather than obvious makeup effects" (1993: 218). Joel E. Siegel's early study notes Lewton's "uncommon respect for the look and texture of everyday life" (1973: 30), where "[h]omes and apartments looked as if somebody had been living in them before the movie started" and "characters wore only the styles and qualities of clothing that their counterparts would in real life" (1973: 30). Even the latter Lewton productions (*The Body Snatcher* [Robert Wise, 1945], *Isle of the Dead* [Mark Robson, 1945], and *Bedlam* [Mark Robson, 1946])—which arguably turn more towards "Gothic fantasy" in their use of 19th-century painting and literary sources, costume and period settings, and heightened allegory—have been deemed realist, especially against the more marvelous tendencies of the 30s. Paul Wells observes, for example, that in the final three Lewton films iconic horror star Boris Karloff "subordinated his Universal persona to Lewton's more *naturalistic* style, and in so doing demonstrated the shift of emphasis that had occurred in the 1940s" (2000: 56, emphasis added) to more subtle, because "unseen", horrors (2000: 55). That Lewton's horror productions indicate a perceptible "shift" towards the "unseen" in 1940s horror is part of a critical narrative of the genre that forgets Lewton's films are—like many 1940s horror films—quite upfront in their deployment of attractions-based spectacle.[12]

In Tom Gunning's terms, a cinema of attractions is one "that displays its visibility" in direct presentation or address to audience (1986: 230). Arguably, the most celebrated sequences in the Lewton productions are those moments when they cease to narrate and commence to *show*: the shadowy, shimmering spectacle of a woman trapped in a basement swimming pool by an unseen menace in *Cat People*, for example, or the almost identical sequences of women pursued through vacant landscapes where emptiness and absence suggest pervasive dread in both *Cat People* and *The Leopard Man* (1943). Both of these latter sequences end in shock effects, with unexpected elements popping out to startle the viewer. In fact, the generally perceived emphasis on absence that scholars highlight in the more celebrated horror films of the 1940s (e.g., *The Uninvited* [Lewis Allen, 1944], *Gaslight* [George Cukor, 1944]) becomes a chiaroscuro *spectacle* in its own right. This *aesthetics of absence* derives from the Gothic's emphasis on liminal states: where easily identifiable monsters, moral and epistemological certainties, perspectival clarity, and clear narrative causality and closure are absent or fogged. Accordingly, the Gothic realism of 1940s horror cycles such as film noir and the paranoid woman's film relies heavily on polysemic symbolism, and on abstractions of space via shadows and oblique angles, to render America's urban, rural and domestic spaces disturbing.

In terms of Gothic realism, an aesthetics of absence is not necessarily an aesthetics of lack (in the psychoanalytical sense, of phallic power), but an excessive stylistics that emphasizes the suggestive properties of the medium itself. This is an aesthetics of attraction that Steven Shaviro calls a "hypertrophy of the visual" (1993: 9), where cinema as object need not be contemplated critically without accounting for "allure" and pleasure (Shaviro, 1993: 14-15). As a source of excitation, an aesthetics of absence necessitates a pronounced *presence* of the medium, a hypermediation. Echoing the revelationist tradition of thinkers like Jean Epstein, Dziga Vertov, Béla Balázs and Sigfried Kracauer, Shaviro argues that it is "not the emptiness of the image, but its weird fullness" that causes theoretical suspicion of the kinds of desire attending the medium (1993: 17). The revelationist tradition was anti-ocularcentric, distrusting the naked eye, and focusing, in Vertov's words, on moving "away from copying" with the camera and to push it to do things the eye cannot do (quoted in Turvey, 2008: 11). For Epstein, writing in 1926, "the lens is quarrelsome," it "displays what is hidden, hides what is displayed," it "impregnates the film" with potential meanings (2012: 298). Malcolm Turvey, marking a reality much akin to a Gothic reality always stranded on the verge of potential knowledge, marks Epstein's cinema as a cinema

of "immanence" (1998: 35). Relating the cinema's uncanny brand of embodiment directly to Epstein's slippery concept of "*photogenie*," Leslie Stern explains:

> At its most representational the cinema could bring into focus the unseen or previously unseeable, but the wonder of it was that in addition to representational prowess it possessed magical powers, could make things appear and disappear, could conjure ghosts, could mutilate and multiply and reconstitute bodies—could mess with time and matter. […] The sense of dissonance and ephemerality, of fragmentation and shock provoked by film corresponded, as so many writers have pointed out, to a consciousness shaped by modernity. (1997: 357)

In some ways, Epstein's cinema of immanence, or in Shaviro's terms above, of "fullness," requires a hypermediated style that withholds meaning—evokes it, suggests it, without fully, starkly revealing it. In other words, a revelatory cinema is one that hypermediates the cinematic apparatus. There is, in the films discussed above, and other less celebrated films of the 1940s, an attempt to develop an aesthetic parallel to the notion of a reality that is always *on the verge* of revealing repressed desires and fears, but that withholds comprehensiveness at a maddening distance from the subject. Gothic reality is always on the verge of producing meaning, and accordingly that state of anticipation of a dreadful-desired revelation requires an aesthetics of hypermediated attraction to realize it.

I. Gothic Excess, Hypermediation and a Realism of Affect

In the Introduction, as here, I discuss Gothic realism as addressing a "neglected" reality similar to that which Louis Bayman sees in Italian Neorealism's use of melodrama (2009: 47), and that which Dudley Andrew identifies in Poetic Realism's realism of the senses (1995: 20). Both of these realist traditions are thus to a certain degree revelatory realisms, in the sense that they "presence" aspects of reality that are otherwise invisible to the subject. Gothic realism functions as a way of presencing its darker reality by essentially stranding its audience between experience and meaning. As Eric Savoy argues, echoing Jameson, "the overarching tendency of the [American] Gothic has been toward a suspension between the immediacy of terrible affect and its linguistic and epistemological unaccountability" (1998: 14). Here, Savoy indicates clearly the Gothic's evocation of a reality that disturbs profoundly but resists representation, and thus

paradoxically may be best evoked through a hypermediated textuality that continually fails to be comprehensive in its representations and solutions. In other words, reality in the American Gothic, must be attended by a sense that any comprehensive chronicle of the "immediacy" of human experience (individual or collective) is maddeningly ephemeral, ungraspable. The most profound (if intangible) specter of the modern Gothic, then, is reality itself.

Some 1940s horror films seem as distant historically and spatially from the immediate concerns of WWII as Poe's allegorical tales seem to be from the rapidly industrializing 19th century United States; yet, as in Poe, they redraw the American landscape in terms of affect and excess, evoking a sense of dread infused by the spectral, the illusory, and the uncanny.[13] Comprehension of one's world in the Gothic is sorted out through both sensation and cognition—or cognition through sensation. Stories like Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher" and "Ligeia" are complicated combinations of interpretation, contemplations of obscure objects, and extended meditation on extreme moods and sensations. Accordingly, it is often in scenes of incredible aesthetic excess that we see the revelatory potential of moments of hypermediation in Gothic realism. Many of these moments of hypermediation are figured through reflexive artistic representations in the diegesis itself—especially music and painting—that halt the narrative, or complement it thematically. Jane Feuer terms such moments of hypermediation a "defamiliarization device" (quoted in Jameson 2007: 166), an act of reflexive interpretation that distances the viewer from the causal flow of narrative. While this distancing may be part of the effect such moments of excess have on audiences, I also want to discuss their affective dimensions, or what Shaviro calls, citing Benjamin, the "reactivation" (1993: 36) of objects via images and of sounds via recordings that occurs especially in such moments of hypermediation and excess, where, to borrow Shaviro's words, "constructedness and immanent materiality go hand in hand" (1993: 37). Four such films—*Bluebeard* (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1944), *Hangover Square* (John Brahm, 1945), *House of Dracula* (Erle C. Kenton, 1944) and *Phantom Lady* (Robert Siodmak, 1944)—feature scenes of spectacle that seem in excess of the requirements of narrative, and that "escape unifying impulses" (Thompson, 1986: 141) to gesture towards a kind of collective 1940s melancholia. The excessive elements in these scenes—largely revolving around scene duration, direct address, heightened allegory, and overdetermined themes and symbols (paintings and musical numbers as embodiments of psychosexual projection, for example)—bring them into the realm of affect-generating horror spectacle. I discuss affect here

as generated by a Gothic excess that highlights the gap between deep feeling and rational understanding (meaning) in confronting the real. Within this gap between sensation and cognition is a productive space where affect occurs in the Deleuzian notion of an embodied sense-feeling prior to meaning-emotion. The shift here to a sense of sublimity "testif[ying] to the primacy of sensation itself" (Johnson, 2012: 123), outside or in excess of representation, is a definition of affect that shifts away from considerations of form. Yet hypermediated form is key to the sensations generated by Gothic realist works, where embodied sensations come through the contemplation of the surface—the materiality of the medium—in addition to the other sensibilities and experiences surrounding reception of the work. I would parallel this kind of disruptive formal play and interaction to what Adam Lowenstein calls "allegorical moment[s]": "a shocking collision of film, spectator, and history where registers of bodily space and historical time are disrupted, confronted, and intertwined" (2005: 2). In the selection of key scenes that follow, I will show how we might locate within scenes of stylistic excess a sort of embodied formal quality. Here, formal disruptions analogous to Lowenstein's allegorical moments convey a collective desire and anxiety between texts and viewers particular to the 1940s.

Edgar G. Ulmer's *Bluebeard* (1944) opens with scenes that establish a 19th-century Paris stilled by fears of the film's eponymous serial killer. The actual Bluebeard of the film is Gaston Morel (played by John Carradine), a tormented artist who performs puppet operas (for which he also sings the lead), designs his own puppets, and, on the side, creates portraits of beautiful women—his potential victims. *Bluebeard* is one of several 1940s horror films featuring suffering artists who become somewhat sympathetic monsters, and in which those artists are shown struggling creatively to express repressed desires. Both *The Locket* (John Brahm, 1946) (discussed below) and *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* (Peter Godfrey, 1947), for example, feature scenes seemingly inspired by Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891)[14], where shocking paintings confront the viewer with overwhelmingly beastly doppelgängers of the main characters—images that are shown only briefly, and that are impossible to grasp in one viewing. The shock of such moments extends beyond narrative causality to emphasize the allegorical power of artistic representation, as one finds in the scene following *Bluebeard*'s opening moments. Here, Ulmer's film features a show-stopping puppet opera of the story of Faust in miniature—a scene played mostly in direct-address to the camera as it announces the film's thematic focus on the inevitable death of beauty. As the tragic scene plays out for a live audience

in a public park, its victimized puppet character, Marguerite, is given a parallel when Morel takes a break to gaze out, wide-eyed, at one of a set of lovely ladies he's invited to this particular performance. The narrative motivation of this scene is clear: this young lady, Lucille Lutien (Jean Parker) will become an inspiration, a love interest, a rival (she is a costume designer), and a torment for the insane artist. But the scene itself—alternating in its subjectivity amongst Morel, his puppeteers, the puppet opera, and Morel's potential victims—creates a sense of uncanny space collapsed into Morel's psyche. Similar to scenes in Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931) and Robert Siodmak's *The Spiral Staircase* (1945), where supernatural and psychological monsters stare starkly out at the horror audience, Morel's wide-eyed gaze at the camera simultaneously singles out Lucille and implicates the cinemagoer in direct address. Deep desire and repression underscore this performative scene, marking one of its many gestures to high-Gothic. Additionally, the film's deft intercutting between puppets and audience-members suggest that the entire diegesis is being orchestrated by an unseen hand, like Morel's puppet show. The meta-diegetic parallels in the scene between Morel's spectating victim, Lucille, and the cinemagoer encourage a response that is somewhere between uncomfortable sensation and distanced awareness of the scene's performative qualities.

The excessive elements of this scene—its self-conscious artistry, its duration (five of the film's total 71 minutes), its thematic and diegetic emphasis on performance, its figuration of reality as deceptive and illusive, its direct address to viewers, its allegorical staging of the narrative that will follow it—both do and do not function in service of the film's narrative and themes. The scene conventionally introduces all of the film's key characters and effectively sets out the film's themes around an artist struggling with a creative impulse that paradoxically forces him to dominate and destroy his models and to replace them with creative copies (puppets, paintings). However, the scene also begins the film with a melodramatic musical spectacle that nearly overwhelms everything that follows. With the exception of a visually stunning and inventive use of mirrors in the film's final scene, arranged so that the killer can see his victim without her seeing him, the film's generally chiaroscuro Paris is lyrical and dreamlike, but rarely in ways that announce themselves as aesthetic strategies in excess of diegetic requirements. The initiating puppet spectacle in *Bluebeard* serves in some ways as an announcement of further violent attractions to come—the allegorical nature of the violent confrontations in the Faust-Marguerite tryst will have its real-world counterpart later in the film between Morel and Lucille.

The film's telegraphing of future violence through scenes of spectacle suggest it as an early example of the subgenre of serial killer films that Cynthia Freeland dubs "realist horror." Like *Bluebeard*, the 1970s and 80s films that Freeland discusses focus on fascinating, even eroticized monsters, along with a "displacement of interest from plot onto spectacle" (1995: 131-2). In Freeland's terms, "realist horror" encourages audience interest in the revelation of future spectacular violence itself, rather than the gradual "disclosure" of category-bending monstrous entities outlined in Noël Carroll's (1990) theoretical model of supernatural horror. *Bluebeard* thus becomes one of a number of films (including several examples in the 1930s, such as Fritz Lang's *M.* [1931], and Michael Curtiz's *Doctor X* [1932]) that anticipate Freeland's "realist horror" subgenre long before the films she highlights. That is, while its monster may be realistic and psychologically complex, *Bluebeard* is less concerned with generating empathy for him and other characters than with a virtuosic stylistic performativity that generates horror through excessive spectacle.[15]

A focus on creator-performers who, like Morel, suffer for their art (especially music and painting) becomes a key trope in 1940s Gothic-realism. In John Brahm's *Hangover Square* (1945), set in London during the era of Guy Fawkes (c. 1605), this character is anxiety-ridden serial killer-composer, George Harvey Bone (played by the equally ill-fated, brilliant actor, Laird Cregar). The film features a moment of reflexive excess in its synecdochic final scene that rivals *Bluebeard*'s allegorical opener in its stylistic evocation of the suffering Bone's fevered psyche. The scene recalls the burning of Manderley in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), and is set to an 11-minute "Concerto Macabre" by Bernard Herrmann (a stunning piece that prefigures themes in Herrmann's music for *Vertigo* [1958]). The scene is a self-contained extravaganza that caps Brahm's film with Bone's fiery death, accompanied by his (and Herrmann's) masterpiece of romantic musical excess. The scene is shot through with commingled beauty and horror played directly to the cinemagoer. The camera tracks like a roving eye through the threatening flames consuming an expansive musical parlor, sweeping towards the long-suffering Bone as he bangs away at a grand piano in anticipation of his demise in a final creative fury. Even as a capstone to all the emotional excess the film suggests—including the emotional manipulation and artistic betrayal of Bone by an Eve-like figure who takes credit for one of his compositions—this final scene comes across as a performance of excess not to be matched until MTV music videos took center stage in the 1980s.

Despite historical settings placing them in that "other" time and space of allegory, *Hangover Square*'s and *Bluebeard*'s key scenes extend beyond narrative requirements to speak directly to 1940s audiences of overwhelming emotions and realties that will transcend any representation—realities that must only be evoked, felt, as affect. While moments of spectacle are not unique to cinematic horror in any era, the emotional resonance of these scenes is striking, even shocking, and excessive in the context of the rest of the films they punctuate. In Kristen Thompson's terms, stylistic "[e]xcess is not only counternarrative; it is also counterunity" (1986: 134), urging the viewer to participate in the highlighting of an extra-textual or para-textual rupture. In short, cinematic excess invites audiences to contemplate a moment of hypermediation in such moments that speaks to them on an affective level that exceeds the emotional logic of narrative. In *Hangover Square*, as in *Bluebeard*, this excess of emotion centers on strategies of hypermediation that bring together the gothic and realist paradigms at work in 1940s horror, where "shocking collision[s] of film, spectator, and history" (Lowenstein, 2005: 2) come through medium reflexivity, direct address, and stylistic excess. In these films, musical and puppet performances serve as projections of narratives that are, like Poe's, extended explorations of psychological obsession and mania related to trauma and repression. Seemingly meant to match the obsessions of their characters, these scenes become almost manic in their use of mise-en-scène, unmotivated camera movement, music and performance styles. Both films feature baroquely layered sets that are tactile in their velvety, draped depths. And actors John Carradine and Laird Cregar both give impressive performances marked occasionally by gestural remnants and facial expressions from the silent era. Wide-eyed stares are a major feature in these performances, most often in direct address to the spectator. There is in both films the wartime interest in psychoanalysis as a structuring device for conflict, though neither film is interested in reaching didactic or moral conclusions that essentialize the actions of their subjects. The psychological states they explore are complex. Both films figure their quotidian realities through a dense lens of uncanny repetition and suggestion that render reality a scene of continual anxiety, especially around the potential rupture of fragile norms.

One of the clearest signs of a paradigmatic shift in the 1940s to a realism of the senses and an interest in explorations of psychological trauma comes in its figurations, or revisions of the 1930s supernatural monster. The key figure here is the titular character of *The Wolf-Man* (1941, George Waggner) (played by Lon Chaney, Jr.), suffering with a curse that strands him in a

mystical trap, and strips him of his only emotional connections to the present: an already-scrutinizing father (Claude Rains), and a love interest (Evelyn Ankers). Key *reconfigurations* of the 1930s staples come in 1940s versions of *Dracula* and *The Mummy* (1932, Karl Freund). *Return of the Vampire* (1943, Lew Landers) resurrects Bela Lugosi's count (under the name Armand Tesla) when a wartime bomb opens his grave. The film features a powerful allegorical moment in one of its late scenes of the awkwardly-caped, anachronistic vampire stumbling through the rubble of a bombed-out London. In the 1940s variations on the original *Mummy* film—*The Mummy's Hand* (1940, Christy Cabanne), *The Mummy's Tomb* (1942, Harold Young), *The Mummy's Ghost* (1944, Reginald Le Borg), and *The Mummy's Curse* (1944, Leslie Goodwins)—the titular monsters are somewhat repurposed from the original Karloff character, now tinged with a kind of dark romantic longing and suffering; hence, Lon Chaney, Jr.'s Mummy character is more like his tortured Wolf-Man character. No longer is he Karloff's savvy undead schemer; now he is the perpetually puppetted dupe of men who, in *The Mummy's Ghost*, drags the film's preternaturally-aging heroine to a shared doom at the bottom of a swamp.

I now turn to one of the definitive iterations of the 1940s doomed monster, Erle C. Kenton's underrated "monster rally"[16] film, *House of Dracula* (1944), where the titular count (now played by John Carradine) and the Wolf Man (Lon Chaney, Jr.) take on the role of suffering monsters, both seeking a cure for their cursed conditions. In a scene that highlights the same fatal (and futile) romantic pairing that 1940s viewers were likely to find in film noir and the paranoid woman's film, Dracula enters to exercise his hypnotic will over an unwitting potential victim, Miliza Morelle (Martha O'Driscoll), who sits playing Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" on a grand piano. As Miliza falls under Dracula's power, the scene becomes a *tour de force* psychic staging of the anxieties of the potential victim, figured through her sudden virtuosity in creating unconscious (and even gloomier) variations on the familiar Beethoven piece she has been playing. "I never heard this music before; yet, I'm playing it," she says as the Count approaches, his eyes widened in tight close-up—a clear imitation of both Lugosi's performance and Tod Browning's persistent framing of him in *Dracula*.[17] The scene is choreographed like a dance, gradually shrinking the vast Victorian-era set to a focus on just the two actors' faces. As Miliza's music becomes wildly variant, the following dialogue occurs, hinting at mingled feelings of desire, alienation and dread:

Dracula: You're creating it, for me.

Miliza: It frightens me.

Dracula: It's beautiful. It's the music of the world from which I come.

Miliza: It makes me see strange things … people who are dead, yet they're alive.

Dracula: Mine is a world without material needs.

Miliza: It calls to me. But I'm afraid.

The dialogue collapses fears of the past, present longing, and anxiety about the future, highlighting the scene as a classic formulation of what Kirsten Moana Thompson calls "scopic dread" (2007: 25), or that dread which is associated with repressed knowledge.[18] In other words, the scene does not visually represent or reenact wartime anxieties—it instead evokes them through overdetermined metaphor, a sort of uncanny double-speak. Thompson bases her conceptualization of dread on the Kierkegaardian model, which sees dread as an open-ended concept oriented towards the future, but informed by past trauma, and "a paradoxical form of desire *and* fear" (2007: 8). As Thomspon explains, "Kierkegaardian dread […] has three principal components [...]: first, radical freedom (or the moral dread occasioned by absolute choice), which gives rise to a fear of the future and which is mediated by past actions; second, a paradoxical ambivalence that is connected to the uncanny; and third, a connection to the cataclysmic qualities of trauma" (2007: 18). Miliza's response to the count that she sees "people who are dead, yet they're alive," recalls (or, chronologically, anticipates) the "terrible resignation" felt by characters in *Night Has a Thousand Eyes*—the idea that, like puppets, these characters are "half dead already," and "automaton[s] playing a part." The films seem to speak the same language of collective repression of lingering trauma and dread of the total lack of agency the future might bring. Agency, or lack thereof, is a key center of examination in the American Gothic as early as Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland; or, The Transformation* (1798), with its titular protagonist re-enacting obsessive and harmful atavistic traits occurring over multiple generations. Such a genealogical lineage also extends to Poe's ill-fated male narrators, who, like prototypes of 1940s noir's hysterical males, are most often so beholden to powerful women (or the lingering idea of those women) that they repeatedly lose themselves in these overwhelming iterations of monstrous femininity.

In American Gothic discourse, the mythical notion of "America the Free" collapses into the "moral dread occasioned by absolute choice." Dracula's past haunts Miliza with both the

possibility of another (terrible) world and the fear of choosing her own path; ironically, this choice is offered to her under Dracula's hypnotic will, suggesting that in this world, such radical choice is perhaps only hypothetical. This mere illusion of choice further links *House of Dracula* to a thematic examination of determinism usually attributed to 1940s film noir (See Bould, 2005). As Dracula releases Miliza, the music returns to the familiar cadenced melancholy of "Moonlight Sonata"—i.e., to form(ula) and to structure—but the excessive emotional overtones of Miliza's sudden virtuosic performance, and the scene, remain. The entire scene, like that of the puppet opera in *Bluebeard* and Bone's final orchestral masterpiece in *Hangover Square*, is focused on the imposition of a sinister will as an act of forced variation from the norm. Miliza may be falling under an evil spell, or she may be opening up to her own repressed desires for pleasures beyond the physical and the everyday (and for death). It is this kind of pleasurable melancholy and barely capped longing for escape and release that characterizes 1940s horror cinema's consistently humanized, eroticized, conflicted and complicated monsters—*as well as* their potential victims.

The variation on a musical theme in these scenes from *House of Dracula*, *Bluebeard* and *Hangover Square* underscores repression and seeks to shock in the Benjaminian sense of "tactile appropriation" (quoted in Reyes, 2013: 253), where a shift occurs from identification to affect and sensation, relating particularly to the spectator's bodily relationship to the cinematic object. The result is a kind of awakening to reality—to one's collective experience—through the senses, as opposed to the ideological model that tends to see the viewer or user as desensitized or deluded by media into a false sense of reality. These scenes play against formula—they perform for us—addressing the audience directly in terms that do not encourage closure, but instead, "shock" us. They ask us to reflect, but they do not dictate the terms of that reflection. As Eric Savoy puts it, discussing the Lacanian notion of the unrepresentable "Real," such scenes suggest "the myriad things and amorphous physicality beyond our representation that haunt our subjectivity and demand our attention, that compel us to explanatory language, but resist the strategies of that language" (Savoy, 2002: 169). Laura Frost, referring to the aesthetics of post-9/11 horror cinema—another cinema of trauma—has termed this disjunction between the onset of traumatic events and their representation, the "drama of the discrepancy between the spectacle and its meaning" (2011: 14). Yet another site of the Foucauldian apparatus (1980), this space of discrepancy in 1940s horror cinema occurs within the realm of sensation, and is also a space where networks of power operate and can be illuminated. In such scenes, the horror genre begins

to tackle the question of representation of experience through sensorial epistemologies—knowledge through the body—traceable back to folktale traditions, where innocents gain knowledge through emotional and physical violence. A disturbing example of this kind of scene occurs in Robert Siodmak's *Phantom Lady* (1944), when we descend with questing heroine, Carol Richman (Ella Raines), heavily dolled up and in disguise, into the liminal depths of a basement nightclub—a clear setting for the unconscious, and the film noir's equivalent of the Gothic's attics and labyrinths. Richman is in pursuit of information from Cliff (Elisha Cook, Jr.), jazz drummer and potential witness to the existence of the phantom lady of the film's title. As a sweaty Cliff pounds wildly on the drums in this seedy, all-male environment, he stares lasciviously at Carol, who returns his gestures with a wide gum-smacking smile, and a lurching of her upper body to the beat. The frenetic editing, oblique angles, close-ups of phallic instruments—along with the aggressively improvised jazz, jutting trombones, pounding drums and thrusting, spastic bodies—all work together to create a highly performative scene that generates a frisson: about the sexual tension underlying this urban world, as well as the potential danger to the heroine who actively alienates herself by taking on the role of detective in a morally corrupt city. Cliff forces a sloppy kiss upon Carol, who then pushes her way through the crowd to reapply her smeared lipstick in a mirror. A sudden look of consternation at the "masked" face she sees in the reflection punctuates the scene's uncanny sense of shrill discomfort. The scene ends when Cliff leaves the drums to pursue this tryst with Carol to fruition; as they exit, the music fades to a low, lilting whisper to emphasize the sexual nature of the figurative climax we have just witnessed. Still, what lingers here is less the climax than Carol's earlier shock at confronting her own changed face, as if suddenly seeing through the disguise of a monster in a fairy tale. The scene is thus undercut by the social dynamics that film noir and the paranoid woman's film share with a horror film like *House of Dracula*. That is, its most sinister implications come not in any supernatural sense of monstrosity, but in an emotional historical grounding—the malaise it reveals around the power relationships and struggles between women and men in America's wartime domestic front.

Emotion and affect are the tools in such scenes, but not only for generating what Noël Carroll (1990) calls the emotion of "art-horror"—affect here pushes beyond cognitive processes that engender "pleasurable horror," to the sublime, the melancholy, and the profoundly spiritual moment of experiencing art, or an artistic moment. These films highlight themselves as self-

conscious works of art, these scenes as cultural markers of emotional embodiment and feeling that awaken viewers to a sense of the collective anxieties of wartime America. Again, they are akin to Lowenstein's highly performative allegorical moments in their stylistic excesses. Here, formal "shocks" become "a potential catalyst for the reawakening of experience to history" (Lowenstein, 2006: 16).[19] I would suggest in this light that 1940s horror films show Hollywood cinema, however unconsciously, to be deeply engaged in the degree to which hypermediation might be one way to draw out the emotional realities and experiences of Americans during wartime. Stylistic excesses in these films highlight the emotional undercurrents of a wartime reality, rather than delivering didactic social messages that may be deemed more appropriate to wartime austerities. A key factor in these films' Gothic realism comes in their abandonment of a rational, positivistic realism for one of sensation and ambivalence. In the next section, I turn to films that further explore the psychological implications of a Gothic reality, focusing on subjects and questers transfixed and bewildered by experience. I discuss the ways Gothic realism informs two Gothic-horror-inflected cycles—film noir and the paranoid woman's film—that have been dissociated from horror cinema due to their emphasis on contemporary urban settings and character psychology, and their evocation of a "national uncanny" (Bergland, 2000) derived from American literary traditions. I end with a discussion of *Citizen Kane* and the strategies it derives from both Gothic horror tradition, and a contemporary documentary tradition, as a way of outlining the crisis of representation inherent to the Gothic realist film that will carry over into Chapters II and III.

II. 1940s Realism, Film Noir and the Paranoid Woman's Film: "Suspended on the Brink of Meaning"

The realist trends in 1940s horror cinema that lead to sub-generic styles like film noir and the paranoid woman's film can be tied in large part to strictly rational, positivistic explorations of the psychology of wartime America. Dana Polan argues that the "war period becomes discursively a moment of psychical tension—the difficulties of homefront life and a fear of war as a source of irremediable psychological change" (1986: 180-81). This psychological change, he suggests, makes the era ripe for narratives that turn on tropes of chaos and closure, illness and cure, especially through recourse to the teleological psychoanalytical models gaining popularity

at the time. Within the context of 1940s horror, specifically, this same generalized tendency to explore "psychical tension" yields narratives of mystery, detection and investigation that generate a sense of pervasive dread of wholesale psychic rupture, and that yield a number of horror-inflected cycles that work within the troubling discourses of the American Gothic. I would include film noir and the paranoid woman's film within these horror-inflected cycles in part because of their interest in eroding the supremacy of American institutions and ideals such as individuality, family, domesticity, urbanity and rurality to configure them all as equally nightmarish constructs, ripe with implications of resurfacing trauma and violence, and the potential for ruin. Certainly films like *Rebecca* and *The Uninvited* flaunt their high-Gothic legacies proudly (and expensively) in narratives of hauntings (supernatural or otherwise) that, once solved, announce psychic release and closure. But these discourses of haunting are also in operation in film noir and the paranoid woman's film, where there prevails a sense that everyday domestic, rural, urban spaces are murky moral labyrinths that suggest discernible but otherwise impenetrable menace.

Writing in 1946, Siegfried Kracauer identifies this interiorizing of the source of horror in his discussion of a number of "horror thrillers" ([1946] 2003: 110) of the 1940s. I cite Kracauer's use of the phrase because the films that he discusses as "terror films" and "horror thrillers" would not be categorized as horror according to current critical trends, but instead as 1) film noir (*Shadow of a Doubt* [1943], *Somewhere in the Night* [1946], *Shock* [1946], *The Lost Weekend* [1945], *Dark Corner* [1946]); 2) paranoid woman's films (*Suspicion* [1941], *Gaslight* [1944]); or 3) hybrids that resist and/or combine such categories (*Spellbound* [1945], *The Spiral Staircase* [1946]).[20] Kracauer particularly singles out the turn in 1940s horror cinema to madness, sadism, and morbidity. He laments what he sees as the "failure of the movies to offer or suggest solutions" to the psychological and moral morass they conceptualize, adding that "the all-pervasive fear that threatens the psychic integrity of the average person seems accepted as inevitable and almost inscrutable" in 1940s films ([1946] 2003: 107). Kracauer's observations here draw a darkened parallel to the "psychical tension" and "irremediable psychological change" that Polan identifies as paradigmatic of 1940s cinema. Additionally, the lack of positivistic closure and the 'inscrutability' that Kracauer sees as attending these concerns is, of course, characteristic of a long-standing tradition in Gothic discourse to test the teleological paradigms of rational analysis as a way of documenting or expressing experience.

Janey Place describes film noir in succinct terms that echo the historical resonances of Dana Polan's comments, as well as the lack of "constructive" goals highlighted by Kracauer's 1946 essay. "The dominant world view expressed in film noir," she writes,

> is paranoid, claustrophobic, hopeless, doomed, predetermined by the past, without clear moral or personal identity. Man has been inexplicably uprooted from those values, beliefs and endeavours that offer him meaning and stability, and in the almost exclusively urban landscape of film noir (in pointed contrast to the pastoral, idealized, remembered past) he is struggling for a foothold in a maze of right and wrong. He has no reference points, no moral base from which to confidently operate. Any previous framework is cut loose and morality becomes relative, both externally (the world) and internally (the character and his relations to his work, his friends, his sexuality). Values, like identities, are constantly shifting and must be redefined at every turn. Nothing—especially woman—is stable, nothing is dependable. (Place, 1981: 41)

In Place's description above, film noir can be characterized in Gothic terms, by a generalized dread and wholesale 'instability' related to morality, sexuality, gender, subjectivity and agency. There is also here the Gothic's discursive collapse of physical and mental space, where 'paranoia', 'hopelessness' and confusion are figured in terms of 'claustrophobia' and disorientation within a nightmarish modernity, especially via the 'maze-like' "urban landscape" of noir. James Naremore (1998) has similarly noted that the "essence of noirness lies in a feeling of discontinuity, an intermingling of social realism and oneiricism" (Naremore, 1998: 22; cited in Bould, 2005: 16-17). As early as Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton's 1955 essay, "Towards a Definition of *Film Noir*," scholars of film noir have highlighted, however implicitly, this Gothic-realist nature of noir thematics and aesthetics. Borde and Chaumeton describe noir in terms of the "uncertainty" ([1955] 2005: 21) it creates around authorities, criminals and victims ([1955] 2005: 22).

The Gothic's emphasis on the inscrutability or illegibility of experience (and often of the media that try to represent that experience) appears as a darkly inflected realism of inconclusiveness and generalized dread in the films that Kracauer lists above—again, films that would have been received as horror in the 1940s.[21] Gothic realism's importance as a critical alternative realism lies within the intersecting networks of crisis occurring in these films: of a

present seen as either stripped of meaning, or overburdened with sensory detail; of the dreadful future threatened by this condition, which leaves the subject either empty or overwhelmed; and of a skepticism of any medium that attempts to convey the realities of such complicated experience. The Gothic-realist present is a flooded present; doing it any justice at all requires a negative hermeneutics that highlights gaps and impasses in any attempt to communicate it fully. Negotiating the noir world is an act of both physical and mental struggle through real space rendered uncanny because it registers another, barely discernible reality that is a nightmarish projection of wartime anxiety. For 1940s viewers, such a nightmare world might have been as thrilling as it was dreadful to contemplate in their cinema-going.

Gothic realism unites film noir and paranoid woman's pictures in a shared historiographical discourse in American literature that long predates Hollywood horror cinema, a subversive account of the present as contested space, haunted by repressed realities of history that undergird modernity, and that come pressing upon the subject bound to American ideals of "progress." Hybrid horror films like Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), *Suspicion* (1941), and *Spellbound* (1945), are characteristic of the period in that they literally strand their subjects in a world that cannot move forward from a sense of crippling paranoia; each, in its own way, begs for a renewed sense of cause and effect to uncover the present from a sense of history that lies over it like a leaden blanket that numbs the senses and cripples all movement forward. Eric Savoy cites David Mogen, Scott P. Sanders, and Joanne B. Karpinski's (1993) use of words like "rift" and "dark chasm" (1998: 7) to refer to American Gothic's figuration of history as absented, threatening from the margins, something in excess of representation. This is a sense of history that "derives from [a] conflict between the inscripted history of civilization and the history of the other, *somehow immanent* in the landscape of the frontier" (quoted in Savoy, 1998: 17, emphasis added). Renée Bergland discusses this essential "hauntedness" (2000: 9) of American subjectivity in its literary tradition in terms of what she calls a "national uncanny," where ghosts stand as reminders of "the unsettled, the not-yet-colonized, the unsuccessfully colonized, or the decolonized" (2000: 11).[22] Discussing the collectively diseased psychic landscapes in Charles Brockden-Brown and Washington Irving, the frontier Gothic of James Fenimore Cooper, and the historical guilt in Nathaniel Hawthorne, Bergland notes the "contradictory but interlocking impulses" in an American subjectivity that "must simultaneously acknowledge the American horror and celebrate the American triumph" (2000: 16). Perhaps nowhere are these interlocking

impulses more apparent than in overlooked 1940s horror films such as the oneiric *Strangler of the Swamp* and *Strangers in the Night* (1944), both of which release even their young, surviving characters into a hopeless, ruined and back-looking America. In *Strangler*, a strong young woman returns to a rural swamp to struggle against the sins of her father; and in *Strangers*, a soldier returns home from a war hospital to a sham lover constructed by a delusional, childless old woman living in a seaside mansion. Even in their final, quasi-happy endings, the films strand their hopeful youths in liminal or border spaces that represent a dead-end America mired in loss and regret.[23]

As figured by the American Gothic, the ghosts of the past are a paradox, "sometimes as much desired as they are feared" (Bergland, 2000: 6), because they are powerful reminders of both triumph and guilt (Bergland, 2000: 6). While this conqueror's guilt is, according to Bergland's account, often framed as having to do with Native American genocide and, later, the institution of slavery, World War II would certainly bring fresh anxieties around the shifting roles for men and women who fought and, perhaps more importantly, stayed behind—as well as the ways a possible Allied victory abroad might change the very definition of "America" and "American." Film noir and the paranoid woman's film both render two of America's most idealized spaces, the city and the home, as essentially haunted, potentially harmful, and morally corrupt. Indeed, the "dark"[24] of film "noir" and the paranoia attending the suspicious heroines of the paranoid woman's film are terms that indicate the horror traditions within which these styles function, particularly Old Dark House films such as *The Cat and the Canary* (Paul Leni, 1927) and *The Old Dark House* (James Whale, 1932), where a sense of overwhelming history is largely what "haunts" the characters and families. The paranoid woman's film is traditional in its gothic trappings, where the domestic sphere is the site of horror, and banishment from it is at least one way in which the struggle for a coherent identity is lost; in noir, urban space stands in for this domestic space: it is equally uncanny, infused by a sense of the psychic struggle of the protagonist, often dictated by his (usually) voice, and deeply evocative of resurfacing trauma. Cities and houses become deterministic spaces in these films, trapping characters who struggle to negotiate and seek out some sort of meaning in them.

In his study of the film noir's origins and characteristics, Mark Bould highlights two major conventions that, incidentally, figure strongly in Gothic horror: "entrapment" (2005: 51) and "investigation" (2005: 67). These two conventions underscore Bould's outline of the noir

mode's particular brand of "determinism," where multiple possibilities and realities promise (and threaten) to spin off into many directions. Bould contrasts film noir's sense of determinism to poetic realism's, arguing that film noir is focused largely on a lack of agency. The noir antihero essentially misreads or is confounded by his surroundings, rendering him lost, and, as Bould argues, this antihero's retelling of the story, usually in voice-over, often reads fatalistically, while the noir world is constructed deterministically (out of randomness and chaotic possibility). In the noir antihero's "often obscured, distorted, derailed" (Bould, 2005: 67) investigations, it is easy to read an epistemological thrust similar to that of Gothic-realist horror. To revisit the reference to maps as a forcing of meaning onto random space in *General Orders No. 9*, the noir voice-over is a "stamped-on" interpretation of events. Writes Bould:

> While the underlying logic of this [investigation] plot is that the world can be known, the film noir investigator frequently struggles to reconstruct and tell an order of events that make any kind of sense. Coincidences, hidden interrelations, unclear and confused motives abound. Consequently, the film noir investigator repeatedly uncovers the order embedded deep within chaos, witnesses order emerging from chaos. (2005: 67)

Bould's latter point that the noir seeker's discovery of a certain "embedded order" may seem counter to the Gothic's focus on inscrutability—that is, its emphasis on ultimate indeterminacy of meaning, or overabundance of possible solutions and evidence (an over-determination of meaning) leading to an eventual impasse. Yet the key point here linking film noir to a Gothic-realist sensibility is that Bould sees the narrative as an extended "[struggle] to reconstruct" the events in a positivistic effort of detection. The noir antihero here reads as a distinctly gothic figuration in that he reports from a witness position that sees no way out of the past. His reductive narrative framing embodies "the notion of cause-and-effect as a partial and retrospective telling of a trajectory abstracted from a total system which changes from moment to moment" (Bould, 2005: 68). Bould suggests that the narratives of noir are often "abstracted" and "retrospective telling[s]" of such a determinist system, which offers more possible outcomes than those presented. In a search for agency, the noir antihero who tells his own story makes an attempt at wresting order from the chaos of possibility in the nightmare noir world and comes up with a fatalist reading, according to Bould. Noir's fatalistic retellings and its abyssal descents into concentric narrative flashbacks that act like palimpsests, is one of the clearest traits that mark it as operating within a Gothic discourse. These retellings are also one of the clearest links between

film noir and the paranoid woman's film, the latter often narrated by—always intensely centered on—a female subject whose central voice or perspective is, like the noir antihero, intensely investigative and interpretive of an essentially uncanny environment.

The paranoid women's film is perhaps more traditional than film noir in its gothic trappings—hence those studies that label it the "gothic woman's film." [25] Here, the domestic sphere is the site of horror, and the threat of erasure or banishment from it is, in classic Gothic form, at least one way in which the struggle for a coherent identity is lost. In film noir, urban space stands in fairly conventionally for this domestic space: it is, like the space of the paranoid woman's film's female gothic, infused by a sense of the psychic struggle of the protagonist, deeply evocative of the threat of resurfacing trauma, and often delineated by the protagonist's deeply subjective narrative act of chronicling events that often have already occurred. Bould highlights the shared characteristics between film noir and the paranoid woman's film by identifying the paranoid woman's film as a subset of film noir, but he does not tease out the implications of this connection for potential examinations of wartime figurations of domestic masculinity and femininity, as opposed to the representations one might find in the war film. In paranoid woman's films, "[f]emale identity, and masculine fantasies thereof, were at the centre of a film noir cycle about wives who find themselves isolated, in danger or victims of husbands' plots," he argues (Bould, 2005: 52). The gender roles here may be flipped, but the construct is essentially the same. Both males and females are, in film noir and the paranoid woman's film, by turns, paranoid or hysterical in their doubts and skepticism, and active in their investigations. Such tropes culminate in a Gothic extravaganza at the end of the decade with Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), whose male subject, struggling screenwriter Joe Gillis (William Holden), becomes entangled sexually and financially in the web of Norma Desmond (former silent film star, Gloria Swanson), a monstrous femme fatale wasting away in an Usher-like decaying mansion with delusions of regaining her career stardom in silent cinema. Wilder heaps on the excesses to make the point that the roles of paranoid woman and hysterical male have essentially collapsed. Desmond is a sociopathic megalomaniac who keeps her former lover and director, Max (former silent film director, Erich von Stroheim), as a servant to help her maintain an elaborate fantasy that does, after all, consume everyone around her. And, to top it off, Gillis's deterministic narration of the events is revealed to be delivered posthumously—the so-called sympathetic duped antihero is dead before the tale begins. The figuration of the hysterical male in

film noir is a fascinating sort of neutering act performed on conventional masculinity in the 1940s domestic sphere (whether characterized by the homefront or the home). The paranoid woman's film's rendering of the male as a potentially sinister force in the domestic space is an equally suspicious take on masculine power and legitimate claim to such power; and the deeply suspicious female characters in the paranoid woman's films are intriguing versions of the crime-solving gothic heroines who do not trust that their reality is anything but an illusion. The femme fatale is, in this collective paradigm, a beast who has learned not to trust anyone but herself. She rules the domestic, haunts the wider spaces of the diegesis, and rages against everything.

In an article on the "abandoned city" in film noir adaptations of Cornell Woolrich's fiction (e.g., *Phantom Lady* [Robert Siodmak, 1945], later *Rear Window* [Alfred Hitchcock, 1954]), David Reid and Jayne Walker highlight film noir's temporal intermingling of historical trauma and lingering dread—again, characteristics that are inherent to American Gothic discourse. They suggest film noir as "a kind of proleptic nightmare vision of a much vaster political, social, sexual and cultural revolution that mysteriously failed to materialize" (Reid and Walker, 1993: 94). "Rather than struggling with a depression," they argue, "the post-war era lived in fear of one, wrestling with a shadow all the more minatory because it obstinately remained a shadow, a phantasm, not a state of affairs" (1993: 65). Reid and Walker gesture only implicitly to the Gothic in these passages, but the 'phantasmic' reality they highlight as endemic to the world of film noir has its roots in the American Gothic's figuration of subjectivity primarily through dread and anxiety regarding a hopeless future.

Though appealing to decidedly bourgeois tastes, Gothic realism as it manifests in film noir and the paranoid woman's film nonetheless draws its inspiration from the same sensationalist appeal to the emotions as the "low" 19th-century sources that inspired writers such as Poe and Melville (Reynolds, 1988). Reid and Walker trace the abandoned city of film noir back through to the Gothic conventions of 19th century sensation fiction and the popular "city mysteries" and "dark adventure"[26] novels that period produced in large numbers (1999: 67-68). Though often disguising this "crude" appeal behind big budgets, Hollywood's Gothic realism is not unlike other national realisms forming around WWII. Noting that Italian "neorealist revelation occurs frequently through the excessive melodramatic impact of social reality" (2009: 56), Louis Bayman makes explicit parallels between the realism of American crime fiction and Italy's popular national realism:

> This realism is in tune with the legacy of the American novelists of the 1930s – Ernest Hemingway and the crime writers Dashiell Hammett and James M. Cain (whose *The Postman Always Rings Twice* provided the basis for [Luchino Visconti's] *Ossessione* [1943]). These writers provide another example of a realism that is not based on rationalist epistemology, but a direct vividness of communication, a newsworthiness within environments that flesh out a wider social picture, and, like nineteenth-century verism, the realism of a non-idealized portrayal of reality" (2009, 55).

Bayman's work suggests a clear parallel here between the two realist trends in Italy and the U.S. similar to Dudley Andrew's discussion of the pulp tradition that inspired French poetic realism. In effect, these national realisms are not only comparable in their derivation from crime, pulp, sensationalist and Gothic literature, but also in their decided shift away from "rationalist epistemolog[ies]" towards "another," "direct" and "vivid" realism of the senses. Likewise, in their linking of 19th-century tabloid actualities and pseudoscience to the moody visions of the noir city and the 1940s film's typical turn to "vulgar Freudianism" (1993: 68), I see Reid and Walker identifying a cinematic iteration in 1940s Hollywood of the literary American Gothic's peculiar (and visceral) interrogation of the real through what would otherwise seem to be incongruous gestures to documentary subject matter (intriguing ciphers, traumatic events) and aesthetics (documents and records, private journals, first-person chronicles).

Reid and Walker also stress that the "abandoned city" of film noir derives from notions of a modernity so disturbing and overwhelming that framing its (possibly unrepresentable) magnitude required a turn to the irrational.[27] Discussing the city as a metonym for the confounding experience of the subject confronting the "gigantic," Susan Stewart explains:

> To walk in the city is to experience the disjuncture of partial vision/partial consciousness. The narrativity of this walking is belied by a simultaneity we know and yet cannot experience. As we turn a corner, our object disappears around the next corner. The sides of the street conspire against us; each attention suppresses a field of possibilities. (Stewart, 1993: 2)

For Stewart, the city strands the subject in a continual, dislocating present that strips any awareness of focalization, localization, or situation. Once again, there is here the sense of being stranded between experience and meaning that characterizes Gothic realism. This is the 20th

century that Walter Benjamin characterized as haunted by a loss of visceral connectedness with historical contingency. Benjamin's modernity, especially as he figures it in works like the massive, ongoing *Arcades Project* ([*Passagenwerk*, 1937-1940] 2002), was essentially unsettling and uncanny in its implications of a modernity of overwhelming disorientation, and of the shock of awareness of history that lay just outside of the consciousness of the modern subjectivity. Fredric Jameson has similarly suggested the "unnatural neutrality" of a "vacant cityscape" in modernist texts as suggestive of "an object world forever suspended on the brink of meaning, forever disposed to receive a revelation of evil or grace that never comes" (quoted in Lloyd-Smith, 2004: 123). Forties film noir, paranoid women's films and horror share this sense of America's wartime domestic reality as rife with imminent revelation or knowledge, pricking at subjectivity from the very edges of consciousness.

Eric Savoy highlights an American Gothic *para-reality* where "the actual is imbued with the darkly hypothetical" (Savoy, 1998: 6). Savoy is referring to Nathaniel Hawthorne's works, but this "darkly hypothetical" reality is characteristic of works such as Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838) (a hoax framed as a found manuscript)[28]; Melville's metaphysical adventure epic, *Moby-Dick* (1851); and, in the 20th-century, William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) with its multiple, conflicting monologues. And it is also characteristic of 1940s films such as *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1940) and *The Locket* (John Brahm, 1946). In these works, narratives are framed as extended *interpretations* and *impressions* by characters who function in what Roger B. Salomon calls the "crucial role of witnessing" (2002: 76) in horror. In *The Locket* Nancy Monks (Laraine Day), a character associated with both the homefront (as a secretive serial bride) and the war effort (as a nurse), is neither knowable, nor is she capable of knowing herself. The mystery surrounding Nancy produces only a palimpsestic "heap of bewildering fragments" (Toles, 2009: 45). In Orson Welles's film, closest in conception and form to Faulkner's multi-perspective novel, the journalist who undertakes a quest to discover the mystery of "Rosebud," the final word spoken by Charles Foster Kane, initiates an often conflicting and over-determined polyvocal narrative delivered (because "witnessed") by several of Kane's intimates—a narrative that J.P. Telotte suggests may parallel Kane's own "narrational longing for completion and explication, and which seems similarly destined to frustration and fragmentation, because of the absence of a single, coherent perspective on these events" (1984: 57). In *Citizen Kane* (as in Faulkner's *Absalom*), as well as in *The Locket*, storytelling itself

becomes monstrous, as it serves only to construct manifold identities for Kane and Nancy Monks, like a series of masks overlaid—or like the multiplied mirror images of Kane that diminish into a *mise-en-abyme* in one of the film's late scenes in the corridors of the castle-like Xanadu (see Telotte 1984: 61-2).

Citizen Kane arguably collapses many of the Gothic horror trends discussed above: at its center is a character to rival the film noir's hysterical male, and who builds around him a domestic prison full of illusions, large enough to be a noir city. *Citizen Kane* also generates a sense of Gothic-realist horror by highlighting itself as a series of narratives that are initiated by a journalist's investigation, but that ultimately fail to offer definitive conclusions. Like its literary precursors in Poe, Melville and Faulkner, Welles's film fits squarely into an American Gothic tradition where narrator-witnesses struggle to comprehend maddeningly opaque symbols, to explore or evoke extreme emotions and states of mind, and to document or chronicle often shocking, incomprehensible experiences. The Gothic world offers itself up to be read, but it is also abstruse, densely layered and polysemic. *Kane*'s "Rosebud," for example—like Kane himself, Melville's white whale, the sealed plantation house of Sutpen's Hundred in Faulkner's *Absalom*, and the indecipherable hieroglyphics and images of blankness that finish Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym*—is an object that gives itself up to multiple interpretations prompting further questions, wider mysteries. It is, in Poe's words, a "text that does not permit itself to be read" ([1840] 1984: 388). More horrifying than any revelation of monstrosity in these works is the idea that "reality" exists within a disjuncture between experience and any possibility of successful communication or comprehension of that experience. The interest here turns to the "failure of language" (Salomon, 2002: 84) and representation to capture the real. No amount of accumulating variations on Kane's life, personality or character can uncover the "real" Kane.

Anne Williams has discussed the Gothic's preoccupation with the "implicit inadequacies" (1995: 67) of language, arguing that "[m]ost—perhaps *all*—Gothic conventions express some anxiety about 'meaning'" (1995: 67). In the American Gothic, particularly, metaphors are stretched towards inscrutability, and even monstrosity becomes so pervasive as to become unmoored from convenient fixed meanings. Gothic-realist films derive much of their impact by generating what E. Ann Kaplan calls an "affect aesthetic" (2005: 76). Kaplan describes this aesthetic as a manifestation of a "vicarious traumatization" (2005: 20) where trauma is not limited to the individual but can be shared by those exposed to it "indirectly" (2005: 1) or

"collective[ly]" (2005: 19), such as in times of war, or where traumatic experience is disseminated through the mass-media (2005: 2). In the 1940s, cinemagoers would have been used to reportage from the war theatre in the *March of Time* newsreels (1933-1943) created by *Life* magazine's Henry Luce, and produced by Louis de Rochemont and *Life*'s Roy E. Larsen. Orson Welles, who had already shocked audiences into awareness of the manipulative power of the mass media with the thrill-inducing ontological uncertainty of his radio mockumentary, *The War of the Worlds* (1938) for *The Mercury Theatre on the Air*, brought the same experimentation to *Citizen Kane* in the form of his satirical mockumentary "*News on the March!*" sequence, which painstakingly recreated the *March of Time* expository form, grainy visuals and authoritative voice-over, and anticipated the roving-camera aesthetic that would only become popular in documentary a few decades later with the development of hand-held cameras. Welles's quoting of the documentary style of his day was no mere ludic self-consciousness, but instead highlighted the limited degree to which the journalistic media could speak to 1940s experience. Laura Mulvey notes that the journalistic "quest for 'Rosebud' that precipitates the quest in *Citizen Kane* emanates directly from the [*News on the March!*] editor's dissatisfaction with the newsreel at the beginning of the film, and the editor himself, Rawlston, represents the new film journalism of [Henry] Luce himself" ([1992] 2012, 47) with its emphasis on offering audiences a clear, comprehensive narrative that includes a sense of closure. Luce publications were attached to social reform, and feature articles in *Life* often paralleled major Hollywood productions in the 1940s that acted as "therapeutic" (Kracauer) realist melodramatic exposés.[29] The producer of the newsreel on Charles Foster Kane, however, calls for an account of Kane's life that is more sensationalistic, perhaps, but more *emotionally* resonant, for sure. Getting at the heart of a potential tragic loss or *lack* in Kane's life is, in other words, much more *real* than the authoritative closure of the newsreel. While this moment could be read as a critique of the media's drive towards comprehensiveness at all costs (including misrepresentation), it also smacks of Welles's interest in exploring the degrees to which *any* representation can speak to the realities and key figures of his time.

Inside both the physical space of Xanadu and the haunted mind of megalomaniacal media mogul Kane, a traumatic history lies locked away, and the rather startling shock cut from a filtered, expressionistically grainy extreme close-up of Kane's lips whispering the word, "Rosebud" deep inside his immense palace, to the stark, expository newsreel style and bleating

voice-over announcing the "*News on the March!*" sequence, blatantly proclaims the Gothic realist discourse that will go underground in most of 1940s horror-inflected cinema.[30] Laura Mulvey (citing cinematographer James Wong Howe) notes that Welles and his cinematographer Greg Toland directly mimic the photojournalistic style of both *Life* (est. 1936) and *Look* (est. 1937) magazines in the film's general use of sharper, high-contrast deep-focus photography ([1992], 2012). This aesthetic is in contrast, however, to the grainy murkiness of the film's expressionistic opening and closing scenes, as well as with the nightmare-like beach "picnic" excursion that Kane forces disillusioned wife, Susan Alexander Kane, to attend. In these scenes, Welles and Toland announce their film as high Gothic; and, indeed, the opening of their film recalls the opening of Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, released the same year, which invites audiences to enter a dream centered on another mysterious house: "Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again." Similarly, *Citizen Kane* opens with the gloomiest of Gothic horror conventions: the isolated castle, Xanadu, viewed through the bars of locked wrought-iron gates. Kane's haunted Usher-like estate is chock-full of the metaphorical accouterments of a diseased psyche: creeping mist, zoo animals stirring in cages, and signs warning trespassers to steer clear of this boundary marker into the irrational world of Kane.

In this chaos of words, images and generic cues, Welles's film announces itself as an inscrutable text, or what Poe called "a mystery all insoluble" in "The Fall of the House of Usher" ([1840] 1984: 317).[31] Mulvey reads this opening as establishing oneiric, fragmentary and disjunctive clues that announce the film as one that "challenges conventional relationship between screen and spectator and constructs a language of cinema that meshes with the language of the psyche" ([1992] 2012: 25). The straightforward, gloomy Gothic imagery that bookends the film not only refers back to two previous decades of Old Dark House films, Dracula's castles, and mad scientists' odd collected experiments—it also formally seals off and effectively encloses, or buries, its four narrative threads like Gothic hidden manuscripts waiting to be uncovered; this narrative preface *and* its coda are also, as Mulvey notes, given no source of enunciation in the film's diegesis—they are directed solely to the viewer. The shocking juxtaposition of the "*News on the March!*" segment with this decidedly Gothic framing thus becomes something of an intrusion into the intensely subjective psychical world that prefaces the film, announcing a clash of Gothic and realist discourses and styles that will be the film's primary operative mode throughout as it layers chronicle upon chronicle of the enigmatic Kane.[32]

Furthermore, by positioning the ostensibly "reliable" and "authoritative" journalistic footage of the "*News on the March!*" film as only one of several incomplete and ultimately incongruous takes on the story of Charles Foster Kane, the film highlights the effectiveness of the Gothic in service of questioning positivistic narratives even through a phantasmagoria of possibilities rather than via concrete, definitive closure. With *Citizen Kane*, Welles, co-writer Herman Mankiewicz, and cinematographer Toland initiate a mock-documentary discourse and aesthetic that will weave its way through much of 1940s horror and noir, arguably anticipating the increasingly popular turn after the war to the documentary-style thrillers of Louis de Rochemont (initiated by *The House on 92nd Street* [Henry Hathaway, 1945]), and laying the groundwork for semi-documentary experiments like Jules Dassin's *The Naked City* (1948).

Citizen Kane becomes a part of a 1940s paradigm of detection, narratives of mystery and haunting tied explicitly to a forgotten or repressed past. George Toles identifies a general narrative trope of amnesia in 1940s films noir where "the possibility of everything that is securely known about oneself going missing" (2009, 35) acts as a metaphor for expressing the cultural trauma during and resulting from the United States's involvement in WWII (1941-1945):

> Amnesia is, on the one hand, a means of disburdening oneself of crime and guilt, and of forgetting the inducements for past behaviour that others deem indefensible. […] Amnesia in noir films, whichever route their stories take, is always concerned with the losing or finding or restoration of an imperiled, not quite make-believe innocence. The disappearance—frightening or comforting—of known connections, beginning with home, is deeply associated with the myth of a prior time, a sacred *moment* of national innocence. (Toles 2009, 36, original emphasis)

We find such amnesia narratives across the 1940s, from Charles Foster Kane's quest for a lost, forgotten state of childhood innocence (as Toles briefly notes); to the fragile but monstrously pervasive illusions of the present that dominate Anthony Mann's 1944 low-budget variation on Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, *Strangers in the Night*; to the oppressive and intensely psychical space of farm and forest in Delmer Daves' prestige production, *The Red House* (1948). These 1940s narratives of memory loss and a quest for identity that Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney (1999) call "metaphysical detection," frame the present through an uncanny lens of

uncertainty and dread where the drama is of the subject's confrontation with a fragmented self—usually played out on a psychic landscape.

In Mann's 56-minute Gothic programmer for Poverty Row's Republic Pictures, *Strangers in the Night*, Mrs. Hilda Blake (Helen Thimig) is a monstrous "mother" figure, living in a Victorian mansion perched on a cliff with her companion, Ivy (Edith Barrett), upon whom she relies to maintain the disturbing illusion of a daughter, Rosemary, who never existed. Here, as in Otto Preminger's *Laura* (1944) and other aforementioned films, a spectral painting of the absent daughter concretizes her haunting presence, rendering the mantelpiece above which hangs a veritable altar to morbid longing for a life (and a past) that never was. Into Mrs. Blake's fragile but pervasive illusion enters wounded soldier Sergeant Johnny Meadows (William Terry), who has fallen in love with the nonexistent daughter through correspondence written, of course, by Mrs. Blake herself. The film is a deft exercise in horror-noir hybridity. Opening on the warfront in a scene that unsettlingly combines crisp studio shooting with grainy stock footage of medics carrying wounded soldiers on stretchers, the film quickly introduces us to a haunted homefront, beckoning one of its wounded back based upon false pretenses of a prosperous future. Meadows meets a real future love interest, Dr. Leslie Ross (Virginia Grey), journeying home on the train—so often the cinema's signifier of progress. But his destination, the Blake mansion, is patently anachronistic and unreal, rendered in an impressionistic matte painting and reachable only by an impossibly steep, twisting drive. The locale is as dead (and as much of a spectacle of absence) as the painting of the nonexistent Rosemary Blake. Echoes of Hitchcock's *Rebecca* suggest that Meadows himself has taken on the role of the young Mrs. DeWinter (Joan Fontaine), burdened by this stifling sense of a carefully maintained illusion of the past by Mrs. Blake (and by stern Mrs. Danvers [Judith Anderson] in Hitchcock's film), and effectively placing him in the emasculating context of film noir's hysterical male, confronting an unstable vision of woman. (If an outright evil Mrs. Danvers figure seems to be missing from the equation, it is only because that figure is collapsed into Mrs. Blake herself, another of the 1940s' monstrous victims.) What Meadows and new love, Dr. Ross, escape in the end is not just the dangerous illusions of a madwoman—which literally come crashing down upon her when the portrait of Rosemary she has commissioned falls off the wall, crushing her—but a terrible state of torpor that also characterizes the haunted space of Delmer Daves' late-decade horror film, *The Red House*.

Writer-director Daves and cinematographer Bert Glennon (whose varied work includes John Ford's *Stagecoach* [1939] and André De Toth's *House of Wax* [1953]) take pains to set up *The Red House* as a document of the rural everyday, set against the uncanny space of the location of most of its action and drama, the Morgan farm. An introductory prologue, shot in crisp black-and-white and cut together with an authoritative voice-over, juxtaposes the small town's sturdy young boys and girls that "don't come prettier anyplace" against the murkier space of farm and forest, which is framed as a decidedly Gothic space harboring monstrosity, and thus ostensibly anachronistic in an America that is supposed to have lost most of its colonial "wildness":

> Dense forest once covered all of Piney Ridge. But no longer is the region a mystery. Modern highways have penetrated the darkness and brought in the light. Not so in Oxhead Woods, further south. Step into it off the abandoned road that hugs its length, and it's like passing through a wall and closing the door behind you. Obsolete trails wander vaguely, crisscross or break at right angles for no reason. Only one leads to the Morgan farm. Pete Morgan's farm has the allure of a walled castle that everybody knows about, but few have entered. Its only access to the outside world is a country road that passes by, and some miles north connects with the highway near the Renton farm.

In many ways anticipating the teen dramas of the fifties, most popularly Elia Kazan's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *The Red House* unfolds a psychological drama of family dysfunction, against the stifling setting of the Morgan farm, cut off from the rest of the world by its liminal forest. Where the film pushes towards Gothic excess is in its literalizing of the damaged psyche of the brooding, fearful Pete Morgan as a psychic projection onto the landscape itself.

As with the intensely psychical domestic spaces of *Citizen Kane*, *Strangers in the Night* and *Rebecca*, separated from the rest of the world by iron gates, twisted drives, and cliff-side locations, the farm and home of brother and sister, Pete and Ellen Morgan (Edward G. Robinson and Judith Anderson), in *The Red House* are separated by a forest that Pete has elaborately constructed as a haunted setpiece, right down to the presence of a local man whom he maintains as a threatening tenant of the forest, a sort of monster-for-hire. The practical reason for Pete's large-scale fiction is to keep trespassers away from the titular Red House itself, the site of his murder of a young woman, the mother of his current charge, Meg (Allene Roberts). But the Red House and the forest around it, like so many Gothic spaces, also represent a place of trauma and

willful forgetting, a space of the unconscious and irrational for the main characters who wish to negotiate them. Pete Morgan, like Charles Foster Kane and *Strangers*' Mrs. Blake, renders his world an oppressive, wholesale projection, colouring it with the force of his own unresolved conflict. *The Red House* juxtaposes a realist drama about a real family against self-conscious and striking Gothic overtures: the weather, for example, seems preternaturally attuned to Pete's anxiety levels about the revelation of his past, wind rising and forest whipping into a frenzy any time a curious seeker enters the secret space. The melodramatic flair of the Gothic-inflected drama is, however, tempered by the film's otherwise secular, everyday setting—domestic farmhouse, barn, fields, dusty and winding country roads.

The most conventional horror elements of *The Red House* (the "haunted" house in the stormy woods) stand in stark, excessive contrast to these elements, and beg to be seen as an elaborate, distanciating *performance* of convention, akin to those scenes mentioned earlier in *Bluebeard*, *Hangover Square*, *House of Dracula* and *Phantom Lady*. Pete will eventually play out the Gothic's deterministic doubling of past events and characters when he takes Meg back to the Red House to reenact his murderous past. He will do this, as the prologue tells us, in a space of "[o]bsolete trails" that "wander vaguely, crisscross or break at right angles for no reason," much like the labyrinthine Gothic castle and shadowy cities of film noir. The world of *The Red House* parallels both the Gothic and film noir space also in that it is enclosed in a circle of desire and repressed trauma that must resurface in almost identical ways to their occurrence in the past. A similar event occurs in *The Locket*, when Nancy Monk's amnesiac journey comes literally full circle as she—and we—finally realize that her most recent wedding (in a spate of couplings that form the spine of the film's narrative) occurs in the very space of her childhood trauma. The house of Nancy's childhood, like the Red House for Pete Morgan, becomes an uncanny space, manifesting a series of psychical "figures in the carpet" to confront Nancy with the roots of the mystery surrounding her strange persona. The gesturing in these films towards mysteries of the psyche that are ostensibly solved, though leaving viewers with lingering ambiguities in the affect they generate, operates within 1940s horror's narrative engagement and play with the models of psychoanalysis as a rational cure.

Like Nancy Monks in *The Locket*, both Pete Morgan and *Strangers in the Night*'s Mrs. Blake (and even to an extent, the Xanadu-bound Charles Foster Kane) could be said to join the ranks of the "icons of grief" that Alexander Nemerov (2005) highlights in the horror films

produced by Val Lewton. Nemerov focuses on four minor characters in the Lewton-produced films as figures of national mourning—sometimes mute, often marginalized, but nonetheless powerful and haunting in their indications of a culture living in dread of war and its aftermath (2005, 1). He sees these "still figures" (2005, 13)—such as the child's imaginary friend played by Simone Simon in *Curse of the Cat People* (1944), Skelton Knaggs' melancholic mute sailor in *The Ghost Ship* (1943), and Darby Jones's wide-eyed zombie "figure of rising power and impoverished pain" (2005, 117) in *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943)—as the products of a suggestive "inertia" (2005, 17) in the Lewton productions that responds to a prevalent wartime sadness. Like Nemerov's icons of grief, Nancy Monks—whose most horrific appearance in the film is in a painting (an "inert" representation) that figures her as an eyeless, staring Cassandra[33]—is a figure that John Brahm's film associates with a sort of cultural shell shock:

> When Nancy comes full circle in *The Locket*, she is transformed into a mute, walking ghost, carrying the amnesia of the just-ended war and the war's as yet unreckoned consequences through the home to which she has almost but not quite succeeded in returning. She seems to embody in this final transit the inexpressible confusion and woe of both the waiting women and the homeward-bound veterans of 1945 and 1946. (Toles 2009, 55)

For Toles, amnesia represents a liminal state (and State) in which the subject (and the nation) is, in a classically Gothic configuration, both confronted by and protected from the shocking truth of an identity linked to a traumatic past. Edward G. Robinson's melancholic turn in *The Red House* lends Pete Morgan's forgotten trauma, and the latent violence it dredges up, a similar stark, staring inert hopelessness.

Strangers in the Night and *The Red House* feature self-conscious evocations of Gothic horror convention—atavism, returns of repressed traumas and histories, and realities tinctured by dark oneirism—that are more than just punctuation marks to add thrills to a noir-ish melodrama. Though their narratives are not as experimental as *Citizen Kane* or *The Locket* in those films' structural parallels to the fragmented subjects at their center, these films are equally as obsessed as those films are with their narratives as an act of remembering—of cutting through thickly constructed fantasies that create paranoia and dread in those who behold them. In an observation similar to Toles's on *The Locket*, E. Ann Kaplan notes in films such as Hitchcock's unabashedly

psychoanalytical *Spellbound* (1945) a conflicted binary that both unsettles and comforts the postwar spectator through the "theme of forgetting" (2005, 74). Kaplan argues that 1940s films like *Spellbound* "uncannily [select] the very theme (traumatic amnesia) that the culture is itself manifesting" (2005, 74). Such "films try not to remember what ultimately has to be remembered" (Kaplan 2005, 74), acknowledges Kaplan, but she adds that, "in that process, they usefully expose catastrophe" (2005, 74). Roger B. Salomon sees this "expos[ure]" of catastrophe as key to horror narrative, where "the experience of catastrophe survives all explanations" (2002, 40). Salomon likens horror narratives to a sort of *documentary of the unnamable*, where traumatized witnesses struggle to chronicle emotionally charged or incomprehensible events: "Horror narrative involves the intrusion of the unaccountable in life—in a context where human beings attempt to offer a careful account of everything" (Salomon 2002, 75).[34] Salomon's idea that horror narrative derives from an attempt to chronicle the often "unaccountable" is key to the reality confronted and constructed by Gothic realism—it compels a "careful account," but the feelings that inspire the witness to action resist circumscription. Toles discusses *The Locket* in such terms when he highlights the "disoriented navigator" figure of the amnesia film's many flashbacks, a

> psychically overburdened narrator [who] generates a felt excess of words in an attempt to express more than he knows. The images, in turn, endeavour to gain access to (render palpable) what is just beyond the reach of sight. The cumulative effect of this lavishly fractured mode of utterance is to demonstrate that our *true* self lies else where" (2002, 40).

Toles here identifies a *crisis of witnessing* that is key to Gothic horror—one of subjects compelled to delineate and describe often overwhelming experiences, or to interpret overpowering symbols that have become overdetermined and inscrutable in their polysemic implications, or in the absence of any such implications. In the 1940s, this crisis of witnessing appears most clearly in different iterations of Gothic horror whose darkly felt realities forced critics and scholars to assign sub-generic or cyclical status to them as film noir, thriller, paranoid woman's film, suspense film, and so on. But the gothic engagement with a struggle at the level of the tale's telling—of the insufficiencies around representation of a reality undergirded by trauma—link many such films within a Gothic-realist discourse. The crisis of witnessing that becomes so central to film noir and the paranoid woman's film in particular, and also in amnesia

films like *Citizen Kane*, *The Locket*, and *The Red House*, figures wartime America through a psychoanalytical process that, as Dori Laub has argued regarding Holocaust testimonials, acts as a "medium of re-externalization—and thus historicization—of the event" (1992: 70). For Laub, "the testimonial enterprise is yet another mode of struggle against the victims' entrapment in trauma repetition, against their enslavement to the fate of their victimization" (70).[35] This discourse that sees history as always-already traumatized will figure later in the twentieth century in two key ways. First, in a documentary cinema that turns to the conventions of horror to suggest that the medium, its revelations and its illusions can be collapsed together to figure an uncanny 21st century hyper-reality. Second, is a narrative figuration (and a cultural condition) that I term "archival anxiety," where horror cinema turns to pseudo- and mock-documentary forms that critique the documentary form through gestures to patently supernatural or apocalyptic subject matter, and that construct subjects characterized by compulsive acts of documentation. The appearance of these trends in the 1940s is key to the reevaluation of that decade of horror cinema, and reveals the shared epistemological frameworks of the horror genre and documentary practice as both of these traditions experiment with degrees of hypermediation and attractions-based aesthetics in representing reality over the 20th century.

Conclusion

Horror cinema in the 1940s, supernatural or otherwise, can be said to shift toward a combination of psychological realism figured through a rationalist discourse of skeptics, detection, psychoanalysis, and a realism of affect that punctuates contemporary settings with moments of affect and stylistic excess that render the everyday disturbing and inscrutable. In identifying a discourse of Gothic realism in 1940s horror films, I do not mean to redraw the boundaries of horror cinema in the 1940s as merely a wider circle, but to suggest that 1940s Hollywood cinema becomes a hybrid site of struggle and contention regarding how best to *articulate* social, cultural and political anxieties on the homefront for women and men. Viewed through the lens of Gothic realism, the paranoid woman's film and film noir, for example, can be said to form two sides of a coin, identifying a realist horror that plays upon dread of a world rendered suspect, *unreadable* and unsafe for women and men, respectively. Film noir, the paranoid woman's film, and other 1940s horror films now labeled "thriller," "mystery film,"

"serial killer film" (see Jancovich, 2012) and so on, all evoke the Gothic's disturbing (and disturbingly parallel) physical and psychic spaces, and they share its interest in complex monsters that provoke an ambivalent response from both other characters, and audiences. This turn to the Gothic—itself always a combination of pleasure and horror, belief and skepticism, the mundane and the absurd—shows 1940s horror films to form a significant contribution to Hollywood figurations of realism.

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[1] This chapter appears in different and much-abbreviated form in the 2014 edited collection, *Recovering 1940s Horror Cinema: Traces of a Lost Decade.* (Ed. Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare, Charlie Ellbé and Kristopher Woofter. Lanham: Lexington Books.)

[2] The sense that genres evolve, from a period of stabilization, to repetition, to excess and parody, and then to a period of revival is in operation in much horror scholarship. Horror films of the 1940s tend to be written out of the critical narrative to stress that such a revival comes only with the 1950s invasion narrative (see especially Tudor, 1989).

[3] Dennis Perry and Carl Sederholm's *Poe's "The House of Usher" and the American Gothic* (2009) makes a case for the influence of Poe's tale as a major influence on the American literary horror landscape.

[4] On the uncanny as the intimation of a deeper or unseen reality, Samuel Weber writes:

> The uncanny is a defense which is ambivalent and which expresses itself in the compulsive curiosity … the craving to penetrate the flimsy appearances to the essence beneath. … This desire to penetrate, discover and ultimately to conserve the integrity of perception: perceiver and perceived, the wholeness of the body, the power of vision—all this implies a denial of that almost-nothing which can hardly be seen, a denial that in turn involves a certain structure of narration, in which this denial repeats and articulates itself. (1973: 73).

[5] Chapters II and III of this study deal more explicitly with the convergence of horror and documentary in various forms.

[6] Regarding postwar social upheavals and horror cinema, Paul Wells discusses the monster as "a metaphor of resistance, posing questions and challenges to the newly emerging social paradigms" (Wells 2000, 58) against the typical sense of American individualism.

[7] This is an oddly elitist framing of Hollywood genre cinema as cruder than other traditions for Andrew, considering that he discusses extensively the roots of Poetic Realism as drawn largely from pulp and crime novels.

[8] For example, *The House on 92nd Street* (Henry Hathaway, 1945), *13 Rue Madeleine* (Henry Hathaway, 1947), *Boomerang!* (Elia Kazan, 1947), *Call Northside 777* (1948, d. Henry Hathaway) and *The Whistle at Eaton Falls* (Robert Siodmak, 1951).

[9] See note xix below, and the References list, for more on Jancovich's 1940s reception scholarship.

[10] I mean here only to highlight the pervasiveness of the term "Gothic" as a critical keyword indicating non-realist horror tied to the Universal monster films particularly, a connotation that has made it difficult to refer to the complicated discourses that constitute "Gothic" in any other way in scholarship on horror from the thirties through the fifties. Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) may be the film that most forces scholars to reconsider the critical currency of "Gothic" as a conceptual framework. Worland has done some of the most important writing on horror in the 1940s. His suggestion, for example, of detective fiction as an extension of the gothic's often conventional exposure of irrational or supernatural as a hoax or fake (2007: 28) has immense implications for 1940s horror cinema's derivations from the earliest American novelist, Charles Brockden-Brown, through Edgar Allen Poe. See also Worland's "OWI Meets the Monsters: Hollywood Horror Films and War Propaganda, 1942 to 1945" (*Cinema Journal* 37 [1] Autumn, 1997) and "Before and after the Fact: Writing and Reading Hitchcock's *Suspicion*" (*Cinema Journal* 41 [4] Summer, 2002).

[11] The other films in the series are *The Leopard Man* (1943) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), both directed by Jacques Tourneur; *The Ghost Ship* (1943) and *The Seventh Victim* (1944), both directed by Mark Robson; *Curse of the Cat People* (1944) and *The Body Snatcher* (1945), both directed by Robert Wise; and *Isle of the Dead* (1945) and *Bedlam* (1946) both directed by Robson. In horror film criticism, the Lewton productions have had a number of innovations and trends credited to them, from larger implications, such as their setting the standard for the psychological and "fantastic" horror film, to more specific syntactical elements, such as their having invented the "bus"—that moment of unexpected shock that gives horror criticism its point of entry into the "startle" effect as outlined by Ronald C. Simons (1996) and Robert Baird (2000).

See Siegel (1973), Telotte (1985) and Newman (1999), for framings of the Lewton films as alternatives to the major trends in 1940s horror.

[12] Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare argues extensively on the attractions-based aesthetic of the Lewton productions, derived specifically from the Grand-Guignol stage tradition in France. See "Val Lewton, Mr. Gross, and the Grand-Guignol: 'Re-Staging' the Corpse in *The Body Snatcher*" (2014, *Recovering 1940s Horror Cinema: Traces of a Lost Decade.* Eds. Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare, Charlie Ellbé and Kristopher Woofter. Lanham: Lexington Books) and "Val Lewton and the Grand-Guignol: *Mademoiselle Fifi* and Horror Canonicity" (2014, *Horror Studies*, 5 [1]: 3-29).

[13] It is useful here to keep in mind that Poe was instrumental in Walter Benjamin's thoughts on turn-of-the-century modernity as essentially uncanny, especially evident in what Benjamin calls Poe's flaneur story, "The Man of the Crowd" (1840). In Poe's short tale—now thought by scholars to be one of the earliest examples of a narrative of detection—an alienated observer locates a visual paradox in a passerby whom he observes through the screen- or canvas-like window of a café. The figure outside not only suggests conflicting meanings (his demeanor and expression strike the observer with "ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, of intense—of supreme despair" [Poe, 1984: 392]), but is also unfixable once the narrator attempts to pursue him to know more about him. The suggestion is ultimately that the narrator, suddenly "aroused, startled, fascinated" (Poe, 1984: 392) by the sight of the man of the crowd, may be pursuing himself, eventually losing himself in the phantasmagorical winding streets, intermingling class extremes, and chaotic life of an increasingly urbanizing nation. Writing on the near-totalizing illusions that can be found in Benjamin's conceptualization of the early 20th century as a phantasmagoria, Tom Gunning asks: "How can this initially negative term take on a positive valence?" (2004a: 13). His answer is one that I would locate in the disturbing too-much-ness of accumulation and commodification that prompts Benjamin's collector and allegorist to frenzied action. That is, the idea that, "[v]iewed through Benjamin's dialectical optic[,] nineteenth century capitalism and bourgeois culture creates [sic] illusions that are inherently unstable" (Gunning, 2004a: 13). This instability creates an unease or malaise that prompts investigative energy, as it does to awaken Poe's narrator from his prior, self-described state of

ennui (1984: 388). I expand on this point in terms of an "archival anxiety" in fake found-footage and mockumentary horror films in Chapter III.

[14] Adapted as a 1945 prestige horror film by Albert Lewin for MGM.

[15] In an interesting parallel to *Bluebeard*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, one of the films Freeland discusses, begins with a similar scene of self-conscious artistry that both announces the film's link between photography and violence, and sets up viewers for the promise of scenes of even greater violent artistry. The film opens with news reports of disinterred corpses fashioned into a kind of gruesome sculpture, showing us flashes of isolated parts of the corpse-sculpture accompanied further y the sounds of photo clicks and flash-cuts. See Peter Marra's chapter, "Strange Pleasure: 1940s Proto-Slasher Cinema," in *Recovering 1940s Horror Cinema: Traces of a Lost Decade* (Lexington Books, 2015) for more on *Bluebeard*'s key place in a sub-genre of horror films that scholars tend to locate solely in the 1980s, the Slasher film.

[16] The phrase refers to a subset of 1940s horror films that feature numerous classic monsters in the same film. Examples include *House of Frankenstein* (1944, Erle C. Kenton) and *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948, Charles Barton).

[17] The cinematography for *House of Dracula* was by George Robinson, who also shot Universal's *Son of Frankenstein* (Rowland V. Lee, 1939) and *Tarantula* (Jack Arnold, 1955).

[18] Thompson divides her focus on dread into three types: "memorial," or that dread which is associated with "remembering"; "scopic," or that dread which is associated with repressed knowledge; and "specular," or that dread which is "attache[d] to" or projected onto a double (2007: 25).

[19] Lowenstein is writing here of shock in the Benjaminian sense: "Shock testifies to the overwhelmed and impoverished state of modern experience, where sensory overstimulation demands shocks in order to register reaction, but shock is also a potential catalyst for the reawakening of experience to history. Cinema occupies a significant space in Benjamin's landscape of modernity—it embodies both the threat and the promise of shock" (2006: 16).

[20] Mark Jancovich makes a similar observation in his essay, "The Murderer's Mind: Edward G. Robinson, Humphrey Bogart and the Monstrous Psychologies of 1940s Horror Film" (in *Recovering 1940s Horror Cinema: Traces of a Lost Decade* [2015, Ed. Mario DeGiglio-

Bellemare, Charlie Ellbé, Kristopher Woofter. Lanham: Lexington]). See Jancovich (2005, 2009, 2009b) for further discussion of how critical reception in the 1940s termed such films.

[21] In *Theories of Cinema, 1945-1995* Francesco Casetti discusses Kracauer's "positivism" (1999: 22) and "functional realism" (1999: 23) in the context of major paradigms in postwar theory. Casetti locates Kracauer's theories specifically within the ontological theoretical paradigm that questions the nature of cinema based upon its mechanical reproduction of reality (1999: 21-22, 35-39). Kracauer's desire for a more productive realism than he finds in 1940s horror cinema arises explicitly from his observations of its lack of clarity and closure.

[22] This uncanny colonial frontier is literalized in the "weird western," a combination of the western's rendering of the American West as a moral and existential liminal space, and the horror film's treatment of liminality in terms of collapsing of borders between life and death, reality and fantasy, material and psychological. See David Mogen, Scott Patrick Sanders, and Joanne B. Karpinski's *Frontier Gothic: Terror and Wonder at the Frontier in American Literature* (1993).

[23] I discuss both films in greater detail later in this chapter.

[24] See note xx below on the term "dark" as a legitimizing term to displace "Gothic's" more popular connotations.

[25] See, for example, Mark Jancovich's "'Thrills and Chills': Horror, the Woman's Film, and the Origins of Film Noir" (2009b), Sharon Tay's "Constructing a Feminist Cinematic Genealogy: The Gothic Woman's Film Beyond Psychoanalysis" (2003) and Diane Waldman's "'At Last I Can Tell It to Someone!' Female Point of View and Subjectivity in the Gothic Romance Film of the 1940s" (1984).

[26] The term "dark adventure" is David S. Reynolds's. Theresa A. Goddu (2008) highlights the problematic high-low cultural binaries attendant to the transference of terminology from "Gothic" (rooted in the popular) to "dark" (rooted in the Romantic tradition) (2008: 6-7).

[27] See also David S. Reynolds (1988) on the similar turn to "irrationality and perversity" in a literature that "wished to find literary correlatives for the horrific or turbulent aspects of *perceived reality* in the new republic" (1988: 190, emphasis mine).

[28] Poe's only novel-length work, *Pym* was presented as an "*exposé*" of an actual voyage—an autobiographical "account" by the "author," Arthur Gordon Pym, who, as Poe explains in the book's Preface, entrusted it to Poe as an editor. The Gothic concern here with highlighting the

text's status as "document" can be marked as early as the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1765).

[29] See Karen Herland's chapter, "'Always Hearing Voices, Never Hearing Mine': Sound and Fury in *The Snake Pit*," in *Recovering 1940s Horror Cinema: Traces of a Lost Decade* (Lexington Books, 2015) for the importance of *Life*'s social exposé tie-ins with social-realist Hollywood productions.

[30] In this way, at least, the decade begins and ends with de Rochemont's documentary aesthetic.

[31] Mulvey notes that the opening of the film establishes a "readerliness" that many have noted ([1992] 2012, 22). "NO TRESPASSING" is the first thing we see on a huge gate with a "K" on it. Later, "Rosebud" will be another textual cue and clue, as will Dorothy Comingore's (Susan Alexander Kane's) puzzles, which signal the film's own act of narrative piecing-together. Most of the film's major narrative segments identify their narrator-chroniclers by name: Susan Alexander's name and face appear on a billboard, prefacing her narrative; a bust of Kane's benefactor, Walter Parks Thatcher, is engraved with Thatcher's name at the mausoleum-like Thatcher library where journalist Jerry Thompson reads the sections of Thatcher's memoirs devoted to Kane ("pages 83 to 142" warns the stern librarian who recalls Kane's equally stern mother).

[32] Welles and Toland continually highlight the fact that the newsreel can only look at Kane from various distances *outside* his life: one particular image in the sequence underscores this idea by featuring a shaky camera peering through a chain-link fence mirroring the film's opening image where the viewer similarly "peers" through Kane's wrought-iron gates.

[33] A figure in Greek mythology given the gift of prophecy, but subsequently cursed with never being believed. Toles intimates that Nancy's eyeless stare, combined with her twisted hair, additionally suggests the literally petrifying stare of Medusa (2009: 52).

[34] Kaplan's and Salomon's focus on catastrophe as the dread of forgetting may go some distance to helping scholars to understand what I have called horror's characteristic "archival anxiety"—that condition in which lived experience is seen to exist to be recorded and/or reported by subjects who understand themselves only as perpetual witnesses to (usually traumatizing or horrific) events that must be properly chronicled and archived to be believed. The voice-over narrations in many 1940s films noir offer an example, some of them literally recorded by a

witness, as in *Double Indemnity* (1944). The paranoid woman's film makes very different use of voice-over narration, usually to represent an interior monologue that is less directed to an audience than it is an address of the female protagonist to herself. Voice-over (or "voice-off") narration in 1940s cinema deserves specific study in addition to the handful of important general studies on first-person and voice-over cinema. See Bruce Kawin's *Mindscreen: Bergman, Godard and First-Person Film* ([1978] 2006 Champaign, IL: University of Illinois / Dalkey Archive Press), Sarah Kozloff's *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-Over Narration in American Fiction Film* (1989, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), which has a chapter on *The Naked City* (Dassin, 1948), and Britta Sjogren's *Into the Vortex: Female Voice and Paradox in Film* (2005, Bloomington, IL: University of Illinois Press).

[35] While Laub's concern is focused on Nazi genocide as its primary trauma, her theory can be generalized to any individual or collective trauma that produces a major shift in subjectivity, such as the events of September 11, 2001. I discuss these implications further in Chapters II and III.

II.

Gothumentary: Horror Cinema, Documentary Desire, and Sensation

> "In the documentary mode, reality becomes an attraction, not because it is ordinary, but because it is suddenly strange."
>
> — Jane Gaines, "Introduction: 'The Real Returns'," *Collecting Visible Evidence*

Chapter I of this study indicated an aesthetic shift in Hollywood horror cinema towards a Gothic-realist mode that renders a disturbing reality through hypermediation and affect. I argued that, as Hollywood filmmakers of the 1940s turn to tropes and themes of collective trauma, amnesia and investigation, they create films that scholars resist reading as horror (Kaplan, 2005; Toles, 2009; Bould, 2005: 67). This resistance occurs especially in light of horror scholarship that overwhelmingly frames the Universal Studios' 1930s supernatural monster cycle as a classical period or prototype for horror cinema. Because of their derivation from Gothic literary sources and their stage adaptations (see Worland, 2007), expressionistic monster films like Universal's *Dracula* (1931, Tod Browning) and *Frankenstein* (1931, James Whale) become synonymous with "Gothic" in scholarly discourse, and this misconception forgets the Gothic's manifestation as a critical mode of interrogation into positivistic or empirical representations of reality. In the 1940s, horror filmmakers in Hollywood look to other ways of evoking the real through an aesthetics that reaches back to the Gothic tradition's emphasis on textual reflexivity, excessive spectacle, and heightened emotions. Thematically, a turn to the interior, to the psychological, meshes with narratives of investigation in 1940s horror to create what Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney call "metaphysical detection" (1999), a mode that has its origins in Poe's extended explorations of extreme psychological states and narratives of ratiocination. Horror cinema in the 1940s privileges a number of such Gothic-horror psychological states (paranoia, obsession, longing, dread, distress, hauntedness) and representational strategies (uncanniness, inconclusiveness, indeterminacy, an aesthetics of absence, hypermediation). Some scholars categorize these films less within the general category of horror film than with more specific styles or subgenres—the main ones being film noir and the paranoid woman's film. Whether labeled as styles, subgenres, or cycles, these two particular horror-inflected forms are

primarily characterized by their interest in exploring psychological rather than supernatural monsters. Forties films like *Citizen Kane*, *The Locket*, *Bluebeard* and *The Red House*—none of which figures strongly in horror scholarship—suggest a darker, more inscrutable aspect of reality that resists representational strategies, and suggest that the evocation of such a reality requires a realism of troubling affect rather than positivistic closure. These films flirt with high-Gothic notions of atavism, monomania and madness to unsettle rural and urban America during and after wartime, marking it as an uncanny and broodily melancholy space of collective longing and loss. They combine such themes of pervasive psychological disease (murderous and/or obsessive men, manipulative and/or paranoid women) with moments of stylistic flourish and allegory to gesture towards a spectral reality that simultaneously compels and resists comprehensive representation. Ultimately, they suggest that something beyond the gritty social realism of films like *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (Mervin LeRoy, 1932) was required to capture the 1940s experience.[1]

The Gothic-realist turn in 1940s horror cinema, with its recourse to investigation and imminent discovery as a source of both pleasure and dread, finds the horror genre manifesting most clearly as a mode that highlights key epistemological paradigms and aesthetic questions shared by horror and documentary cinema. These shared concerns revolve around the ways subjects come into knowledge and understanding of their world, not just through rational understanding, but also through feeling and sensation; they also revolve around the degree to which poetic expressiveness and appeals to spectatorial desire should figure in generating these effects. Tom Gunning suggests that an "aesthetics of attraction," whether in fictional or documentary cinema, emphasizes "exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption" (1986: 384); in other words, an attractions-based aesthetic eschews narrative and diegetic aims to emphasize the "direct stimulation" (1986: 384) of the spectator's "visual curiosity" (1986: 384). Attractions-based cinema performs for the spectator with the aim of making the world newly visible to spectators through emotional as well as aesthetic appreciation. Yet to what degree should (or does) documentary involve such methods? How much can we access knowledge via appeals to logic and analysis, versus appeals to the affective and aesthetic engagement of the spectator? More specifically, to what extent does documentary hermeneutics engage the same emotional and aesthetic responses found in the cinema of attractions, involving astonishment and uncanny effects? These are questions that theorists like Michael Renov (1993), John Corner

(2006), and Elizabeth Cowie (2011) have highlighted in their work on documentary expressiveness. The films in this chapter carry forward the 1940s horror film's aesthetics of attraction to both explore and interrogate the fully sensorial and expressive possibilities of the documentary form.

In discussing his framing of documentary's discursive "modalities of desire" (1993: 21) which include "preservation, persuasion, analysis, and expressivity" (1993: 35), Renov writes that attempts at a poetics of documentary have been troubled by the truth-versus-beauty dichotomy of Western thought since the 18th century (1993: 24). The key for Renov and others is to acknowledge the role of epistemological desire and pleasure in documentary, especially through a reflexive lens of analysis. For Renov, artistic goals that unite a quest for knowledge with spectatorial pleasure need not be a taboo subject for documentary theory: "As desire is put into play," he writes, "documentary discourse may realize historical discursivity *through and against* pleasurable surface, may engage in self-reflection *in the service of* moral suasion" (1993: 25). Cowie also has addressed extensively the role of pleasure and spectacle in documentary viewing, an integral factor often opposed to the goals of serious documentary. In "The Spectacle of Actuality," she asks of documentary, "should we look for knowledge or for pleasure?" (1999: 26), and in her later work, identifies "mise-en-scenes of desire and of imagining that enable identification" (2011: 86) in documentary similar to those of fiction. In Cowie's terms, the documentary gaze carries echoes of the revelatory and the uncanny parallel to the gaze of cinematic horror, as "[i]n curiosity, the desire to see is allied with the desire [to] know through seeing what cannot normally be seen, that is, what is normally veiled or hidden from sight" (2011: 13). In Cowie's framing, the documentary spectator confronts knowledge through a combination of desire and dread.

James Marsh's poetic documentary, *Wisconsin Death Trip* (1999), takes questions of documentary desire and "pleasurable surface" as its central conceit, and undercuts them with a disturbing sense of repressed historical trauma. Marsh's film, an adaptation of a 1976 book by historian Michael Lesy, compiles an uncanny amount of evidence of collective mania and violence in an area of turn-of-the-century Wisconsin. It derives its material entirely from two types of documentary evidence: photographs—mostly by Charles van Schaick—and journalistic accounts from regional newspaper writers. The book includes no further comment on these materials, other than Lesy's suggestive arrangement of them. Lesy's method is associational—

occurring through repetition and through juxtaposition of journalistic blurbs with other blurbs, blurbs with photographs, and photographs with other photographs. Marsh's film takes significantly more liberties with the book's presentation of exclusively salvaged evidence, adding evocative black-and-white reenactments of the book's journalistic reports and institutional records, some of which are rendered in whispered voice-over by actor Ian Holm (especially those relating to accounts of subjects institutionalized in the Mendota State Asylum). Against these dramatic reenactments, the film juxtaposes color footage of the present, underscored by radio broadcasts telling of violence, house fires, and other unsavory events that reflect back upon the almost epidemic violence and madness in the area's abandoned history. In paralleling the two time periods, the film suggests a present disturbingly undergirded by a past that may now be recoverable for the present only as a kind of phantasmal echo. There is the sense of creeping dread in the film's parallel juxtapositions of past and present, a cultural malaise that itself may be the source of impending crisis. Discussing the expressive-associative aesthetic of *Wisconsin Death Trip*, Corner writes:

> The production of an historical imaginary is a consequence both of the beguilingly unknowable nature of past specificity and of its attractions both as an object world (a site for historical knowledge but also the resources for historical fetishism) and as subjective space (the site for the reconstruction of historical experience and feeling and for the play of historical fantasy). (2006: 294)

For Corner, questions around documentary desire come as well through a need to re-present the historical world cinematically in ways that highlight subjectivity, interpretation, and the limitations of the medium—that is, documentary "images as ones to be looked *at* as well as *through*" (Corner, 2006: 293). The performance of rhetorical strategies—and their limitations—itself becomes an attraction. *Wisconsin Death Trip* offers a wealth of anecdotal evidence in its voice-over readings of actual accounts of murderous mania, violence, hysteria, mental disease, drug use, and, in one case, maniacal civil disobedience. But the film subverts any claim to expository mastery through a formal structure that is more like collage than narrative. The film's four sections (Spring, Summer, Winter, Fall), along with its chapters announced in intertitles, heighten the film's relationship to texts,[2] and encourage an associative reading by the spectator who must confront the many uncanny repetitions in the film to be receptive to its sense of history. Even in its playful liberties with voice-over, and occasional darkly comical presentation of

characters like the window-smashing Mary Sweeney—who "tours" the state hopped up on cocaine and rage—the film is deeply engaged with the ways we understand the past. News stories, photographs and beautifully shot reenactments accumulate into evidence of a sort of infectious social and psychic collapse—in Corner's terms, a "pathology of place" (2006: 293). The expected documentary information comes embedded in the film's pervasive sense of dread that opens up a space of sensation and contemplation for the spectator.

Marsh keeps the spectator at a poetic distance from these very real events and their context. The film's evocative black-and-white photography reenacts a sort of fetishized sense of history as silver-tinted, strange and elusive; additionally, the film's emphasis on textuality through its suggestive (and often ironically humorous) intertitles reminds the spectator of the manipulative power and limitations of media representation. Corner highlights several criticisms of this aspect of the film's framing of historical place and context, including a review for *Sight and Sound* by Michael Eaton, who distinguishes Marsh's film from Lesy's book by suggesting that it is "now far easier to view Black River Falls as an aberrant gothic liminal zone rather than as a cracked synecdoche for the whole of the Union" (quoted in Marsh, 2006: 304). Eaton's reading is typical of scholarly use of the Gothic as a tag for anti-realist, ahistorical strategies. 'Localized' (Corner, 2006: 304), psychic and dreamlike though it may be in its presentation, the film's poetic-Gothic 'liminality' provides a way of expressing this very synechdochic state-of-the-union through allegory and ambiguity. It is also infused with a sense of dreadful inevitability in its vision of an American psyche caught up in anxieties around the burden of freedom and promise represented by the frontier. It is, therefore, an example of "frontier Gothic" (David Mogen, Scott P. Sanders and Joanne B. Karpinski, 1992). It expresses the anxieties of a nation expanding westward through a form that attempts to manifest that very anxiety in the spectator.

Marsh's film also derives directly from the American Gothic an uncannily palimpsestic element to history's undergirding force in the present (which the film consistently presents in color) that is both thrilling and disturbing. For Corner, what needs to be brought to light in *Wisconsin Death Trip*'s uncanny historiography is not the truth of history, but the *feeling* of repressed history and, through that, an awareness of how remembering creates a collective experience. Marsh's strategy is to read historical events as traumatic, repressed, and uncannily *sensed* through formal strategies that highlight the documentary as "transformational" rather than "transparent." This method derives from the American Gothic as a critical mode for interrogating

the sanctioned discourses of documentary representation—a formulation of the Foucauldian apparatus. Thematically, the film is a reminder of Eric Savoy's observation that "Gothic texts return obsessively to the personal, the familial, and the national pasts to complicate rather than to clarify them, but mainly to implicate the individual in a deep morass of American desires and deeds that allow no final escape from or transcendence of them" (1998: 169). Formally, the film is a reminder that the cinema's indexical relationship to the historical event is not a transparent window. *Wisconsin Death Trip* attempts to draw attention to a sense of inescapable remove from the historical, and the representational resourcefulness required to encourage active, sensorial remembering. For Mary Ann Doane, the event is a "marker of time" (2002: 140), of "pure factualness" (2002: 141) that is "unassimilable," that "resists meaning," and "resists structure" (2002: 140). The cinematic image resurrects the event's sense of moment and duration, but ultimately can only give it a sense of "presence" (Doane, 2002: 220), a revived "moment" that has been "lost" (Doane, 2002: 223). This sense of the historical as a spectral haunter of the real—once there, now disembodied, dead—is, of course, the realm of the Gothic's interrogatory aesthetics of immanence. As a type of historiographical lens, the Gothic mode, in Eric Savoy's terms, depicts American history and subjectivity as locked in a maddening dialectical struggle to distinguish the line between past and present—a struggle that engenders violence as its only escape route (2002, 167). Savoy cites Malcolm Bowie, who sees the Gothic as a mode seeking "that which our structures cannot structure" (quoted in Savoy, 2002: 169). The ephemerality and contingency of the historical moment thus becomes a source of archival anxiety, a frenzied urge to document and "get everything," preserving it *while it occurs*—a trope taken up by late 20th and early 21st-century fake found-footage horror films such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez) and *Cloverfield* (2008, Matt Reeves). These films strand their fictional amateur visual archivists in a compulsion to "capture" the real as a perpetual event that resists their efforts, possibly with the goal of revisiting the event retroactively so that it might ignite a "posthumous shock" (Doane [invoking Benjamin], 2002: 160).[3]

A shared concern of the aforementioned theorists around documentary desire, and a film like *Wisconsin Death Trip*, forms particularly around how documentary cinema might best express, or *evoke* a 20th-century reality that comes to be characterized by a resistance to comprehensive representation—in its collectively traumatizing events, cryptic symbols, psychological monsters, ubiquitous institutions, threatening domestic spaces, and sprawling

urban, industrial and technological horrors. World War II is a key site for both documentary and its theorists in assessing the degree to which events that are overwhelming in scope and emotional implications spur an epistephilic, scopophilic and sensorial desire that cannot be fully satisfied. Cowie, discussing the documentary presentation of soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, or "shell-shock," remarks that in such cases where the traumatic event is an absence marked only by symptom, the "desire for the 'real' is the desire for some little bit of absence by which the possibility of presence is affirmed while yet restating loss, absence itself" (1999: 32). As with Lyotard's notion of a sublime aesthetic that struggles to 'present the unpresentable' (Johnson, 2012: 120), the paradox lies here in the representation doing justice to the power of that absented trauma while also circling its borders via the soldiers' symptoms. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub have discussed these issues in terms of a "crisis of witnessing" (1992: xvii) attending the Holocaust specifically. Here, according to Laub, is a traumatic event that not only resists comprehensive knowledge, but that eliminated most of its witnesses, and left its survivors to share a stunned code of silence in fear that their testimonials will renew the original trauma (1992: 67). Like the manifestation of collective frontier mania suggested by repetition and association in *Wisconsin Death Trip*, the traumatic event thus results as an "absence" (1992: 57) that must be recovered, re-invoked, and reclaimed through re-presentation. Speaking of Alain Resnais' Holocaust documentary, *Night and Fog* (1955), Sandy Flitterman-Lewis parallels Laub's argument in that Resnais and script writer Jean Cayrol are challenged with "represent[ing] the unrepresentable" (2014: 197). Flitterman-Lewis describes Resnais and Cayrol's decidedly poetic highlighting of "the presence of unconscious desire in all aspects of everyday life" (2014: 203) to bring viewers into a state of historical conscience and moral responsibility around an event thought to be too horrific to document responsibly.[4] This, too, is the project of *Wisconsin Death Trip*'s attempt to *presence* a turn-of-the-century state of individual, moral and psychic trauma that cannot be expressed as the result of a single, concrete cause. The conventions of Gothic-horror become useful in such representations to suggest an "other" reality that speaks through the irrational and the multiple, as opposed to the logical and the singular—a reality of conscience.

This chapter draws explicit connections between horror and documentary cinema, particularly in terms of how a cinema of attractions joins the two in a shared Gothic-realist mode. The focus will be on documentary films that expand and examine the ways we can understand

our reality by adopting the Gothic tradition's peculiarly revelatory and sensory reality, especially its turn to expressive—even excessive—spectacle, sensation, and sublimity as ways of understanding the impact of the historical world on the subject. These works bring Gothic realism to bear upon documentary subject matter (not necessarily horrific in content) in ways that further illuminate links between the epistemological, critical and practical concerns, of horror, documentary and pseudo-documentary cinema. They carry with them the overriding presumption that the historical world is always-already sublime; that is, its immense scope, ephemerality and resistance to "capture" confront the observer with a pleasurable dread that is, in Lyotardian terms, "generative" (quoted in Johnson, 121) in its encouraging spectators to explore the limits and limitations.[5] These films construct a subjectivity that is a perpetual play between acts of witnessing and chronicling. Accordingly, they unsettle the documentary form to suggest the productive and transcendent possibilities of Gothic-horror fragmentariness, inscrutability, and narrative "anticlosure" (Heller, 1987: 110), or a reflexive circling back to the text's initial questions that implicates the reader (or spectator) in the fraught process of exegesis that occurs so often in horror texts. Ultimately, the epistemic links between horror and documentary tell us that there is important critical power in encouraging desire—both pleasurable and dreadful—in seeking knowledge.

I. Resisting Documentary "Capture" in *Capturing the Friedmans*

As I discussed in Chapter I, Gothic-horror's roots in a tradition of excess, affect, oneirism and heightened subjectivity have rendered "Gothic" a convenient term connoting non-realism, allegory, and fantasy. Yet attending these dimensions are the Gothic's investigation into how various types of evidence—especially private or found texts, testimonials, journals, diaries, and so on—might be arranged to create, or to suggest, a story full of meaningful discoveries and disclosures. Here, "meaningful" evidence likely will not be comprehensive, and may even lead to contradictory conclusions and epistemological impasses. An emphasis on rupture, connotation, and, above all, *interpretation*, characterizes the Gothic-real and the works that confront it. For instance, the 2003 documentary, *Capturing the Friedmans* (Andrew Jarecki), is built upon the mingling of pleasure and dread in contemplating an event that resists the range of "capture" of documentary representation. Arnold and Jesse, the father and son of the film's titular family, are

the subjects of a disturbing case in 1980s Long Island of alleged pervasive child molestation, a slippery "truth" that the film interrogates via conflicting evidence and testimonials from the family, the alleged victims, and local authorities. Additionally, the film includes audio recordings by Jesse, home movies shot by Arnold, and home-video footage shot primarily by another son, David, who documents the family's gradual internal disintegration as a result of the very public accusations. The Friedmans come off in the film as scapegoats to a significant degree, victimized by a community that also "defines itself as a victimized community"[6] that seeks answers and closure at any cost. Jarecki focuses his own lens intensely on how the public accusations draw out latent sexual frustrations and emotional traumas in the Friedman family, as well as on the family's increased isolation from this community and each other (the Friedman family members are interviewed individually and only have conversations in the film's archival footage). The film's scenes of public indignation, along with eventual charges of communal hysteria around a "grotesque fantasy" constructed by the authorities, suggest a community of morally debased monsters ready to take up the torch at whatever cause might rupture the glassy surface of their own repressed violence. But the film also gives ample room for the Friedmans to show their own monstrousness as they scrutinize and emotionally abuse each other with chilly precision. At the center of the family's private downfall is the mother's, Elaine's, forced reserve in the face of constant berating from her sons, who in her presence label her as "sexually ignorant," 'humorless', troubled, 'controlling', 'manipulative', and emotionally unavailable. *Capturing the Friedmans* cumulatively details a patriarchal power structure where husband Arnold is, in Elaine's words, the "saintlike" and "messia[nic]" father-leader of a "gang" from which she is continually excluded. And Elaine stands clearly at the center of a stereotypical indictment by her sons, who see her as having failed to be appropriately nurturing and sensitive in her maternal role.

Jarecki's film takes as its focus a situation full of dreadful potential knowledge, but the evidence it generates leads only to further suspicions and questions regarding whether it is Arnold and Jesse Friedman, or the community around them, that struggle to maintain a near-totalizing illusion. The film can only press upon the wound, so to speak, in its reportage of the deeply troubled Friedmans and their equally fraught social milieu. It therefore calls out to the spectator to ruminate on the source of this wound. *Capturing the Friedmans* offers interesting commentary on the historiographical process itself in its highlighting that we are watching

intimate moments that were never intended to be shown publicly—that, in David's own words, were meant to be "private, between me now and me in the future"—but that now have become a sort of testimonial held up to scrutiny by the spectator. In his video diary entry of 18 November, 1988, David addresses the camera directly, telling his potential audience: "turn it off, don't watch this." Here, David manifests an archival anxiety—a compulsion to record his experience for the future—that surfaces again and again in Gothic narratives where much of the validation of a narrator's struggle consists of privately recorded thoughts eventually made public as evidence. David also links his obsessive recording of his family to an act of repression: "Maybe I shot the videotape so I don't have to remember it myself," he says. Other video footage shot by David shows the Friedmans holding family forums in the kitchen, or at Thanksgiving, where accusations and insults fly, especially in the direction of the mother, Elaine. These private moments contrast harshly with the sometimes zany energy of the home movie stories shot by Arnold, and "starring" his son and family when they were all much younger, an implicitly more "innocent" time compared to that which the later video footage captures. A good part of the film's unnerving impact arises from witnessing the invasive, oppressive presence of recording technology in the midst of private trauma.[7]

Jarecki's film is decidedly grim and melancholy, its color palette diminished to match the grainy sepias, browns and blacks of its home movie and video footage. The mood and aesthetic match the world of moral murkiness and dread that the film presents to the spectator. No combination of evidence, testimony or (re)framing will lay open the "real" story, which is fraught with underlying enmity, emotional violence, and deep loss. Additionally, the film's uncanny proliferation of accounts by its social actors causes viewers to shift allegiances throughout the film, highlighting an irresolvable perspectivism. *Capturing the Friedmans* employs the Gothic's charge to the spectator to become an active interpreter in a struggle to bring knowledge to light. The film is a meditation on the difficulty of articulating an overwhelming reality, where witnesses struggle to report on, to collect, to decipher, or to conjure a sense of something they have seen, experienced, *felt*. Jarecki's film is thus an example of the diffusion (Botting, 1996) of the Gothic's conventional reflexivity deployed as a critical mode that highlights the aesthetic underpinnings of the "enlightened" moment or rhetorical form; it makes us aware of the knowledge-producing apparatuses that we rely upon, highlighting their epistemological power and undermining it at the same time (Botting, 2008: 10). In its examination of such limits,

Jarecki's film illustrates a powerful intersection of the epistemological drive of horror and documentary, creating a sublime awareness of a world in flux, possibly unrepresentable in the monstrous enormity of its traumas and truths. *Capturing the Friedmans* is Gothic-realist in its interest in interrogating documentary representation via such Gothic-horror representational strategies, making it exemplary of a critical turn in documentary that I have termed "gothumentary."[8]

Gothumentary is not so much a documentary subgenre as it is a conceptual site that brings Gothic-realist strategies to documentary representation. "Gothumentary" reflects how recent documentary artists have brought Gothic-horror tropes and conventions to bear upon documentary subject matter as a way of exploring the boundaries of what we can know about the historical world. Gothumentary works are, by turns, reflexive, ludic, experimental and poetic. They may or may not feature horrific content, but nonetheless consistently evoke the style, tone, and/or address of Gothic-horror to create unique documentary experiments. They show radical potential for investigating documentary tradition explicitly (and horror tradition implicitly) in their often straightforward introduction of Gothic-horror conventions and themes as a way of approaching the historical world. While they employ an aesthetics of uncanniness, suspicion and dread that that might at first appear only superficial variations on horror convention, gothumentaries are actually deeply invested in the parallels they highlight between documentary and horror epistemologies, and how these might converge into an investigative mode that acknowledges the desire of the documentary spectator for sensation and spectacle as a way of getting at the real. Works like *Capturing the Friedmans* reveal that Gothic-realist and documentary discourses collide at the intersection of cognition and sensation, where knowledge comes through both interpretation and feeling, and is both desired and dreaded. Rather than presenting persuasive narratives that reach definitive conclusions, gothumentary strategies combine the Gothic tradition of unsettling our relationships with what we think we know with questions brought out in experimental and hybrid documentary to push the spectator into active modes of inquiry about how the historical world is represented. In the gothumentary, knowledge is often elusive, even monstrous in its resistance to the documentarian's efforts. My use of "monstrous" here is, of course, figural and conceptual—like a specter or uncanny double that presses itself upon our awareness but lies outside definable, rational boundaries. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen frames the "monstrous" in similar conceptual terms, arguing "that the monster is best

understood as an embodiment of difference, a breaker of category, and a resistant Other known only through process and movement, never through dissection-table analysis" (Cohen, 1996: x). The documentary lens is often seen in terms of "dissection-table analysis," where acute factors and locatable evidence, once revealed, will lead to comprehensive conclusions or successive openings-up of various truths. Gothumentary counters the idea that such analysis will produce definitive knowledge. In gothumentary, subjects or events are often too large, too complex, or too elusive to be represented satisfactorily by any means. Evidence may be overabundant, scarce, or too diffuse to create a comprehensive representation; the gothumentary treats this inconclusiveness as part of its depiction of the historical world. That is, the gothumentary conjures up a world that is uncanny in its resistance to our attempts to seek knowledge, and its "truths" are often emotional, multiple, conflicting, partial or highly personal. In juxtaposing the documentary's discourses of rationality with the Gothic-horror's focus on sensation, excess and inscrutability, the gothumentary creates a sensorial space for the airing out and interrogation of anxieties around documentary representation of the historical world.

The hermeneutics of gothumentary are negativistic: though interpretations are building up, a central void becomes the ultimate focus, the foregrounded problem, and a reason to reach out to a more full sensorial experience. Again, this highlighting of a void is not a simplistic nihilism, but a productive skepticism and ambiguity. As Francisco Serra Lopes has observed, a hermeneutics of negation is one of "resistance" to ideological and hegemonic "totalit[ies]" (2007: 74). The knowledge produced in the gothumentary is of an absence due to the ever-widening circles of further questions that surround new knowledge. In the gothumentary, decoding reality is seen as always already based on a Nietzschean notion of infinite interpretation, an acknowledgment that there are no complete texts. In reading the evidence presented in the gothumentary, the filmmaker's method—and the spectator's challenge—is not to close the circle to discover the incontrovertible truth of the thing-in-itself, but rather to discover more about the dimensions of the yawning chasm of mystery between ourselves and that of which we seek to grasp some part. In the same vein as Gothic-realist fiction films such as *Citizen Kane*, and the Gothic-horror narratives that inspired it, the gothumentary does not so much nihilistically eliminate solutions in its emphasis on "indeterminacy of meaning" (Salomon 2002: 87), but instead *withholds* solutions, to emphasize narrative construction, documentary aesthetics, and viewer reception as extended acts of *interpretation*. If, as Roger B. Salomon states, the

"ambiguous situation" common to the narratives of Gothic and horror "represents precisely the paradigm of truth in the contemporary world" (2002: 76), then gothumentaries open up and address that reality by resisting easy solutions and closure, and by constructing a state of pleasurable and productive dread in confronting the uncertainties they raise.

In gothumentary, filmmakers (and often the subjects of the film) confront the real, first, as always-already uncanny in its over-ripeness of possibly disturbing insights; second, as spectral in its resistance to capture by narrative, image, testimony and other attempts at generating evidence; and, third, as sublime in the pervasiveness and imminence of these overwhelming implications. Similar to many Gothic-horror narratives, the focalization or perspective of the gothumentary narrative is often figured around acts of witnessing, and subsequent attempts to chronicle, traumatic events or circumstances that either defy logic or stand outside the normative. These acts of witnessing may be by the filmmaker, or subjects, or both. Murder, suicide, physical and mental disintegration, social collapse, extreme violence and abuse, cryptic texts, diseases of the collective psyche, enigmatic or absent persons—these are some of the key focal points for gothumentary. Such potentially horrific or disturbing subject matter is not compulsory, however, as gothumentary also turns its attentions to disturbing our sense of the everyday as well. That is, for every *Cropsey* (Joshua Zeman, Barbara Brancaccio, 2009)—which capitalizes on a central boogeyman-cipher who may or may not have murdered a number of youths with mental disabilities—there is a *Must Read After My Death* (Morgan Dews, 2008), which focuses on unraveling the deceptions and repression that underscore its archival footage of a woman's increasingly distressing domestic struggle in 1960s suburbia. And for every *Hellstrom Chronicle* (Walon Green, 1971)—a stunningly shot, ironic juxtaposition of insect footage, hoax footage, and excessive, apocalyptic commentary scripted by horror author David Seltzer (*The Omen* [1979])—there is a *The Sound of Insects: Record of a Mummy* (Peter Liechti, 2009). This last film is an odd inversion of body horror. Its subject—the titular "mummy"—is absent from the film's imagery. Instead, the film relies on the journal account of his suicide by starvation, left behind as a daily account of the quiet, but visceral bodily suffering and eventual psychic slippage he endured. This, it juxtaposes with images of the deep forest where his body was found, and increasingly impressionistic images of the urban space that plagued him.[9] Regardless of the degree of sensationalism characterizing its material, a sense of generalized or collective anxiety and dread colors gothumentary subject matter, and this is especially so because of the

gothumentary's intensely reflexive investigation of the documentary film's form and strategy. The gothumentary manifests these issues in an aesthetics of absence that highlights reality's resistance to capture: the gothumentary may stress an almost spectral ephemerality of event or incident; it may present an overabundance of information that leads to multiple truths (and ultimately overdetermination of evidence); or it may reveal a lack of—or gaps in—information that leads to indeterminacy. The ultimate effect of gothumentary's many impasses is less to announce a totalizing failure of all attempts at documentary representation than it is to offer a critical reading of our desire to know about the world through appeals to excesses of both feeling and style. A sense of incompleteness or inscrutability, for example, is constructive in the discourse of gothumentary because it 1) encourages active, pleasurable engagement with the text, and 2) demands that the spectator participate in the investigation and the creation of meaning (or meanings) at least partly through sensation, a sense of embodied learning.

Capturing the Friedmans, then, is a gothumentary for a number of key reasons. It unsettles both the reality it presents and the strategies documentary has in its toolbox for accessing and assessing that reality. It offers up the Friedmans, and the suburban American community around them, as essentially resisting full legibility, in spite of their cultural specificity and individual availability. The frisson produced by this absence of certainty, along with the distress generated by the film's focus on the painful private confrontations among the disintegrating Friedman family, places analytical demands on the viewer that are both vexing and appealing. Jarecki's film experiments with and frustrates the spectators' desire to know more about the Friedmans and their world with the increasing possibility that comprehensive knowledge of events, subjects, traumas, objects, will always escape us. Even a late bit of information divulged by the Friedmans' lawyer that Jessie admitted his father abused him sexually, is framed later by Jessie himself as a manipulation concocted by the lawyer. Thus, the setup of a "shocking advancement" in the film's narrative quest is immediately undermined by the subjects themselves as a misrepresentation of the facts, leaving the spectator to adjust from one shock to another in light of new information. *Capturing the Friedmans* bases such false revelations on the idea that there is both a desire for, and dread of, the ends to which our quests for comprehensive knowledge of the Friedmans' case might bring us. The film ends with lingering questions around whether Arnold and Jesse Friedman have been victims of a witch hunt, or are the perpetrators of both heinous crimes and a subsequent deception of their family

(and, by extension, the documentarians). These questions leave the spectator in a state of interpretive hesitation that encourages critical reflection. In its challenge to documentary's normal avenues for understanding the Friedmans' case, *Capturing the Friedmans* also defamiliarizes the everyday. Specifically, it undermines American hegemonic notions of the family headed by a strong, protective patriarchal force; it reminds us, via Elaine Friedman, how uncomfortable we can be when confronted by women who resist the gender roles assigned to them; it conjures unease around sexual intimacy, privacy and community; and it unsettles the powerful law enforcement and judiciary institutions that may be monstrously manipulative in their maintaining of Arnold and Jesse's guilt. In Jarecki's film, then, the pleasure is less in solving all of the mysteries of the text than in acknowledging its limitations and power of suggestion. Accordingly, its goal is not one of positivistic disambiguation, but to construct a sustained act of interpretation that stresses many meanings and many truths. And it achieves this goal by relying on the spectator's access to information, spectacle and sensation as a way of coming into knowledge. The lingering malaise left by the film is arguably meant to gesture towards a sense of collective suburban degeneration—a provocation to the spectator that generates critical awareness through an embodied sensorial reception that rejects the distinction between feeling and thinking.

II. Gothic-Horror Epistemology and the Questing "I"/Eye of Gothumentary: *Cropsey*

In gothumentary, an engagement with multiple interrogations becomes part of an aesthetic of attractions that is not afraid to address spectators like a carnival barker. Gothumentary films like *Capturing the Friedmans* eschew notions of documentary narrative authority to move from a conventionally "descriptive" (Roscoe and Hight, 2001: 16) mode to a performative interpretive mode. Gothumentary discourse occurs partly at the phenomenological level, and partly through constructing a formal and narrative hermeneutics of skepticism—in the words of Paul Ricœur a "willingness to suspect" (quoted in Serra Lopes, 71)—regarding meaning and its formal conveyance. The gothumentary interpretive mode may include multiple conflicting voices or sources, or a single conflicted individual narrating voice that calls to the spectator to be critical as well as receptive. It models this interpretive quest by dramatizing the failure of documentary strategies to fully capture experience; that is, it makes an attraction of its negative hermeneutics.

In this respect, Gothumentary manifests a performative postmodern mistrust in positivistic grand narratives and meta-narratives—the Enlightenment "discourses of sobriety," as Bill Nichols (1991: 3) phrases them. Here, the more authoritative voice of documentary texts (most conventionally embodied by a voice-over) is continually tested and undermined—often in a kind of dramatization of suspicion for spectators (e.g., *Wisconsin Death Trip*'s voice-over reading of asylum records, delivered in a whisper to highlight their abject otherness). In this way, gothumentary offers a kind of model for the critical distance that the spectator, too, will need to adopt. The mode of suspicion here is "reparative" in the sense that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) puts forward in her critique of paranoid readings. That is, it is a form of critique that accounts for multiple sensations, not only negative ones: terror, astonishment, amusement, shock, pleasure, pain, and so on (Sedgwick, 2003). Gothumentary derives its skepticism of narrative authority from the Gothic-horror literary tradition—particularly as a way of investigating the formation of subjectivity under extreme social oppression. Gothic-horror narratives scrutinize the reliability of narrative and narrating voices (and encourage their readers to do the same) through reflexive use of fabricated evidentiary texts such as letters, news articles, journals, found manuscripts and testimonials. The Gothic work deploys these "documentary" texts within a context of more romantic, sensational tropes such as baroque description and style, limited first-person narration, and embedded or suppressed narration(s) that surface through compound layers of telling and re-telling. The result is a reality both rendered and characterized by overdetermination, where multiple experiences and perceptions give way to multiple tellings—multiple *mediations*—often producing multiple truths. Epistolary novels such as *Frankenstein* (1818 [1835]) and *Dracula* (1895) are narrative compilations of many such forms of seemingly evidentiary documentation and the sensations that they produce. And, while it is true that the accumulating mock-documentary textual material in these two works ultimately emphasizes narrative wholeness over fragmentariness or incompleteness, both of these works nonetheless emphasize once again what Sedgwick identifies as the "structural significance" in the Gothic of the "difficulty the story has in getting itself told" (1986: 13).[10] Pleasure and dread in the Gothic work need not be derived from narrative continuity and plausibility, but instead may arise from a readerly contemplation of the veracity and objectivity of the materials that make up the chronicle of events. In the Gothic literary tradition, documents, manuscripts and other texts themselves become an attraction—words fail, obscure meaning, or become mere seductive decoration;

symbols produce multiple, often conflicting readings; and multiple perspectives create multiple realities. In its focus on reflexive strategies that complicate the status of the reality the reader receives, the Gothic offers a model for the kind of attractions-driven aesthetic that ultimately diminishes the authority and comprehensiveness of the diegetic reality in gothumentary. Part of the risk for the Gothic-horror tale-teller is to become lost in the telling of the story—the act of documenting—itself, especially since the chronicle of events requires the reigniting of painful trauma. Being "lost" here means, at base, a failure to properly reconstitute the experience as coherent or conclusive narrative, as in Joyce Carol Oates's short story "Haunted" (1995), in which the narrator writes of her childhood trauma: "I know what happened in my life but I don't know what has happened in these pages" (1994: 23). In this and other Gothic-horror narratives, a failure to *force* narrative coherence onto a reality that overwhelms is often linked to mental trauma. Oates's narrator is troubled by a death that she may have caused, resulting in a slippage between reality and fantasy. Similarly, the narrator's loss of his ability to distinguish between reality and hallucination in Guy du Maupassant's "Le Horla" (1887)—or the narrator's total rejection of an oppressive patriarchal reality in Charlotte Perkins-Gillman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892)—turn their first-person accounts into sustained acts of radical interpretation of (and withdrawal from) their surroundings. In the gothumentary, too, the degree to which meaning can be forced or "read" onto the subject matter becomes a part of the critical project, as we have seen already with both *Capturing the Friedmans* and, in the Introduction, *General Orders No. 9*.

The wider Gothic discourse that informs gothumentary's hermeneutics of suspicion is an extension of the failure of traditionally ordered, meaning-making systems found in these and other works of literary Gothic horror. According to Fred Botting, Gothic-horror literature manifests a tendency towards a "dissolution of all order, meaning and identity" through the inescapable, "darkly illuminating labyrinth of language" (1996: 14) and form. At least part of the excess of the Gothic style comes in the baroque performance of this "darkly illuminating labyrinth," where getting lost in the attempt at telling the story is part of a drama of dread and desire. As in the cinema of attractions, here the narrative grinds to a halt in a performance of form and style. Questions of manipulation or deception arise when contemplating the limitations imposed upon an obsessive or paranoid single storyteller who has only limited access to knowledge or evidence, but maintains agency over the narrative nonetheless. This is the case in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), for example, whose narrative consists of a private

journal that documents what may be an extended delusion resulting from the young governess's crippling sexual repression and moral outrage. Likewise, *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote's 1966 docu-fictional account of the 1959 murder in Kansas of the Clutter family by Dick Hickock and Perry Smith, continually suggests Capote's narration as a fabulation based on the author's overriding interest in interpreting the desire and desperation behind violent crime more than a journalistic case study of his subjects. Conversely, a sort of overdetermination can result from multiple narrating voices and views, as evidenced in modernist multi-perspective novels, such as *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), by William Faulkner. The readerly doubt that arises in experiencing these voices is part of an American Gothic mistrust of the voice of authority descending from Poe's tales like "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat" (both 1843). In these two stories, Poe's narrators address the reader directly in extended monologues that are at once attempts to convey their sense of reality and to deflect attention from their heinous crimes; in other words, their narratives easily can be seen as manipulative attempts to regain a sense of agency through a distortion of reality that represents an "alternative" logic. These strategies find their way into more conventional Gothic-horror films such as Robert Wise's *The Haunting* (1963), which translates the totalizing interiority of the narrating voice in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) through an innovative use of voice-over as an interpretive interior monologue. But they also find their way into less conventional films, such as Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966), Nicholas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973), and Roman Polanski's *The Tenant* (1976), all of which bury the spectator deeply within the tormented subjectivity and metaphysical quests of their protagonists, engaging the spectator in a parallel quest for meaning. These fiction films are, like the 1940s films I discuss in Chapter I, Gothic-realist in the productive paranoia that unites their themes, forms, and narratives in a struggle to represent uncomfortable slippages between reality and what may be delusion or fantasy.

The skepticism in these Gothic-horror films around the focalization, or perspective, of the narrative is a strategy that a film like *Capturing the Friedmans* adopts whole-heartedly in its series of equivocal testimonials and multiplicity of perspective. The result is a Gothic realism applied to documentary, one constituted by an excessive "play of codes, signs and images" (Botting, 2008: 175) that produces prevarication, endless reflexivity, and inscrutability. As mentioned earlier, Roger B. Salomon sees the inability to "read" reality as paradigmatic for the

Gothic-horror narrative. In this sense, Salomon and Botting both implicitly highlight the degree to which Gothic makes a drama (a "play," in Botting's terms) of interpretation and interrogation. Paralleling Botting's view of Gothic's semiotic breakdown, Salomon identifies what he terms the "hieroglyphic" elements found in horror narratives' evocation of the real—that "[e]verywhere in horror narrative one finds the inadequacy, ambiguity, or outright failure of signs," and adds that horror's "metaphors of labyrinth and labyrinthian, episodic plots mirror indeterminacy of meaning, at least if 'determinacy' assumes any dimension of hope or positive possibility" (2008: 87). I would amend Salomon's statement slightly to suggest the potential for a more critical space of reception—that Gothic-horror narratives do not always nihilistically eliminate "positive possibility" in their emphasis on indeterminacy and doubt, but instead performatively *withhold* it, in an extended act of interpretation often shared by both narrator and reader. The effect of this technique in gothumentary is something like a combination of the analytical and expressive documentary modes discussed by Michael Renov—expressive because of the reliance on artifice to construct an aesthetic where the spectator is overwhelmed by sensations, both pleasurable and dreadful; and analytical because the "analytical impulse is not so much enacted by the filmmakers as encouraged for the viewer" (Renov, 1993: 32). A combination—even a collapsing together—of interpretation and sensation that one finds in Gothic discourse is integral to the spectatorial role in gothumentary, where epistemic desire and curiosity are continually encouraged, *and* under investigation.

In "The Epistemology of the Horror Story," Susan Stewart argues that horror narratives model a process of coming into awareness of oneself or one's situation based upon "problems of interpretation" (1982: 48). The Gothic-horror narrative's traditional focus on witnessing, interpretation—and subsequent attempts to chronicle—subject matter that resists full disclosure in its extremities and complexities of meaning is a key factor in the strategies of gothumentary. The idea that the real offers resistance to the investigator who desires to uncover further knowledge illustrates again the epistemological parallels that exist between the narrative structures of horror and documentary. Such parallels suggest that there is important critical power in encouraging spectatorial pleasure and desire when looking for knowledge, or encouraging awareness of the historical processes that determine reality. From as early as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), the Gothic-horror narrative has characteristically manipulated and made a spectacle of "metanarrative devices" (Stewart, 1982: 35) that lay claim to nonfiction

status, such as the "manuscript found in a bottle," epistolary forms, journals, or otherwise "found" narratives, often to render the introduction of tacitly fantastic content more believable, and potentially more thrilling as a result of that believability. There is in such horror narratives a mock-documentary aesthetic that grounds the story in a recognizable (even mundane) reality, as one finds in the overloaded documentary descriptions of the preparations for the ultimately fantastical voyage in H.P. Lovecraft's horror-quest novel, *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936). Lovecraft, in fact, theorized that a key factor of the "Weird" narrative would be its almost documentary adherence to the quotidian to prepare for its introduction of the unknown: "Inconceivable events and conditions have a special handicap to overcome, and this can be accomplished only through the maintenance of a careful realism in every phase of the story except that touching on the one given marvel" (quoted in Mariconda, 2013: 176). Concomitant with the emphasis on mundanity disrupted by the marvelous in horror is a sense (sometimes encouraged by the author as a hoax) that the events of the story actually occurred, as in Poe's "hoax" stories, among them: "The Unparalleled Adventures of One Hans Pfall" (1835), *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1837) "The Balloon Hoax" (1844), and the gruesome "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" (1845). For Stewart, as for Botting and Salomon above, the horror narrative melds both subject matter and telling into a single attraction: "In the horror story the boundary between the real and the fictive, the interpretations of experience by the audience and the characters, is continually drawn and effaced. Both the story and its context of telling dissolve into a uniformity of effect" (1980: 35). And this "uniformity of effect" brings the reader into a shared and extended act of enunciation with the storyteller that produces a hesitation between desire and fear of the effects of uncovering knowledge similar to that which one finds in gothumentary. In narratives where the protagonist's pursuit of knowledge forms the central conceit of the narrative, the reader "rarely knows more than the victim of the story" (Stewart, 1982: 39).[11] Gothic-horror narratives thus bring the reader into an interpretive activity that parallels the protagonist's quest to derive coherent meaning and material understanding from available information.

Writing of Edgar Allan Poe's 1838 story, "Ligeia" (revised in 1845 by the author), Terry Heller uses the term, "anticlosure" to describe the state of "terrifying entrapment of the real reader in the role of the implied reader" (1987: 110) at the end of Poe's horror tale and, by implication, others like it. Heller argues that this collapse of real and implied readerships circles

readers back to the beginning of the tale, leaving them in a liminal space between beginning mystery and lingering final questions. (This, as I will argue later, is also the domain of the pseudo-documentary, which varies in its degree of critical use of the final interrogative inversion that Heller identifies.) Stewart also discusses horror fiction as having a tendency towards ontological liminality, particularly in terms of "being in between interpretations, in between states of being" (1982: 40). This space of hermeneutic rupture in horror and the fantastic is traditionally framed in Todorovian terms as the narrative construction of a fantastic "hesitation" (1975: 25) between two possibilities, one supporting rational thinking, the other requiring a redefinition of all categories governing the rational.[12] Following Todorov, Rosemary Jackson (1981) notes the critical possibilities for the fantastic space of hesitation in service of subversion of norms. Spectacle is key to creating the kind of hesitation that Todorov and Jackson describe—here, narrative logic breaks down in moments where the narrative account becomes foggy, hazy, ambiguous, encouraging a more sensorial reading strategy. Stewart, too, implies the essentially sensorial nature of the horror story's reliance on hesitation among potential realities or possible meanings. Her reading of horror narrative's troubled and troubling hermeneutic derives directly from an epistephilic desire, the frustration of that desire, and the potentially terrifying or disturbing rewards that might result. In documentary, this "hesitation" in meaning is one that Nichols calls "figurability," or "an emergent category, a possibility that takes form in a liminal moment prior to any empirical gesture toward verification" (1994: 98). The gothumentaries that I discuss in this chapter, actively work to produce a similar frustration—a hermeneutical gap, a state of "being in between interpretations, in between states of being"—that maneuvers the viewer into a position of critical distance and responsibility characterized not just by observing, but by witnessing.

The key role of the witness in Gothic-horror narratives that are constructed as records or testimonials of a narrator's experience is yet another key conceptual link between horror and factual discourse. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (2014) makes a perceptive distinction between the roles of documentary observer and witness that relates to the narrative and aesthetics shared by documentary and horror cinema: "With the *observer*," she writes, "the camera documents; with the *witness*, the camera testifies, renders an account." She adds that "the witness has a subjective relation to the image (the ability to see oneself *in* the scene), transforming what is seen through the prism of human feeling by means of communication" (2014: 201). Flitterman-Lewis

discusses how a dialectic between representation and the referent functions to heighten a critical spectatorship in Alain Resnais' unsettling, performative (in Nichols' [2010] terms) or "expressive" (in Renov's [1993] terms) Holocaust documentary, *Night and Fog*. Flitterman-Lewis tracks Resnais' film's construction of a viewing position that moves spectators from receptive observers to morally implicated witnesses (2014: 201), using a formal "strategy of indirection" (2014: 202) that highlights the style of the film's presentation—and thus its status as artistic object. This emphasis on the documentary's own interpretive process as part of its content is a formal strategy that relates to Bill Nichols' definition of the performative documentary: "Performative documentary," he argues, "does not propose a primary object of study beyond itself but instead gives priority to the affective dimensions struck up between ourselves and the text. It proposes a way of being-in-the-world as this world is itself brought into being through the very act of comprehension, 'abducted from fragments,' as Stephen Tyler puts it" (1994: 102). Renov, as well, identifies a degree of associative play and acknowledgment of the apparatus in his account of documentary's more expressive traits that resemble avant-garde cinema in the degree to which they "[emphasize] the filtering of the represented object through the eye and mind of the artist" (1993: 35). Resnais' film nudges its controversial, horrific subject matter into a space of ambiguity that encourages contemplation on the part of the viewer who searches for meaning between, on the one hand, the film's straightforwardly presented facts and archival footage of concentration camps and victims; and, on the other, its poetic evocation of the present through landscapes and spaces of absence, where memory lingers but <u>remembering</u> needs to be evoked and encouraged (Flitterman-Lewis, 2014: 208).

Scholarly work on Holocaust testimonials provides crucial theoretical ground for investigating the similarities of the witness role in documentary and Gothic-horror narratives. The witness here has the horrific task of giving some meaningful form to overwhelming trauma for an expectant audience that wants to learn from that experience. Based upon her work interviewing Holocaust survivors for the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University, Dori Laub discusses "the process of the testimony as, essentially, a ceaseless struggle" (1992: 75), a process fraught with fear that the act of witnessing will renew the trauma. Laub identifies three levels of witnessing: 1) "being a witness to oneself" (1992: 75); 2) the witnessing role of the "immediate receiver" (1992: 76) of the testimonial in the form of an interviewer, archivist, and/or documentarian; and 3) "the process of witnessing […] itself being

witnessed" (1992: 76). This last is the role most akin to the spectator in that the testimonial becomes a shared experience, a mutual process of seeking "truth" (Laub, 1992: 76). This third level is also the most important to the sensorial experience of gothumentary reception. The gothumentary may rely on deeply unsettling material that may be too complex, "too much," to comprehend, or it may disrupt the spectator's comfortable relationship to the quotidian by pointing to its secretive, uncanny, or otherwise troubling qualities. In either case, the gothumentary's historiographical mode derives directly from a sense of history as haunting: it is pervasive and troubling, it pricks the subject with awareness, it resists attempts to grasp its full implications, and it fills the subject with dread in contemplation of achieving full knowledge of those implications. Laub writes of the Holocaust in terms that mirror the gothumentary's sense of testimony as a struggle to recapture history as horror:

> The horror of the historical experience is maintained in the testimony only as an elusive memory that feels as if it no longer resembles any reality. The horror is, indeed, compelling not only in its reality, but even more so, in its flagrant distortion and subversion of reality. Realizing its dimensions becomes a process that demands retreat. The narrator and I need to halt and reflect on these memories as they are spoken, so as to reassert the veracity of the past and to build anew its linkage to, and assimilation into, present-day life. (1992: 76)

In so many Gothic-horror narratives, the primary struggle is for the narrator to be believed, to have one's experience understood, validated by others. My making a link between representing the trauma of the Holocaust and the gothumentary's rhetorical gestures to the extreme emotions and excesses of Gothic-horror as a historiographical strategy may seem crude or offensive. But while I do not mean to reduce the brave and triumphant act of the Holocaust witnesses' testifying to their experience to a mere trope, I do want to highlight the links between this kind of documentary record and the Gothic-horror narrative as an extended struggle to articulate experience through description, interpretation, and evocation of a trauma that has 'flagrantly' "distorted" and "subverted" reality, because it is this element that gothumentary borrows most significantly from Gothic-horror discourse. Both traditions follow the same dictum that the traumatic event is so profound that it renders the real ungraspable as narrative, yet that, nonetheless, "The 'not telling' of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny" (Laub, 1992: 79).

A focus on epistephilia and epistephobia in the contract between cinematic and literary works of horror and their audiences as witnesses "of the process of witnessing itself" also has been endemic to reception-based studies and cognitive studies that explore the ostensibly paradoxical questions of spectatorial and readerly pleasure in horror. Horror spectators and readers typically confront undesirable emotions such as disgust, dread, and shock. And yet there is an aesthetic pleasure in the contemplation of such emotions. In his seminal 1990 study, *The Philosophy of Horror; or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, Noël Carroll contends that horror cinema and literature draw interest around such disagreeable responses because they have at their center an "unknowable" (1990: 182), entity that "defies standing cultural categories" (1990: 184) and initiates a horror narrative that necessarily "engages its audience by being involved in processes of disclosure, discovery, proof, explanation, hypothesis, and confirmation" (1990: 182).[13] Negative emotions are therefore the expected outcome and fulfillment of the horror spectator's or reader's epistephilic desire. In other words, the revelation of the category-defying monstrosity essential to Carroll's argument carries with it the concomitant pleasurable uncovering of all of the unpleasant issues and knowledge that attend the monstrous figure—a fulfilling of the desire to know (whatever the cost) that frames both horror and documentary spectatorship.[14] "All narration might be thought to involve the desire to know," writes Carroll, but "the horror fiction is a special variation on this general narrative because it has at the center of it something which is given as in principle unknowable" (1990: 35). Carroll's comments here revolve around an unknowable monstrous *entity*, and not just the idea of unknowability itself as monstrous, which is the characteristic of the gothumentary and much of the fake found-footage and mockumentary horror cinema that I discuss in Chapter III. Here, it is an absence of knowledge resulting in an epistemological impasse, or the overwhelming presence of information resulting in an overdetermination of information, a polysemy, that becomes monstrous and fearful, dreadful. Taken exactly as-is and out of the context of his supernatural entity-based theory of horror, Carroll's statement that horror revolves around "processes of disclosure, discovery, proof, explanation, hypothesis, and confirmation" (1990: 182), identifies the shared epistemologies of horror and documentary around an attractions aesthetic—a promise to show, or reveal. As such, it also identifies the conceptual orientation of the gothumentary around desire and dread of knowing. Knowledge can be monstrous in its implications, and in its resistance.

Bill Nichols also remarks that documentaries, at least in their expository form, often "take shape around the solution to a problem or puzzle" (1991: 38) constructed around a promise of disclosure of knowledge. And Jane Gaines identifies a similarly sensationalized epistephilic desire when she writes, "Of every commercial documentary film it must be said that there is a 'Ripley's Believe It or Not' quality, a quality of 'stranger than', and it is this particular quality that invites investigation and knowledge, even a questioning about the imagined world/real world distinction" (1999: 10). Significantly, Gaines identifies a certain latent fantastical pseudo-documentary element in the way that commercial documentary attracts "spectatorial incredulity" (1999: 9) around a "believe-it-or-not" framework. This more fantastical element is one that gothumentary, and to some extent the pseudo-documentary, will highlight in both ludic and critical ways.

The engagement of spectatorial curiosity in gothumentary is no mere initiation of a cognitive process that concludes in satisfying revelation, as Carroll implies of horror works, and as Nichols (1994) argues of expository documentary. By creating a spectatorship that is actively involved in the interpretation and sensorial reception of the text, gothumentary constitutes a return of suppressed avant-garde possibilities in documentary. It reintegrates the pleasures of textuality into documentary as an essential part of a meaning-making process that encourages a critical understanding of the historical world through being *moved* by it. Elizabeth Cowie argues that documentary imagery responds to two types of desire: there is, first, the "desire for reality held and reviewable for analysis as […] a world of evidence confirmed through observation and logical interpretation," and, second, the "desire for the real not as knowledge but as image, as spectacle" (1999: 19). Gothumentary films like *Capturing the Friedmans* highlight the tension between these two desires, questioning the first by exploring the possibilities of the latter—that is, by constructing a spectatorship that derives both dread and pleasure from the act of scrutiny, however successfully that scrutiny produces conventional "proof." The gothumentary gaze seeks a different kind of knowledge, one gained through the contemplation of an aesthetics of spectacle and sensation rather than through the cognitive rewards produced by teleological structures. Such an aesthetics brings feeling and knowing into conjunction with each other rather than separating out the haptic and sensorial lure of knowledge-seeking from the more privileged intellectual engagement of more "sober" discourses. Gothumentary, then, turns to Gothic discourse to signal a new strategy for bringing desire, dread, pleasure and active viewership back into documentary.

Where the gothumentary differs from conventional documentary is in its disruption of these desires to force spectators to contemplate the limits of knowledge. As Alisa Lebow argues, epistephilia as not simply the "desire to know," but "the desire for the illusion of mastery through knowing" (2006: 227). Gothumentary asks the spectator to find an oblique sort of pleasure in being stripped of such mastery.

I now turn to a film that shares *Capturing the Friedmans*' interest in interrogating the degrees of "mastery" offered by the documentary form: Barbara Brancaccio and Joshua Zeman's *Cropsey* (2009). *Cropsey* is an extended, attractions-based performance of its own potential failure to capture its subject. It combines the two types of documentary desire identified by Cowie—epistephilic and scopophilic—by building into its very structure a meta-commentary on horror convention and the "stranger-than" aspect of pseudo-documentary treatment that Gaines sees in popular documentary forms. In *Cropsey*, an intriguing, but mostly absent, cipher stands at the center of the documentary exploration, but directors Brancaccio and Zeman are less interested in solving or concluding anything about their central subject than they are in exploring the evidence that leads only to an ever-widening scope of mystery—one that the filmmakers playfully imply verges on the fantastical, at least in terms of the enigmatic central subject's power as a mythical bogeyman figure. Part of this process is, of course, not just a deft presentation of evidence, but a performance in the film of horror convention to amplify the monstrous nature of the subject matter, and the absences of knowledge around which the film circles. The filmmakers choose as their subject André Rand, an alleged serial killer of mentally disabled children being retried for another murder retroactively after serving 20 years of a 25-years-to-life sentence. Brancaccio and Zeman construct a spectatorial desire to know more about Rand's history and possible motives, but even more so they construct a desire around their ability to somehow produce Rand himself in the form of a direct interview that he never grants. The only material the filmmakers have to give Rand a presence in their film are several letters addressed to them by Rand, a few photographs, and footage of Rand being led from the courthouse to his transport bus back to prison. The rest of the character-building that happens around Rand comes in the form of testimonials by local Staten Islanders, the stories of the case that have circulated around the community and in news reports, and the folkloric status that Rand has achieved as the result of his notoriety. *Cropsey* does not make claims to objectivity or transparency; the filmmakers increasingly turn their lack of access to "truth"—their struggle of their story to "get

itself told"—into the subject of their film. Brancacchio and Zeman also construct their film so as to play consciously with Gothic-horror and pseudo-documentary aesthetic tropes and subject matter as a critical strategy to highlight their intentions of sourcing out a "monster." The film is at times self-consciously beautiful and gloomily atmospheric, with eerie music and a deliberately ominous voice-over—extra-textual allusions to the horror aesthetic from which the film borrows its mood, its themes, and its investigative narrative structure.

Cropsey is an example of gothumentary where the central figure is fragmented, and reachable only through the spaces they have inhabited, or the objects and documents they have left behind. As in the case of classic Gothic texts such as *Northanger Abbey* (1817), where found manuscripts become part of a narrative of private suffering and secrets, the documents in gothumentaries, are often not intended to be presented to the public, but they confront us nonetheless. The Gothic-horror found text confronts the reader-spectator with potentially the same kind of attraction-repulsion that Carroll says comes with the revelation of a category-defying monstrous entity. The creators of such testimonials in gothumentaries do not necessarily have an audience in mind; in fact, their text often functions as a form of introspection or self-interrogation. We collude with the filmmaker in trespassing upon these personal transmissions, hoping to become worthy of deciphering their deeper significance. In the gothumentaries that focus on the documents left behind by individuals who have been pushed to the margins and who would otherwise have no voice, the airing of these records holds powerful critical possibilities. In *Must Read After My Death*, for example, protagonist, Allis, has left upon her death her audio confessions and home movies to her family, who knew nothing of the pain she experienced while living in a suburban patriarchal hell. Her unconventional open relationship with husband, Charlie, who spends an extended period in Australia for work, seems to spark a rift between Allis and Charlie, and between the couple and their community, that expands to the rest of the family. Allis's recorded testimonials gradually reveal her to be at the center of a cycle of emotional abuse by Charlie, and the medical institutions to which they turn. As Allis watches her family crumble around her—including one child that must be institutionalized—she turns away from psychoanalysts (who communicate with her husband behind her back and, of course, blame her for the family's collapse) and increasingly to her private recordings using the technology she had at one point used to communicate with her husband (first, on a phonographic cylinder; later, via tape recordings). These recorded testimonials change from an early status in the film as a more

personal substitute for letter-writing between Allis and Charlie, to a sort of private confessional, to which Allis turns to voice her frustrations and often angry critique of her situation. Filmmaker Morgan Dews, Allis's grandson, juxtaposes these recordings of Allis's private story against home movie footage that presents a different reality. As we examine the images of the supposedly happy family, Allis's voice intercedes to confront the spectator with the knowledge that, while these amateur images of domestic "bliss" are not faked or intentional deceptions, without the voice that conveys experience, they can only tell the story we already think we know, which is revealed to be an impoverished fabrication. In this case, a voice desperately calls out from the past demanding reparations for an injustice that the images are unable to confirm, and thus unsettles the conventionalized strategies we rely upon to feel that we know what has happened in the past. Furthermore, the "unsettling" element extends to the way the film means to make its audience feel about this voice from the past. Allis' voice surfaces as a corrective to an official record that exempts and erases her identity. The *frisson* that comes with confronting this resurrected voice and presence in the film is an integral part of its critique. Thus, the film acts as a sort of investigation not only of Allis, but of the rather disturbing, potentially misleading nature of the home movie as an archival form. Through juxtaposing Allis's recordings against the home movie illusions, Dews' film places itself among other critical cinematic explorations of amateur footage that, according to Patricia Zimmerman, "[combine] historical exhumation of lost voices with artistic manipulation of lost images, interrogating the fracture between archival history and personal memory" (2008a: 10). And it does so by relying significantly upon how audiences will receive its message as one of uncanny rupture.

Other gothumentary films will favor reconstructing such "lost voices" through an even broader appeal to the senses than a film like *Must Read After My Death*. Via associational juxtapositions of voice-over, music and impressionistic imagery, such films as *In the Realms of the Unreal: The Mystery of Henry Darger* (Jessica Yu, 2004) and *The Sound of Insects: Record of a Mummy* (Peter Liechti, 2009) convey a *sense* of their absent subjects with very little material to draw upon. Both films have limited or no access to visual records of the subjects they trace. In *The Sound of Insects*, the "mummy's" journal—a daily account of a man's suicide by starvation in the forest—is the only record of his existence. There are no images, no interviews of anyone who knew the subject. And in *Realms of the Unreal*, the primary access to the secretive existence of Henry Darger are three photographs of Darger; Darger's apartment full of hundreds of

paintings, collages and sketches; and Darger's 1,500-page fantasy work comprising text, art and collage. Accordingly, both films rely heavily upon images that attempt to evoke their subjects, as well as to render the world they (and we) live in as unsettling. In both films, as in *Cropsey*, abandoned spaces figure significantly. *The Sound of Insects* must reconstruct the handmade tent constructed by its subject deep in the woods, where he will live out his two-month suffering. *In the Realms of the Unreal* has access to Darger's apartment, fixing its gaze on only a few static shots of the main room where his work was found. Otherwise, these films must attempt to perform something akin to their subjects' personalities. *The Sound of Insects* develops slowly, from static, naturalistic images of nature, to a gradually more frenetic pace, as it represents the slow degeneration of its subject's perceptions of the world around him. *In the Realms of the Unreal* enacts a type of phantasmagoria show at certain points, animating the fantastical images in Darger's illustrations to resurrect his private fantasy as a fever dream.

Resurrect Dead: The Mystery of the Toynbee Tiles (Jon Foy, 2011) is another gothumentary film that traces an absent subject, here through a nod to pseudo-documentary style that is closer to the strategies used in *Cropsey*. Foy's film revolves around the quest of several young men to crack the numerous cryptic missives alluding to Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the ideas of historian Arnold J. Toynbee, and left embedded in the streets of major cities by a reclusive visionary whose identity the filmmakers are never able to fix definitively. Several hundred "Toynbee" tiles have been discovered since the late 1980s in cities throughout North and South America; they all contain some variation of the message: "Toynbee Idea in Movie 2001 Resurrect Dead on Planet Jupiter." Unlike Henry Darger, whose massive fantasy project was entirely private and for himself, the intense desire of the creator of the "Toynbee tiles" to remain hidden is matched by the excessiveness of the energy he puts out to communicate his message. Similar to *Cropsey*'s André Rand, he is a traumatic (and possibly traumatized) ghostly figure who exercises power through being heard and not seen. The (dreadful) pleasure of watching the documentarians' quest to find the Toynbee Tiles creator lies in the anticipation that he will be exposed, potentially disclosing his motives, and in the equally disturbing possibility that he will not emerge to decode his communication. In *Resurrect Dead*, as in these other films, we see that there may be more power in probing the limits of the documentary subject-as-cipher than there is in reaching conclusive statements about the 'real' person at the film's centre. These films are ultimately satisfied with their ability to open up a space for interpretation around this

enigmatic individual's motives and what the documentarian's desire to know about him says about the spectator's own experience of the world.

As in these other gothumentary films, *Cropsey*'s entry point into the historical world is through a cipher whose presence leads to further mysteries and uncomfortable social and cultural realities. Though a troubling history of missing children—some of whom turn up dead—is its own sort of communal trauma, *Cropsey* is less initiated by a traumatic past event, than motivated by an attempt to uncover a traumatized present. Its exploration of its documentarians' struggle to get at the root of the André Rand case has wider implications for a moral and social malaise that has settled over the Staten Island community. As in *Capturing the Friedmans*, the implications here take on much more universal implications for a millennial and 21st-century America that finds its status as indomitable world power on the wane. Gothumentaries like *Cropsey* speak openly to the ever widening "whys?" surrounding the failure of evidence, visible or otherwise, to tell us what we really want to know about the past and about how the past persists in the present, informing us in almost imperceptible ways about aspects of ourselves almost successfully repressed, and nearly forgotten. Thus, both the aesthetic and the worldview veer towards the uncanny—the real as always-already on the verge of revealing disturbing truths that threaten the subject's stability. From its opening moments, *Cropsey* seems as much a fantastical pseudo-documentary exploration of the mythmaking around a local bogeyman as it is a fresh investigation into a 20 year-old murder trial. The first words intoned in the voice-over, voiced by Zeman, tell us of the urban legend of Cropsey, a child-murdering boogeyman said to "haunt" the woods of Staten Island. The early implication is that the film will be about this legend; only later is it suggested that Rand may be the real-life manifestation of this bogeyman. Once the film announces itself as an investigation into the communal frenzy that has turned a serial killer into a horrific urban-legend, it also acknowledges the ways that it will work reflexively to show how such a legend can be constructed. In other words, the filmmakers openly acknowledge their own documentary's contribution to the interpretive frenzy surrounding the enigmatic and inaccessible André Rand, and that may work to construct him as a monster. To this effect, *Cropsey* begins in high-Gothic-horror form by showing us the location of the supposed haunts of Cropsey—the wooded grounds and abandoned buildings of Staten Island's Willowbrook State Institution for the mentally insane, where Rand worked as an orderly. Over amber-tinted images of the institution, with its dark, eye-like windows staring out at the spectator, Zeman's voice-over tells

us that Willowbrook "was a city under a city," creating the sense that some hidden truth lies beneath the veneer of reality like the overwritten layers in a palimpsest, and fashioning Willowbrook as a sort of Gothic double to darkly mirror this fearful, isolated Staten Island community. The inclusion in the film's early scenes of an exploitative journalistic exposé of Willowbrook for television news by a young Geraldo Rivera is telling in its performativity. Disturbing scenes showing the asylum inmates' scrawny, twisted bodies wallowing in their own feces while Rivera's voice-over describes the horrendous smells, work well to initiate the potentially unsavory details of the context for the Rand case. Here, *Cropsey* also asks spectators to acknowledge their own curiosity for the production of such monstrous sights in the film. As Carroll puts it of horror narratives, *Cropsey* shows us a glimpse of the monstrous that may be to come, so as to make us feel both dread and titillation in wanting such repulsive images to return to us, in the guise of further knowledge—and the sensations that come with it.

Staten Island itself is described early in the film's voice-over as a place of repression: it is a place literally built on the accumulation of detritus, a "dumping ground" in the words of one of the Staten Islanders, where garbage is brought to massive landfills that later become parks, and where bodies wash up or are dumped from New York City, whose monolithic skyline is shown several times dominating the hazy horizon. Willowbrook, in this context, becomes the film's most intensely abject space—a dumping ground at the center of a dumping ground, where a society's most alienated and disenfranchised others are hidden away. Willowbrook, Zeman tells us, is also built to the exact same specifications as Pilgrim State mental asylum in Long Island, where Rand's mother had been committed, and where Rand had spent some time. The self-conscious highlighting of this fact draws out the uncanny parallels and atavistic Gothic doubling in the wider subject matter that the filmmakers wish to tackle regarding Rand's relationship to the community that imprisoned him. In some ways, Gothic-horror convention *itself* is the subject of these early moments of *Cropsey*, as they are in the opening of a film like *Citizen Kane* or *Rebecca*, where monstrous houses, Xanadu and Manderley, stand as ruinous figurations of absent ciphers who are monstrous in their enigmatic resistance to representation. In *Cropsey*, Staten Island's repressive, isolated community lies in the monstrous shadows of a major metropolis; its abandoned Willowbrook asylum stands as a reminder of the developmentally disabled youths that serial killer Rand is said to have targeted, and reads as an uncanny psychic space where the violent desires of the Staten-Islanders themselves are made manifest. As in *Capturing the*

Friedmans, the filmmakers of *Cropsey* cumulatively document a collective desire in the Staten Island community to see Rand stand as its monster—as either an avatar of, or convenient scapegoat for, the ugly and complex moral truths that lie outside the range of this community's understanding.

To further emphasize their authorial perspective in the proceedings, *Cropsey* filmmakers Joshua Zeman and Barbara Brancaccio appear as investigative social actors in their own film. But their role as the spectators' personal guides is anything but conventionally authoritative. They construct their film as a personal journey of discovery through a mire of often conflicting information, and even *manipulation* by the subject of the documentary himself. The film's narration thus takes on the Gothic's tone of self-conscious doubt and skepticism around the construction of any attempt at coherent chronicling. The filmmakers also document their own process of working through, debating and assessing the material their documentary presents: they openly voice their doubts, frustrations and suspicions about the evidence they have collected; they document their failure to secure a key interview with Rand; they open for the first time and read aloud his taunting and obfuscatory letters to them on camera. Questions regarding whether Rand's letters—densely packed with inserted text, marginalia, and biblical allusions—are his attempts to manipulate the documentarians further serve to render evidence in the film as increasingly suspect, even unreadable. The evidence they collect suggests that Rand may be misleading or derailing the documentarians with false promises and increasingly abstract meta-commentary on their own investigative process. In his letters, for example, provocative statements such as, "The documentary you put so much faith into will never stand up to the exculpatory evidence in my book," single out the filmmakers, implicating them more deeply as agents in the narrative they construct around him; conversely, Rand's taunts may be an attempt to secure his own sense of agency, either by reminding the filmmakers that his book, not their film, will tell the *real* story they seek, or by perpetuating the idea of himself as the almost supernaturally ubiquitous monster, the bogeyman "Cropsey." Commenting on the renewed visibility he is receiving, and the power his legendary status gives him, Rand writes to the filmmakers: "As long as I'm in prison, I will give the moviemakers reason to portray me as an evil person. You see, *evilness* sells." Against Brancaccio's and Zeman's own quest to give Rand a voice, Rand himself seems to seek empowerment through secrecy—his own narrative, embedded in the filmmakers' quest, offers a reality that is in many ways more powerful than the

one Brancaccio and Zeman can construct because it is a truth that remains hidden. *Cropsey* suggests that we can still learn from evidence of this sort, but the lessons will be different; we may not get the answer, but will learn about the problem of looking at and understanding evidence. Gothumentary films such as *Cropsey* thus create interpretive openings on the way evidence is collected, analyzed and deployed. Their reflexivity highlights factual discourses around the more conventional uses of evidence by the press, the justice system, and academic institutions. In their ability to be reflexive about the multiple meanings and even failings in their *own* use of evidence, gothumentary films highlight the ruptures and inconsistencies that prominent institutions often eschew while serving their positivistic mandates.

In highlighting their role as social actors participating in the meaning-making process of their film, Brancaccio and Zeman participate in a recent documentary turn that Jon Dovey highlights as a "revival of the cine vérité idea" borne of increased access to "camcorder" technology. Citing films like *Sherman's March* (Ross McElwhee, 1985) and *Roger and Me* (Michael Moore, 1989), Dovey describes a construct in which,

> [t]he film-makers deliberately construct narrative personae for themselves which work to mobilise the audience's sympathy with the film-maker's point of view. This is often the film-maker as klutz, the film-maker who makes mistakes, forgets things, retraces his steps, who can't get the essential interview. If we are not terminally irritated by this refusal to assume the traditional authoritative point of view, then we will be recruited to the construction of the film-maker's subjective vision. (1994: n.p.)

We learn early on in *Cropsey* that Brancaccio and Zeman, having grown up on Staten Island, have a personal involvement in the story, marking the film as the result of a sort of amateurish archival impulse to seek out the source of a communal trauma that doubles as a sort of journaling or self-writing for the filmmakers. Where this aspect of *Cropsey* differs from the spectator 'recruitment' strategy outlined by Dovey above, however, is in its reflexive dialogue with Gothic-horror convention. As much as they stand at the center of *Cropsey*'s narration, Brancaccio and Zeman concurrently unseat themselves in their upfront allusions to generic tropes. Like Gothic narrators, Brancaccio and Zeman engage continually with the "difficulty the story has in getting itself told" (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1986: 13); Zeman's voice-over highlights this process, and along with it the instability and insecurity of his and Brancacchio's narrating voice and presence.

Voice-over is conventionally read as the source of authoritative knowledge in documentary, but in *Cropsey* it constantly serves to underscore the filmmakers' frustrated attempts at accumulating enough evidence to gain certainty around Rand's guilt or innocence: "The more we tried … the more bizarre the stories became," Zeman says, concluding the film's opening segment with the acknowledgment that it is "hard to find the difference between the facts and the folklore." Such gestures to conventional Gothic-horror skepticism around the narrating presence and the "true" nature of reality are not only clear but performative in *Cropsey*, but not in any merely ludic way. *Cropsey* is, itself, a highly self-conscious entry into both "the facts and the folklore" surrounding Rand and Cropsey. Its primary goal is to investigate not only Rand's ostensible guilt on the eve of his being tried for yet another crime long-past, but, like *Capturing the Friedmans*, to situate him rhetorically as the token "monster" at the center of a misguided community that seems to view his resurfacing in the media as an unsettling return of the repressed that must once again be put down. At the same time, Brancaccio and Zeman seem quite aware of their film as a potential *contribution* to the notion of Rand as a bogeyman, especially in their focus on his resistance to being "captured" by their lens and their questions. In one scene that seems a direct reference to reality television shows like *Ghost Hunters* (Syfy, 2004-present) and *Paranormal State* (A&E, 2007-present), the two filmmakers record themselves—on Halloween, no less—entering the abandoned Willowbrook asylum with only their cameraperson to accompany them, in the interest of probing Rand's former haunts. The idea is not to revisit the scene of a past event, but to discover a *trace* of their absent subject through inhabiting the ruins of his past. The space is almost impenetrably dark, illuminated only by the pinpoint circles of flashlights. Perhaps in an effort to perform a bit of the anxiety that their film hopes to derive from such a scene, Brancaccio initially refuses to go inside; she eventually does, in fear of being left outside alone, only to have her (and the spectator's) startle reflexes activated later in the scene because of Josh's stumbling noisily over some debris. The scene is highly effective in bringing the spectator into the emotional realm of dread that initiates the project. What do the filmmakers expect to find in this ruined, abandoned space? At the risk of sounding flaky—they seek a *sense* of Rand there.

The two filmmakers are clear that part of understanding the terror of Cropsey as a phenomenon that must be felt to be understood, but they ultimately demonstrate an equivocation in their appeal to the senses. The only "evidence" they find while exploring Willowbrook at night is a group of teenagers appearing out of the blackness of a long corridor, seeking the same

visceral connection to the space and the legend that Brancaccio and Zeman themselves feel in their own nostalgic connection to it. The moment reflects back onto Zeman's and Brancaccio's personal investment in the Cropsey legend as kids who grew up hearing it, more than it adds to any further testimonial on Rand's innocence or guilt. It reminds us that *Cropsey* is, at least in part, an act of "self-inscription" (Renov, 2004: 176) on the part of the filmmakers, where the filmmakers render subject matter as filtered through, and an extension of, their own subjectivities. The scene constructs the space most associated with Rand as haunted and threatening: it is a ruin, obscured by darkness and the unnervingly harsh sounds of the filmmakers' voices and footsteps cutting through an otherwise quiet night. Within this spectacular space, the filmmakers perform the fear they feel while being there. Conventionally, the scene reads like a textbook setup from a reality-TV ghost-hunter series, supporting Dovey's conclusions about such amateurish constructs. Yet it also figures reflexively in Brancaccio and Zeman's interest in the power of their own documentary spectacle-making to underscore Rand's status as local monster. The scene thus has a "dual function" (2014: 206) similar to that which Sandy Flitterman-Lewis finds in *Night and Fog*'s "restless and probing" (2014: 206) tracking shots over the ruins of Nazi concentration camps ten years on, in that it "reinforce[s] the power of 'the look' (the camera's, the viewer's)" (Flitterman-Lewis, 2014: 206). Brancaccio and Zeman rarely miss an opportunity to play up their film's links to a horror tradition that often turns the spectators' desirous gaze back upon them. The strategies here may seem more in service of textual play than critical inquiry (or even documentary ethics), but the scene's gestures to the aesthetics of fake found-footage horror cinema and reality television serve reflexively to highlight the rather tenuous nature of the project's goals and access to knowledge, as well as the rhetorical power of conjecture that one finds in the typical pseudo-documentary. The act of entering the ruins of Willowbrook mirrors the spectator's act of viewing the film; it is built upon the same desire for *any* kind of access to Rand.

The degree to which the gothumentary deploys visual technology to bring viewers into an uneasy sensory relationship with their world parallels the strategies of popular fake found-footage horror films, such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999, Eduardo Sanchez and Daniel Myrick) and the *Paranormal Activity* series (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015). In these films, the evidence the spectator wants to know, and to see, most is withheld in the mise-en-scène; the spectator scans, probes the screen with a combination of rousing expectation and dread. Here, the visual

record is rendered suspect in that it often fails to capture the (usually monstrous) object the amateur filmmakers have set their sights on. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter III, this aesthetics of absence around a failure of supposedly revelatory recording technology is apparent in much recent horror cinema. The camera in fake found-footage and mockumentary horror films, in particular, falls into the hands of obsessive recorders with the urge to chronicle every moment of lived experience, and yet often fails to capture anything but horrific obscurity and blankness. The failure of the documentary project in *Blair Witch*, for example, prompts Brigid Cherry to remark that the film is "about the way technology gets in the way of seeing" (Cherry, 2009: 188). James Keller extends this point, arguing that "in many ways the subject of *Blair Witch* is the progressive loss of control of the cinema process" (Keller, 2004: 60). As one *Blair Witch* character admits, the visual record offers only a "filtered reality," one that deflects attention from a traumatic and ultimately unreachable real.

In fake found-footage horror that focuses on the domestic space, such as the *Paranormal Activity* films and *Home Movie* (2008, Christopher Denham), the technology used for self-surveillance by the films' haunted families is at least as monstrous in its pervasiveness in the home as the possible presence of demons. In these films, characters submit to a technology that need not be linked to the supernatural to be disturbing: the camera turns its users into the continual subjects of an ongoing visual document—one that they feel compelled to help to produce. Not unlike these and other mockumentary horror films, gothumentary films are a site where fiction and nonfiction strategies converge to create ruptures in the way we frame the world in our visual representations. Thus, when *Cropsey* turns to emulating the style and content of current styles in horror cinema and reality-horror television, it does so both to acknowledge and to undermine its own strategies for producing knowledge.

The self-conscious exploitation of the possibilities of fiction in a film like *Cropsey* becomes a critical commentary upon the reality the filmmakers construct via genre cinema discourse. The monster figure, Cropsey, as a product of the "collective fear" of a community and of the documentary that bears its name, is ultimately a conceptual tool by which the filmmakers investigate the power of pseudo-documentary-style conjecture to function as a form of closure. Brancaccio and Zeman construct their film to combine the spectatorial desires behind horror cinema's and the pseudo-documentary's need to produce a monster, and documentary's ostensible need to produce definitive knowledge. If the filmmakers find little in the way of

information that will exculpate Rand, they find a type of finality in his fitting squarely into the center of the film's monstrous vacancy. In the words of Detective, Frank Saez, one of the investigators who looked into Rand's potential connections to a culture of devil worship situated on Staten Island, the uncertainty around the "missing of a child is even worse" than the certainty of the child's death, because "the child is never dead until you bring the remains to" the parents. To highlight the Staten Islanders' desperate need for a solution to the disappearance of so many children, *Cropsey* makes self-conscious gestures to supernatural horror's "drama of iterated disclosure" (Carroll, 1990: 182) of a central monstrous entity. As I mentioned earlier in this section, for Carroll, the simultaneous pleasure and disgust the reader/spectator feels in confronting the expected unsavory details that come with gradually disclosing the monstrous figure is not only expected, but sought-after. The production of a monster in horror fulfills a certain desire for definitive knowledge. *Cropsey*'s self-conscious turn to horror convention highlights that this desire occurs for both the Staten Island community and the documentary spectator. The communal need for the production of a folkloric monster like Cropsey is mirrored in the film with the Staten Islanders' need for a secure narrative that fixes André Rand as its local child murderer. When they need further closure, as in the reopened case of Holly Ann Hughes, they "resurrect" Rand from prison years later (incidentally, just four years before he is up for parole) and haul him in for trial once again. Whether guilty or not, Rand is the community's figure representing the sense of an ending. One of Rand's friends discusses the less-than-incontrovertible nature of a photograph of Rand that circulated in newspapers, indicting him at least in the public mind. The friend points to the multiple readings about Rand's character that could be imposed upon the photo, which shows Rand in an ostensibly abject posture, head-down and hunched over, eyes rolled upwards, a string of drool handing from the lower lip. Later in the film, Brancaccio and Zeman uncover that Rand was in shock when the photograph was taken, having been shown by detectives images of Willowbrook that re-traumatized him. The film presents a sort of Kuleshov test, the interviewed friend's voice heard over the photograph as he offers different interpretations of the image as representing either a heroic humanitarian or a brutal murderer, to suggest the tenuous claim the photo has to representing the "real" Rand. *Cropsey* holds <u>itself</u> constantly up to scrutiny in this manner. It resists any such closure in its self-conscious forcing of Rand into the context of a local myth—the sought-after, requisite "monster" that its title implies the film will produce. The film plays upon two seemingly at-odds techniques:

first, it creates a sense of the uncanny, of otherness, and of dread and looming monstrosity (both supernatural and criminal) in the Staten Island community; second, it suggests that the "monster" that initiates the documentary project ultimately transcends the boundaries of the documentary, just as much as the filmmakers' investigation into the mystery of the missing children fails to produce enough convincing evidence of Rand's guilt or innocence. *Cropsey* leaves itself open to interpretation to enforce this point. Zeman's final words, heard in voice-over against a series of images of Willowbrook interiors streaked by sunlight, highlight the film as a contribution to the legend of Cropsey more than a cracking of the Rand case:

> We will never know the real story behind André Rand, so all we're left with is our version—that of Cropsey. But, now we've added another chapter, for the next generation of kids on Staten Island. The power of the urban legend is that it doesn't claim to be the truth, but rather it says the truth is a range of possibilities. And it's the audience who must decide. So, pick one.

The film's appeal to the viewer's awareness of the power of urban legends might seem like an oblique type of closure in its leading the audience away from the specifics and locality of the Staten Island Rand case to the safer realm of urban legend. But *Cropsey*'s final challenge to the audience to "pick" the truth from a range of possibilities strikes directly at the heart of the Rand case, where closure was forced by a community that had only circumstantial evidence—and a convenient figure on which to pin their moral outrage and grief. Rand becomes a paradoxical conceptual cocktail of all the conjecture about him: he is a child murderer, childlike himself, a kidnapper, a charismatic cult leader, a mere minion of the Satanic "Church of the Process," a highly intelligent and manipulative schemer, a person of "slow" intellect like his victims, a victim of society and the institutions meant to protect him, "an absolute, fucking monster"—a "complete mystery." As in *Capturing the Friedmans*, *Cropsey*'s major skepticism of the powerfully deterministic judiciary institutions (and morally righteous communities) in the film is what remains for the spectator, regardless of Rand's guilt or innocence.

III. "Or is it … ?"—The Horror Pseudo-Documentary as Gothumentary: *The Hellstrom Chronicle* (1971)

A gothumentary film like *Cropsey* deploys its horror tropes to a degree that calls to mind the pseudo-documentary, a manifestation of documentary form that flirts with horror and the fantastic. Perhaps closer in aesthetic to the hoax film than to the documentary, the pseudo-documentary uses the rhetoric of factual discourse and aesthetics of conventional documentary to render the strange more real, or to render the real seemingly strange. In a 2013 article, upon which this chapter expands, I argued that the pseudo-documentary is largely ludic and uncritical in its goals. This may well be the case in pseudo-documentaries like the Academy Award-nominated *Chariots of the Gods* (1970, Harald Reinl) and *In Search of Ancient Astronauts* (1975, Harald Reinl); in horror documentaries like *H.H. Holmes: America's First Serial Killer* (2004, John Borowski); and in reality television series like *A Haunting* (The Discovery Channel, 2005-2007; Destination America, 2012-present) and Syfy's *Ghost Hunters* (2004-present). But in this section, I want to revise and complicate that earlier conclusion to suggest that the sense of productive reflexive play that one finds in gothumentary's adoption of Gothic-horror convention, can be found to a significant degree in the pseudo-documentary form. Why this is important has to do with Gothic-horror's function as an alternative discourse of realism that has been critically productive in both horror and documentary. It is in the context of a critical-versus-ludic engagement with Gothic-horror convention in both the gothumentary and horror pseudo-documentary forms, that I want to re-evaluate a film that enacts gothumentary critique through straightforward fantastical pseudo-documentary excess: Walon Green's 1971 Oscar-winner for Best Documentary, *The Hellstrom Chronicle*.

Before I turn to the analysis of *The Hellstrom Chronicle*, it is imperative that I make a distinction between the gothumentary's critical strategies and the more ludic uses of Gothic in pseudo-documentary works. I do not mean to suggest that any documentary that seeks to disturb viewers about its potentially unfathomable or cryptic subject matter is working with the Gothic as a critical discourse on documentary (or horror) representation. As we find in *Capturing the Friedmans* and *Cropsey*, gothumentary manifests the reflexive tendency in Gothic discourse to call attention to the pleasures and torments of getting the story told, and as a way of exploring the manipulative powers of representation, truth-telling, and knowledge construction. These gothumentaries deeply unsettle the spectator's naturalized relationships with knowledge, reality, representation, memory, history and the self. One sees this critical goal clearly in a gothumentary film like the aforementioned *Wisconsin Death Trip*, which, like the pseudo-documentary, relies

on the associations it can make using a number of representational strategies, both evidentiary and semi-fictional. As I have mentioned, along with the multiple period accounts and photographs expected of the documentary form, James Marsh's film uses reenactments full of dark humor and lyrical imagery, as well as intertitles that both ritualize the film's events and telegraph events to come. All of these strategies combine in *Wisconsin Death Trip* to evoke a region of turn-of-the-century America pervaded by an infectious mania that has its roots in the American Gothic imaginary, especially attending the expectations and terrors of life on the American frontier. But despite what may seem like aesthetic preciousness and comical irreverence with respect to its often disturbing accounts of impoverishment, child abandonment, infanticide, murder, suicide, and insanity, *Wisconsin Death Trip* is deeply engaged with the ways we understand the past. It unsettles any sense that the spectator will gain mastery over its subject matter through conventional observation, compelling the spectator to take an active role in reaching conclusions. As I noted earlier in the chapter, the representational license Marsh takes with the material available to him is a distanciating strategy similar to a film like *Night and Fog*, in that it serves to locate the spectator at a disturbing distance from the past to highlight the important role of remembering in the present. I bring up *Wisconsin Death Trip* again here because, like the pseudo-documentary, it works through appeals to senses, and through the association of often disparate elements to render the historical world strange and troubling. It does so to lend weight to the emotional, irrational experience of history, encouraging the viewer to exercise some imaginative license in revisiting and reconstructing the historical period and phenomena it covers.

While the horror pseudo-documentary also renders the historical world strange, it does so through juxtaposing conjecture and speculation with strings of unanswered questions and readings of evidence that are often *extracted* from historical, archaeological, anthropological or cultural contexts. Pseudo-documentaries can and often do work to subvert their own claims to transparency by highlighting the rhetorical power of documentary aesthetics and factual discourse, but they typically do little else with the fevered sense of allusive textual and generic play they conjure up. Gary D. Rhodes argues that in pseudo-documentaries such as the television series *In Search of ...* (1976-82; 2002), and *Unsolved Mysteries* (1987-2010), "the question becomes the answer" (2005: 157). That is, the potentially critically productive ambiguity inherent to an open "What if?" ending (such as *Cropsey*'s) instead becomes in pseudo-documentary a

fulfillment of narrative conventions. Open endings in the horror pseudo-documentary in particular serve a teleological drive to take events that are explicable within the disciplines of archaeology, anthropology or geography, and tilt them rhetorically towards the supernatural or paranormal. A single, cryptic phone-in to a late-night radio show by an unidentified caller in southern Florida is enough to suggest a supernatural cause to the strange phenomena covered in *In Search of ...*'s episode on the Bermuda Triangle (01.04; airdate, 27 April, 1977). Another episode of that series devoted to the "Magic of Stonehenge" (01.24; airdate, 10 September, 1977) begins with a string of reasons why the massive stones would be next to impossible to get into position, and proceeds to compile numerous esoteric uses for the site, including its use as a sort of ancient communications network, or as a generator of a massive magnetic field. "The question which still eludes us," intones host Leonard Nimoy in the episode's coda, "is who erected these working monuments? Clearly they were the work of people more advanced than we had thought possible for that time. We can speculate that our ancestors were possessed of knowledge that was somehow lost to succeeding generations. Or, perhaps they had help?" Though the word "alien" is never mentioned in the episode's expository script, its final question to the viewer implies the popular hypothesis in the1970s that a visit by extraterrestrials provided primitive humanity with the tools and knowledge to erect the giant stones. Such mysteries in the pseudo-documentary need not involve spaces as vast and cryptic as the Bermuda Triangle or Stonehenge to have an impact. In an episode of Discovery Channel's *A Haunting* ("Demon Child," 02.01; airdate, 10 August, 2006), a family's belief that their child's strange behavior (including peeing in his closet) is a form of demonic possession by a demon called "Man" outstrips any other possibility (that the child is simply an imaginative brat, for example), only because the episode takes pains to offer numerous other "strange" events to make the claim seem more plausible through repetition.

Genre literature and cinema are important precedents for the pseudo-documentary aesthetic and themes. One of the pseudo-documentary's most popular topics—ancient aliens—has been traced to the fiction of H.P. Lovecraft by Jason Colavito (2005), who surveys various ancient-alien theories and extraterrestrial-based religious cults with the notion that all such belief systems derive from ideas central specifically to the so-called Cthulhu mythos, first appearing in Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928). Central to Colavito's thesis is the idea that scientists, spiritualists and theorists turned to such ideas over the course of the 20th Century as a way of developing a contemporary mythology for a century that grew increasingly secular as the result

of industrialization, urbanization and scientific discovery. Gary D. Rhodes locates the ancient alien conspiracy theories of pseudo-documentary treatments in a more historically specific counter-culture and New Age tradition that extends from the turn-of-the-19th-century Spiritualist movement, and occult and alternative thinkers in the 1920s, 30s and 40s, such as Alice Bailey (2005: 156).[15] As a number of scholars have shown (Sconce, 2000; Kaplan 2003, 2008; Chéroux, et al, 2004; Gunning, 2007), the "new medium" of photography with its potentially revelatory properties was a key tool for these alternative movements. Spiritualists especially took a technophilic stance on the photographic medium-as-magical that the pseudo-documentary would adopt unreservedly.

Pseudo-documentaries combine horror and documentary themes, tropes, and rhetorical strategies in ways that rely heavily on the spectators' savvy awareness of documentary, reality television, mystery and horror conventions. We *expect* the pseudo-documentary to turn away from rational explanations of its visual record to the fantasy of a possible world where skeptics are fools and believers in the preternatural and supernatural see their unconventional conclusions supported—if not by evidence, then by a final interrogatory appeal to the viewer's sense of mystery. In doing so, the pseudo-documentary feeds into the traditional connotation of Gothic as an anti-realist discourse of excess and transgression. Conversely, the gothumentary turns to the Gothic as a critical-realist discourse suspicious of a reality it sees as uncanny and troubling, even threatening in its resistance to any means of capture or decipherment. Pseudo-documentaries do, indeed, flirt with questioning the positivistic conclusions of rational (scientific) discourse, as Rhodes suggests, but, unlike gothumentaries, they do not highlight themselves as acts of documentary-style interpretation that open up critical pathways into the historical world and the spectator's tenuous relationship to it. When, for example, the television series, *In Search of ...*, claims at the beginning of every episode that its treatment of everything from hauntings to spontaneous combustion is "based in part on theory and conjecture" and meant to "suggest some possible explanation, but not necessarily the only ones to the mysteries [they] will examine," the spectator is less *suspicious* of what will follow than *primed* for it. The ambiguities and final frissons evoked by pseudo-documentaries can thus be read generically (and ironically) as rhetorical closure to the narrative, where, as Rhodes argues above, a final question ("Or is it … ?") becomes the answer. The pseudo-documentary is, then, retrograde in its appropriation of documentary aesthetics, at least if we consider its straightforward use of an expository formula in

which "[i]magery and utterance combine to lead the audience to a monolithic conclusion to their esoteric questions: the exalted truth, rendered impersonally and without apparent bias" (Rhodes, 2005: 159). Both the horror pseudo-documentary and the gothumentary can serve as a form of meta-documentary and meta-horror in the sense that formal and generic play are often front-and-center in their aesthetics. However, the gothumentary differs from the horror pseudo-documentary significantly in that it *re-enacts* Gothic-horror convention not as a canny wink to the spectator, but with the purpose of revealing monstrous ruptures in in the tools (factual, fictional) we use to understand the historical world. Framing the world as though teetering on the brink of the inscrutable and the irrational—often, like *Cropsey* and *Wisconsin Death Trip*, superficially in ways very similar to its pseudo-documentary cousin—the gothumentary points to and disrupts our vague or illusory sense of the real by rendering it through the conventions of the darkly fantastic, while still maintaining a link to the historical world, so crucial within the documentary tradition.

Walon Green's *The Hellstrom Chronicle* is a hybrid combination of the pseudo-documentary's reflexive playfulness and the gothumentary's critical stance. Produced by David Wolper in the same year as another Wolper production, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (Mel Stuart), and released in some venues as a double-bill alongside that film, *The Hellstrom Chronicle* was marketed as an apocalyptic horror-science-fiction film. Posters featured the image of a butterfly with two eye-like circles on its wings, accompanied by the claim, "Shocking. Beautiful. Brilliant. Sensual. Deadly … and in the end, only *they* will survive." Another poster declared: "Science-Fiction? No! Science-Fact!" In the film, "they" are of course insects, the planet's longest-existing creatures, long predating humans and—as the film makes abundantly clear—destined to outlive them. *The Hellstrom Chronicle* is an oddball documentary-horror hybrid. Its script is by David Seltzer, who would later go on to pen the screenplay for the perennially popular, *The Omen* (1976, Richard Donner) and its tie-in novelization. Director Green, who had worked with Wolper on documentary shoots for National Geographic, also served as one of the film's three principal cinematographers as well as a co-producer. The film is deftly edited (by Jon Soh) and features intricate, impressionistic sound design (by Charles L. Campbell, David Ronne and composer Lalo Schifrin), some derived from recordings of the natural world, some significantly enhanced. (We hear the sound of worms munching on plant leaves in full stereo, with echoing reverb to accentuate the grotesque, up-close images.)

Arguably, the film won its Oscar largely for its never-before-seen macro-lens footage of the insect world, which included glimpses inside a termite tower and a bee hive; extreme-close-up, slow-motion footage of the flapping of a bee's wings; the view from inside a carnivorous plant; monstrous insect faces that fill the screen; and a full-scale record of a battle between two ant colonies—including the decapitations and dismemberments expected of a proper war. According to the end credits, all of the film's "statements about the insect world are factual and have been reviewed by Roy Snelling and Charles Hogue, PhD, of the Entomology Department, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History." The hard science behind the film's claims stops there, however.

In the film's end credits, we learn that fear-mongering entomologist "Nils Hellstrom"—who serves the film as part-expert 'chronicler', part-leering horror-host, part carnival barker—is a *fictional* character, played by actor Lawrence Pressman (in a perpetually smirking and glowering performance). Purportedly, there was an actual entomologist assigned to the role, but when he died unexpectedly, Pressman was brought on to play the "expert" (Tomkins, 2012, n.p.). Pressman savors the role of the film's authority figure as though he's got a universal truth tucked in the pocket of his blazer (he delivers his lines like he's rolling a delicious chocolate around in his mouth). His excessively creepy, arrogant demeanor is meant to telegraph continuously that his presence in the film is a parodic take on the expert character in so many horror films whose dire pronouncements go unheeded by his fellow humans. Hellstrom's role as one of horror cinema's archetypal unsung savants is suggested immediately in his initial claims that his unorthodox beliefs have "cost [him] two fellowships, one assistant professorship and," after a dramatic pause, followed by a sly grin, "even a few friendships." The film's oblique presentation of this character is a sign of its twisted take on what would otherwise be straightforward, clinical subject matter. Pressman is frequently framed from the side, giving him the opportunity to turn to the camera to acknowledge the film's spectators as though he's just noticed them out there watching. With a half-smile on his face and a never-ending string of sidelong, knowing glances at the camera, Hellstrom delivers portentous pronouncements that insects will outlast humanity through their sheer adaptability. We learn in the end credits that Hellstrom's "statements relating to the impermanence of the human species have been synthesized from contemporary opinions." This proviso must be read against the kind of "theory and conjecture" disclaimer that frames a pseudo-documentary series like *In Search of* .... In light of the proliferation of warnings and

directives by Hellstrom that have preceded this disclaimer in the film, the sheer evasiveness of the disclaimer requires that it be read as sarcastic commentary on the film's didactic, paranoid fear-mongering.

Hellstrom's "chronicle" offers a terrifying speculation on the true inheritors of an earth eventually depleted by humanity (among the film's targets are "hydrogen bombs and pollution") and as such may seem like not much more than an environmental horror film script rammed up against some stunning insect photography. Yet *The Hellstrom Chronicle* continually strips away the expository power of Hellstrom's claims by overplaying the character's confidence to an absurd degree. In his first statement, heard in voice-over against the film's opening images of violent volcanic eruptions, Hellstrom tells us that "The earth was created not with the gentle caress of love but with the brutal violence of rape." The film's stunning imagery of often frenzied, vicious insect survival will seem to bear out such a pronouncement, if largely because everything in the film—including, implicitly, the motives of Hellstrom himself—is meant to be framed by monstrous violence and seductive, manipulative sexuality. Hellstrom's statements throughout the film allow spectators little room to interpret the film's imagery for themselves. According to his voice-over, the bulbous black widow spider that we see in close-up on a web bouncing under her weight, is "trembling with obese sexuality" as she awaits her mate. And the insect in general is claimed to be nature's most "grotesque variation," "a foetus with the capability to dominate all," whose adaptability over 300 million years has transformed it into "specters as limitless as the imagination of the insane." In such statements, *The Hellstrom Chronicle* inverts the strategy of the self-consciously unsure authorial perspective used in *Cropsey*; instead, its commanding voice-over offers a totalizing interpretation of its evidentiary footage that is often extremely difficult to accept, even as polemic or opinion.[16] The "text"—the insects themselves—can be read; but the film's highly colourful and themed reading of their actions takes on a critical potential that hold audiences somewhere between watching a documentary, analyzing their historical moment, and celebrating the total breakdown of the documentary authority narrating the film. Despite the differences in strategy, *The Hellstrom Chronicle*'s narration achieves ends similar to *Cropsey*'s—it asks viewers consistently to evaluate their relationship to the referent and its documentary representation. It is also a grotesque celebration and parody of the role of the authority in both documentary and horror cinema. Seltzer's over-the-top voice-over script frames the film as Hellstrom's personal

exploration of his obsession with the subject matter, peppering the monologue with some of the juiciest overwriting to grace the screen. With the combined overconfidence of a carnival sideshow barker, and one of Poe's imprudent narrators, Hellstrom cautions the spectator: "And if you, at this moment, dare to think this is lunacy, I invite you to remain in your seat, draw your own conclusion and learn the inevitable destiny of ignorance."

In this way, the film's voice-over takes the interpretive mode of other gothumentary films to an absurdly confident expository level, forcing an interpretation onto evidentiary images that can barely sustain the reading they're being given. The film demands being read as a colourful reading itself—through a horror lens darkly. The images of insect battles and attacks are, indeed, violent in the film—as are images of a grasshopper digested by a cobra plant, or an iguana squinting in pain as it is devoured by millions of ants—but the assured voice-over's self-conscious monster-movie rhetoric ramps up the terror to push it to formulaic excess. The voice-over pulls the spectator back from the evidentiary potency of the otherwise convincingly horrific images, encouraging a sense of hilarity that often attends horror's extreme spectacles—but here the hilarity is critical. The film *stamps* horror genre convention onto its documentary footage like a dominating revisionary commentary on what the spectator sees—a re-enactment that pushes reality a little too far into the realm of paranoia, even as it appeals to a collective fear that humans—and Americans in particular—are overtaxing the planet. "It is the need for individual luxury," urges Hellstrom, "that creates the technology that destroys the planet, making it uninhabitable for all but one—the insect." The voice-over message can be heard alongside the images, *supplementing* them with an imposed cautionary reading, rather than conventionally "complement[ing]" (Kozloff, 1988: 104) them with information that offers a unified reading (i.e., a reading focused exclusively of the behaviours of insects). Sarah Kozloff notes that voice-over in cinema is always-already going to be read as "asynchronous" (1988: 103) because it throws into relief the dialogue between the visual and its narrative presentation. Kozloff sees potential in the highlighting of this interplay in what she terms "ironic" and "unreliable" voice-over. In Kozloff's terms, Nils Hellstrom is an "ironic narrator" (1988: 111). His forced commentary on the imagery isn't necessarily "undermined" by the film's insect footage; it is an "overinflation" (Kozloff, 1988: 112) of that footage, throwing both voice-over text and evidentiary imagery into tension with each other. Hellstrom's audience hears the film's *other* message, one that arrives in the voice-over as a thematic directive to regard the position of the human animal in nature as one

of degraded privilege: "It is we who are the dwarfs, he who is the giant." Humans, it suggests, can "radically change the earth," but they do not have the power to adapt to those changes. Insects, however, do—and will.

Hellstrom's continually confrontational cautionary statements make it easy to look at *The Hellstrom Chronicle* merely as a fear-mongering pseudo-documentary allegory of human excess. In his 1 January, 1971 review, Roger Ebert seriously misses the film's point, calling the film's narration "so theatrical and philosophically naive that it's unworthy of the photography," and concluding, "Think how bad the insects could feel if they could see a documentary about what humans are up to" (rogerebert.com, 2015: n.p.). Yet this is *exactly* the argument that *The Hellstrom Chronicle* makes in its almost whimsically forced anthropomorphizing of its insect subjects. Indeed, the film's main analytical thrust is less entomologic than ethnographic: the insects as presented in the film are anthropomorphized to manifest a mirror image of humanity's basic desires for sex, violence, and survival. This effect is achieved not just through the voice-over, but through associative montage and guiding commentary that links the film to the Italian Mondo or "shockumentary" tradition, which makes its cultural arguments almost entirely via repetition and juxtaposition of images and events across cultures. From notorious examples of the form, such as *Mondo Cane* (1963, Gualtiero Jacopetti, Franco Prosperi, Paolo Cavara), to self-conscious art-house entries, such as *Baraka* (1992, Ron Fricke), the Mondo aesthetic makes its sometimes critical, sometimes reductive statements about humanity by collapsing vastly different cultures into shocking comparisons and contrasts that create meaning by generating an embodied response from spectators. The pseudo-documentary operates similarly. As Gary D. Rhodes observes of Harald Reinl's film, *Chariots of the Gods*: "The editing shifts from image to image, which are no longer attributed to their geography or culture, and blurs them into a visual menagerie suited to the film's argument" (2006: 158).[17] The back-and-forth movement from insect footage to Hellstrom's scripted commentary in *The Hellstrom Chronicle* continually gestures to the kind of level playing ground that Ebert suggests in his concluding statement above, as when Hellstrom says that he would like to see the "ironic smile on the creator's face" when he made man and insect equal. This very irony dominates *The Hellstrom Chronicle*'s script and presentation. In what almost seems a canny observation of the business-as-usual final "Or is it …?" question for the pseudo-documentary, Hellstrom asks why any creature struggles to survive against the inevitability of death. He concludes that "The insect has the answer, because

he never posed the question." In moments such as this the film holds itself up as a darkly comical mirror on a Cold War culture that fears everything that stands in the way of anthropocentric (and especially American) domination and exceptionalism.

The Hellstrom Chronicle is a well-researched and stunningly shot insect documentary. It is also an anti-speciesist animal rights documentary, an apocalyptic cautionary tale, and as good an entry into the killer-insect horror cinema subgenre as *Them!* (Gordon Douglas, 1958) (which it visually excerpts) and *Phase IV* (Saul Bass, 1974) (which it arguably inspired). Additionally, it stands as a significant commentary on factual discourse, stranding its spectators squarely between subjective cinematographic representation and a stunningly revealed referent. Yet, it remains unsung by scholars in this regard. In *F is for Phony*, a scholarly collection on documentaries that play with notions of fakery, hoax and deception as part of a critical intervention on documentary historiography, Jesse Lerner excludes *The Hellstrom Chronicle* from what she and co-editor Alexandra Juhasz term "productive fake documentaries" (Juhasz and Lerner, 2006: 5), calling it one of a "host of other sensationalist and tabloid films liberally borrowing documentary devices for the dissemination of untruths" (Juhasz and Lerner, 2006: 21).[18] Lerner makes this call despite her claim that more productive fake documentaries, like Orson Welles's mockumentary *News on the March* sequence in *Citizen Kane*, achieve their critical power through the "known lie that brings what would otherwise be transparent form into focus" (Juhasz and Lerner, 2006: 5). Juhasz defines productive fake documentaries, as "produc[ing] uncertainty and also knowingness about documentary's codes, assumptions, and processes" (Juhasz and Lerner, 2006: 7).[19] I would offer that *The Hellstrom Chronicle* is nothing if not a film that documents its own tendency towards fakery, and in doing so it highlights the way that a historical reality and context can be forced onto the referent via appeals to factual discourse—the direct address and voice-over of an expert, for example. It claims in sensationalist, apocalyptic terms that insects are the true inheritors of the earth—the only life form that ultimately will really matter. And yet it fashions itself as a *human* interest story just the same—ironically and satirically stamping human subjectivity onto the more "superior" species it documents for the sole sake of making an argument *about* humanity by comparison and contrast. If the film's position on humanity's fleeting existence in the scheme of deep history is true, the only thing in *The Hellstrom Chronicle* that *should* matter is the footage of insects doing what insects do. No reading, or readings, of their behavior—and no amount of comparisons and contrasts to human behavior—would

"explain" the insect's dominance through adaptability. What matters, in fact, is that Hellstrom's paranoid claims *do* impress upon the spectator a sense of historical processes and an awareness of a specific historical moment. The film was released on 28 June, 1971. The Vietnam War would not end officially until 1975. The 4 May, 1970, murders of four students at Kent State University in Ohio, and the massive 21 April, 1971, protest in Washington, DC, precede its release, stoking anti-war sentiment in the minds of Americans. (In a war where Agent Orange and Napalm were deployed by the U.S. military to poison and burn the tropical foliage of Vietnam, American spectators could not have felt anything but uneasy watching Hellstrom present the spraying of billions of locusts in Africa and the American west.) At this point, the 1972 Watergate scandal is yet to come. And the "Keep America Beautiful" campaign will air its first environmental spot on U.S. television on 22 April, 1971, showing Native American character, "Iron Eyes Cody" (played by Italian-American actor Espera Oscar de Corti) weeping over steaming landfills, polluted creeks, and smog-choked highways. The institutions and industries that were deemed infallible in their support of America's triumphant presence in WWII were now being held under suspicion.

Nils Hellstrom's dire claims for humanity derive directly from this context, and become allegorized in the film's final scene, an impressively staged demonstration of the driver ant's pillaging to feed its colony. Here, the film "stages" a full scale attack with streams of soldier ants crossing rivers on bridges made by the bodies of other ants who will sacrifice themselves to the colony's destructive cause. Again, as in the Mondo film, the scene is shot and edited with colonial superiority to the subjects who move in to exploit their victims, yet tinctured with anti-colonial sentiment in the pathos and terror it evokes in its presentation. It is also a tour-de-force of body horror, filled with extreme close ups of ant pincers munching on the flesh of their victims, and deftly shot and edited to make this small-scale battlefield seem as immense in scope as the film's implications for the scene. Hellstrom's scripted framing of the scene means to suggest that such insect armies as these will apocalyptically destroy the feeble remains of the human race once it has left itself weakened by war and environmental abuse: "The industrial waste that poisons our air, the DDT that poisons our food source, the radiation that destroys our very flesh, are to the insect nothing more than a gentle perfume," he warns. "And the toxins that are killing our fellow creatures—the insects live, reproduce, thrive and gain strength by virtue of our growing weakness." Yet the scene's staging, in light of such pronouncements, also suggests that the insects are simultaneously an ominous *reflection* of humanity. The scene ends with shots

of the triumphant soldier ants standing straight up on their hind legs atop stone slabs that appear like monolithic bulwarks, lit by the burnt-orange glow of a fading sun. Such imagery is characteristic of apocalyptic horror films of the period such as 1974's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper) and 1977's *The Hills Have Eyes* (Wes Craven), which are also critical of U.S. foreign policy and its diminishing returns (especially for the working class), excessive military spending, capitalist outsourcing of local labor, industrial mechanization, and abuse and waste of environmental resources. *The Hellstrom Chronicle*'s suspicions of the historical world and the ways we engage with it are *critical*, not fantastical. Hellstrom, undercuts, obfuscates and densely thematizes what the viewer sees. The film comments on the excesses of humanity by *being* excessive—as presentation but also as interpretation. Where *Capturing the Friedmans* and *Cropsey* set their sights on subverting and reinforcing documentary's power in service of challenging social and judiciary conclusions, *The Hellstrom Chronicle* targets documentary as a discourse of sobriety prone to abuse by both scientific discourse and hegemonic propaganda. It is a parody of the documentary form as easily coopted, and it is a satire of its historical moment. As such, if it can be deemed "fake," it must also be seen as critically productive.

IV. Gothumentary: A Radical Diversion?

This chapter has traced in contemporary documentaries that draw upon conventions of horror and the Gothic, an explicit acknowledgment of the critical power of sensation and spectacle. In their terms, a viewing experience that encourages an embodied spectator is no mere ludic tactic, or diversion, but a potential tool for exploring the kinds of productive sensorial experience shared by both horror and documentary viewerships. In "Documentary in a Post-Documentary Culture? A Note on Forms and their Functions," John Corner identifies a key, turn-of-the-21st century shift in documentary aesthetics that represents a "weakening of documentary status" (2001, n.p.). For Corner, a viewership that no longer places any value in the once-dominant expository rhetorical form has instead encouraged a dramatic and "decisive shift towards diversion" in documentary, a degree of "representational play and reflexivity" that is more "performative" than critical (2001, n.p.). Corner locates this discussion in terms of the influence of reality television on documentary aesthetics and a move away from postmodern questions around representation-as-manipulation towards a "dynamics of diversion and the

aesthetics of performance [that] dominate a greatly expanded range of popular images of the real" (2001, n.p.). Corner's position is a standard scholarly lament on the unrealized critical potential that increased accessibility to recording technologies might have provided—from home movie, to video, to digital technology. Reality TV becomes the prime site for studies of cinematic and televisual production and reception because it is a pervasive and popular manifestation of what might have been a singularly radical intervention into who does the telling in historical narratives. That is, reality TV is the commercialized form of what might have been a radical amateur film movement, representing a return of the "repress[ed] heterogeneity" (Zimmerman, 2008: 5) of voices that could have rewritten, in Jim Sharpe's terms, "history from below" (quoted in Zimmerman, 2008: 3). Writing in 1994, Jon Dovey locates in reality TV's reflexive tendencies a "new regime of reality" (1994, n.p.) and a new standard of realism that David Bolter and Richard Grusin will later call "hypermediation" (1999). Dovey's fears turn to reality TV's "camcorder" culture as a potential form of self-surveillance and self-policing, offering the illusion of freedom and intervention, but ultimately being adopted as a new panoptic paradigm for contemporary subjectivity. Scholars of reality TV such as Craig Hight (2004) and Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (2004), are more hopeful, having noted the inherent reflexivity of reality TV, which produces this hypermediated reality as a feature that both audiences *and* social actors read as illusory. These scholars highlight a more active spectatorship than the supposed fickle, distracted one of "glance" theory (see, for example, Ellis, [1982] 1992), which worries that spectatorship in the domestic sphere may represent the nadir of uncritical reception.

Reality TV's "remediated" (Grusin and Bolter, 1999) documentary aesthetic has also been *re*-remediated into a millennial cinema that seeks to comment on it, but makes itself equally salable by borrowing from it. As I have argued elsewhere with reference to recent films such as *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012, Drew Goddard), *Paranormal Activity 2* (2010, Tod Williams) and *Diary of the Dead* (2007, George A. Romero), horror cinema in the late 20th century has picked up on these concerns, turning to a dystopian discourse around new media and reality TV "that considers visual representation as offering neither infallible access to, nor insulation from, the real" (2014: 273). These films present this fear-of-the-new-medium thematic as new, yet horror films have continually manifested such concerns and skepticism around documentary representation in films such as *Doctor X* (1932, Michael Curtiz), *Peeping Tom* (1960, Michael Powell), *Blow-Up* (1966, Michelangelo Antonioni), *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980, Ruggero

Deodato), *Blow Out* (1981, Brian De Palma), *Videodrome* (1983, David Cronenberg), and *The Blair Witch Project* (1999, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez). And documentary tradition has performed a similar meditation on the limitations and deceptions of documentary representation in films as experimentally diverse as *Haxan: Witchcraft Through the Ages* (1927, Benjamin Christensen), *F for Fake* (1974, Orson Welles), *Grizzly Man* (2005, Werner Herzog), and *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008, Errol Morris). It is in this context that the gothumentary performs what might be called its "radical diversion" as regards documentary spectatorship. I borrow Corner's framing (above) of a turn to merely ludic reflexivity in popular documentary forms not so much to contest it as to suggest that a turn to what he calls "diversion" in documentary aesthetics need not be unproductive. In my terms, a "*radical* diversion" in documentary aesthetics may look something like what the gothumentary (and particularly a pseudo-documentary like *The Hellstrom Chronicle*) does in highlighting the materiality of the medium and in encouraging contemplation through sensation. As I have argued in this chapter, gothumentary introduces a possibility where popular forms and generic convention can be used in a critical, interrogatory way to investigate the historical world and our methods of capturing it.

Given the impossibility of conveying objectivity just by de-emphasizing the filmmaking apparatus (as many observational documentary films demonstrate), documentary cinema has often experimented with reflexivity to address realism and representation. Renov stresses a genealogy where documentary has always experimented with degrees of expressiveness, ranging from Dziga Vertov's associative play and acknowledgment of the apparatus in *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), to city symphonies which highlight the power of montage and music to offer expressive visions of place. Despite these experiments with form and expressiveness, Renov notes that "the historical fact of a repression of the formal or expressive domain within the documentary tradition is inescapable" (1993: 33). This is, of course, due to anxieties that artistic expressiveness constitutes some sort of ethical breakdown in the treatment of reality. This critical narrative constitutes the main framework for Bill Nichols' work on documentary. In works such as *Representing Reality* (1991), *Blurred Boundaries* (1994) and *Introduction to Documentary* (2001, revised 2010), Nichols has offered a somewhat evolutionary model for how such anxieties in documentary manifest aesthetically over the 20th century, arguing that documentary continually turns towards experiments with acknowledging narrative, style and structure in its representations of the real. In Nichols' formulation of the development of documentary rhetoric

in its intermingling of "expository," "observational," "interactive," "reflexive," "poetic," and "performative" modes is a sense that the documentary tradition is shaped and reshaped by its practitioners around their goals to reach a degree of direct access to the real that Richard Grusin and Jay David Bolter term "immediacy" (1999: 53).[20] Immediacy for Grusin and Bolter connotes a "realism" that can be achieved by either increasing or *diminishing* medium transparency, depending on the regime of realism in place at the time.

Nichols' six documentary modes track an ongoing process in documentary aesthetics that continually tests notions of the documentary lens as a transparent window into the historical world; at its most critical, documentary aesthetics hold up the dialectic between representation and the referent that one finds also in uncanny avant-garde experiments such as Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) or Stan Brakhage's *The Way to Shadow Garden* (1954). Both of these films are autobiographical "trance films" (Sitney, 2000), which construct an intensely subjective, traveling documentary gaze to aestheticize a sort of "interior quest" (Sitney, 2000: 10) not uncharacteristic of the Gothic narrative's accounts by introspective witnesses. [21] Despite his acknowledgment that there will be a mixture of these six modes in any given documentary work, Nichols' model suggests that documentary aesthetics have noticeably gradually shifted further away from a transparency that attempts to diminish awareness of the medium, and have adopted the "double logic of remediation" (1999: 55-6) that Grusin and Bolter argue moves towards increasing 'hypermediation', or "an immediacy that grows out of the frank acknowledgment of the medium and is not based on the perfect visual re-creation of the world" (1999: 81). Grusin and Bolter argue that "[h]ypermedia and transparent media are opposite manifestations of the same desire: the desire to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real" (1999: 53). Further, they suggest that it is the "appeal to authenticity of experience [that] brings the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy together" (1999: 70-71) into a seemingly paradoxical mix. Nichols suggests similarly that, increasingly, only through acknowledging representational strategies—and variegated modes of narration, address, and inquiry—can documentary speak to contemporary viewers as "real." Furthermore, films that combine "an avant-garde impulse with a documentary orientation," he writes, are particularly well suited to the task of "disabus[ing] their viewers of any commonsense reality" (Nichols, 2001: 592). There is here the same rhetoric of critical realism that we find in the Gothic's intense scrutiny of all narrative accounts. The Gothic narrative is reflexive in its intensely interiorized subjectivity and multiplicity of media, and

encourages readerly skepticism of the motives behind the text as written and/or presented. But this very state of sustained skepticism also *constitutes* the Gothic real—in other words, the Gothic real constructs a sort of productively paranoid subjectivity that approaches reality as text, as always-already mediated. Gothic narrators are perpetually skeptical witnesses who seek and struggle to convey the real in all its affective power, as *felt*, through careful mediations. And this Gothic discourse on representation becomes increasingly useful to documentary artists who wish to examine documentary aesthetics.

Nichols' model may also suggest that documentary artists' more expressive work over the course of the 20th century highlights an epistemological impasse, a "stress on fragmentation and ambiguity" (Nichols, 2010: 165) that approaches the nihilistic vis-à-vis its outlining of the limitations attending documentary mediations of the real. Yet within this context, Nichols sees the performative and poetic documentary modes as indicating nothing short of a paradigm shift (Nichols, 1994: 97) for documentary that offers great productive and political possibility. The absence of emphasis on empirical truth or comprehensive knowledge attending such modes, along with their emphasis on artifice and affect as a way of approaching experience, creates a productive epistemological impasse, in other words. The gothumentary develops within this productive, negative space. It is Gothic historiography. In Eric Savoy's terms, the American Gothic tradition becomes a particularly "historiograph[ical]" mode (1998: 17), giving presence to a sense of history by constructing a perpetually-questioning American subjectivity that is always-already haunted. In Chapter I, I showed this perpetual questioning in operation in 1940s horror. In this chapter, the gothumentary taps into the negative aspects of this epistemological impasse directly, pressing the resulting absences and ambiguities into productive pathways to suggest a new "mode" for documentary, one focused less on representation than on *interpretation*. This "interpretive" mode is characterized by the use of reflexivity to hold a multitude of possibilities in sway to stress plurality of meaning. The convergence of Gothic and documentary strategies in the gothumentary film thus highlights the potential for reflexivity to produce critical relationships between filmmaker, text and audience at the intersection of three conceptual axes: hermeneutics, desire, and epistemology. Gothumentary deploys the contemporary Gothic's polyvocal and polysemic textuality, its emphasis on endless interpretation by its narrators and witnesses, and its evocation of a reality that defies representation, to create a "mysterium hermeneutics" that challenges the exclusive reign of positivism that has dominated much of the documentary

tradition. In its experimentation with testing the limits of what we can know, gothumentary becomes an extension of a general trend in documentary towards highlighting the sensations of the documentary as spectacle.

Again, I refer to "Gothic" as a discourse of disruption, critique, and sensation that reveals enough darkly suggestive ruptures in the real to form an interrogatory "gothic realism." In the gothumentary, the evidence sought after or deployed by documentary filmmakers either does not give up knowledge to the epistephilic drive (curiosity, desire) of the filmmaker and spectator, or is organized by the filmmaker differently so as to stress a reality that lies *outside of* representation. As one finds in films like *Capturing the Friedmans*, *Cropsey*, and to an extent *The Hellstrom Chronicle*, the gothumentary often turns its focus upon what Edgar Allan Poe called 'the text which does not permit itself to be read' (Poe [1840' 1984: 388). Its central subjects (often deceased or otherwise absent, always enigmatic) and objects (often ruins, cryptic texts, or abandoned spaces) elude the grasp of the documentary camera. As I discuss in the introduction, Elizabeth Cowie and Cynthia Freeland have discussed this indefinability of the real in terms of the nonfictional and fictional cinematic sublime, respectively. The sublime signifies a seemingly paradoxical state of dreadful pleasure in the contemplation of an overwhelming or potentially transcendent experience. In terms of a negative hermeneutics, the sublime carries with it connotations of the terrible beauty of religious transcendence confronting an impossible infiniteness, or a divinity that represents this infiniteness. In Freeland's succinct terms, "It is crucial to the sublime that one somehow feels exaltation, elevation or pleasure *about* what one is overwhelmed by or fears" (1999: 83). In its consistent delineations of a reality of uncanniness, dread and anxiety that suggests meaningfulness but resists capture, the gothumentary works within this generative-observational dialectic to figure an always-already sublime reality sublimely, so to speak.

The Gothumentary film unsettles, destabilizes and defamiliarizes those constructs we conjure up to (re)present reality. It functions not merely through an evocation of terror, but through a deployment of Gothic skepticism around representation to disrupt the conventional documentary's positivist drive, creating a critical distance and sensorial engagement between text and spectator in order to question both reality and its representation. The gothumentary is the result of specific historical convergences and epistemological impasses that require a negative hermeneutics to emphasize more interpretive modes of reception. Both *Capturing the Friedmans*

and *Cropsey*, for example, generate an affective malaise around what are perceived as the United States' faltering legal institutions, not to mention the uncanniness they derive from an implicit suggestion of social and moral degeneration, and critical myopia, at the core of the nation's communities and politics. *Wisconsin Death Trip* and *Must Read After My* Death, like *Capturing the Friedmans*, strike a plangently uncanny chord with disturbing visions of America's families and homes as spaces of physical violence and psychological torment—microcosmic manifestations the nation's stifling, oppressive, and conflicted ideologies. *The Hellstrom Chronicle* tackles its era's own contradictions through associational strategies adopted by the Mondo film a decade earlier. Here, insect "cultures" double for those culturally "primitive" others that the film not only suggests are similar to "sophisticated" humanity in their ingenuity, violence, and greed, but are also superior to humanity in their adaptability. The coming crisis traced by the film is also one of a disturbing reality lurking nearby, waiting to undermine all that one sees as normal and ordered—like that anthill crawling abjectly with ants, unnoticed by nearby sleeping picnickers in the park. Twenty-first century and millennial anxieties—anticipated in *Hellstrom*'s apocalypticism, implicit in *Wisconsin Death Trip*'s, *Capturing the Friedmans*' and *Cropsey*'s sense of social degeneration—also undergird the gothumentary. In all of these ways, and more, the gothumentary seems a response to an era where the United States of America is no longer the unquestioned global power it was after WWII. The hypermediated events of 9/11 will constitute another source of anxiety that calls for gothumentary representation of a (isolationist framing of) reality one can no longer trust. In the coming chapter, the Gothic realism of Gothumentary will be required to draw out anxieties around the recording technologies that have shaped the 20th and early 21st centuries. For Laura Mulvey, this is a "technological uncanny" that "waxes and wanes" (2006: 36), and for Simone Natale, it is a period of sublime contemplation where fascination and fear attend the "prophecies" of new media possibilities and the "fantasies" that attend both the realization—and, later, the ostensible demise—of new media (2014: 205).

More generally, gothumentary stems from the three axes around which the documentary film and the Gothic mode revolve—hermeneutics, epistemology and desire—to form a critical mode of documentary filmmaking. Several major strategies of representation can be identified in recent gothumentary films, including, but not limited to: an undermining of the visual record (specifically treated in *Cropsey* and *Must Read After my Death*); an emphasis on the failure of evidence to satisfy our epistephilic desires; a reflexive focus on, or evocation of, unreadable

objects, subjects or texts; a frank reintroduction of a sensing, embodied spectator; a reconfiguration of the pleasurable gaze of the spectator as both active and productive; and an over-determination of meaning that acts as a counterpoint to conventional documentary representations and strategies. The introduction of Gothic discourse to documentary foregrounds a trend that has been unfolding in documentary for several decades towards eschewing positivistic, conclusive containments of subjects, objects and events, to emphasize a new basis for documentary realism. In these films, failures of interpretative closure can be seen to open up a field in which to explore our anxieties about how we form and communicate our relationships to reality. In this way, it could be said that the gothumentary *moves* its spectators closer to a sense of the real by acknowledging where we cannot go in the search for truth. Gothumentary is about revealing ruptures in rational discourses; it is about asking different questions of reality and knowledge, about stressing absences and negatives rather than the revelations and truths required by positivism.

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[1] Leroy's film, based on the true story of an impoverished WWI veteran who is forced into committing a crime and subsequently imprisoned, opened up inquiry into the cruelty of chain gangs in the American south.

[2] It was a feature of the 18th-century novel, particularly, that chapters carried subtitles that telegraph the themes and events of the chapter. Voltaire's Enlightenment satire, *Candide* (1759), mocked the feature, some of his chapter titles being longer than the chapters themselves.

[3] Chapter III is an extended discussion of such films in terms of their archival anxiety.

[4] The formal, narrative and thematic conventions of Gothic horror disseminated into a apparatus mode provide powerful ways to generate a profound sensorial response to disturbing events. I discuss the logic and ethics of Gothic-realist strategies of *Night and Fog* in more detail later in this chapter.

[5] The passage, quoted here by David B. Johnson (2012), is from Lyotard's 1991 *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, regards the contemplation of the failure of the imagination to rectify the unrepresentable: "Rather than resulting in a kind of stultified impasse," argues Lyotard, "the irresolvability of this situation itself becomes generative: it produces a negative presentation of what exceeds presentation, 'a sign of the presence of the absolute'" (1991: 152).

[6] The comment is made by an interviewee.

[7] The dread resulting from, and encouraging, the pervasiveness of recording technology in the home is a topic I discuss in detail in the next chapter, which focuses on fake found-footge and mockumentary horror cinema.

[8] This chapter is an extensively revised and expanded version of an essay that I co-authored with Papagena Robbins for the Italian journal, *Textus* (12 [3] [Fall 2013]). In that essay, we theorize "gothumentary" as a critical concept. While I still consider the gothumentary as largely derived from a conceptual framework that examines documentary representation, I would adjust my original argument in the 2013 article to clarify that it is also a mode, borrowing a set of Gothic-horror themes and conventions in its discourse on history, modernity, reality and realism.

[9] I discuss these films in more detail later in this chapter.

[10] Nineteenth-century American mock-chronicles such as Washington Irving's tall tales—notably "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820), which is presented as a kind of document of local rumor—and Poe's hoaxes (e.g., "The Balloon Hoax" [1844] and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*) and true-crime texts (e.g., "The Mystery of Marie Roget" [1842, revised 1845]) all emphasize the struggle to deliver a convincing narrative account of human experience or event. From folkloric colonial fears of the dark forest in "Sleepy Hollow," to the extreme mental and physical horror of Poe's travel narrative, *Pym*, to the careful constructions or reconstructions of incredible events in "Balloon Hoax" and "Marie Roget," respectively, all of these tales are presented as mock-chronicles, celebrating the degree to which truth-seeking and dread commingle rather convincingly and meaningfully.

[10] In contemporary American Gothic literature, such as Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (1999), the Gothic's continual engagement with documentary discourses around representation comes with complicated parallel textual information such as extensive footnotes and annotations that take on their own narrative significance, graphic experiments with the layout of the text on the page, and illustrations, that create multiple and sometimes competing or contradictory accounts and evidence which expand the text vertically.

[11] Perhaps the quintessential example of such a tale is H.P. Lovecraft's "The Outsider" (1926), which relies entirely on restricting the reader to its narrator-protagonist's severely limited knowledge of his world. Moving from a state of ignorance to experience and self-knowledge that is almost fairy-tale-like in its purity, Lovecraft's Outsider character, crawls out of the obscurity of

a tomb into the light to confront the truth that he is a ghoul. All that he has learned from books represents the world of the living, not the (un)dead; therefore, his interpretations throughout the story as he gradually surfaces into enlightened awareness are based upon a misconception of his entire world—a misconception the reader is meant to share to increase the shock of otherness at the tale's end. The final shocking truth comes when the Outsider confronts what he thinks is a monster, but turns out to be his own mirror image, in a proto-Lacanian moment of disgust, sadness and rage at this reflected "other" that is also himself.

[12] The pseudo-documentary form, perhaps most conventionally represented by a film like *Chariots of the Gods* (1970), and *In Search of ...* (1976-82), the television series it inspired, is perhaps the clearest example of the epistephilia and epistephobia that are endemic to horror narratives. The hesitation they produce has to do with a rhetorical sleight of hand that uses factual discourse to relocate phenomena like repetition, accident, and coincidence from the realm of the uncanny to that of the preternatural.

[13] Carroll's cognitive, entity-based framework as a general theory of attractions to horror has certain limitations: he has a difficult time including non-narrative moments of spectacle, for example; he sidelines discussion of other pleasure-making elements of horror films on the level of aesthetics, music, and performance; and he limits his definition of the monstrous to supernatural entities about which the film must make at least some definitive conclusions. As I mentioned earlier, parallel omissions to these elements in theories of documentary are similarly lamented by scholars such as Renov, Gaines and Cowie. What is instructive in Carroll's account, however, for a study of a documentary film that trades self-consciously in the conventions of fictional horror cinema is how much it parallels similar goals of conventional documentary.

[14] Gothumentary films are also deeply invested in viewer expectations of the assertiveness of documentary form, based upon what Bill Nichols calls "procedures of rhetorical engagement" rather than "fictive engagement" (1994: 26) and what Noël Carroll calls the "assertoric stance" (1997: 185). As Nichols explains such expectations: "[d]ocumentary convention spawns an epistephilia. It posits an organizing agency that possesses information and knowledge, a text that conveys it, and a subject who will gain it" (31).

[15] Rhodes also makes the tenuous statement that Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and *Chariots of the Gods?* share the same New Age thesis that ancient aliens are

responsible for human knowledge. Yet, while Von Däniken's work poses itself as an evidentiary explanation of certain ancient "mysteries," Kubrick's film is a metaphysical quest, suggesting the creation and use of technology to primal human desires—an argument far from Von Däniken's teleological neo-colonial interest in tracing human origins from the "impossible" technologies of "advanced" alien cultures.

[16] Perhaps the most famous example of a Gothic narrative in which the narrating voice manifests grossly overconfident interpretations of the proceedings is in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), where family servant, Nelly Dean, offers a comprehensive account of events that it is questionable she could have witnessed so fully.

[17] Mondo films and horror are often linked, explicitly so in such mockumentary horror films as *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980, Ruggero Deodato), which situates its fictional narrative as an exploitative ethnographic project, and makes satirical parallels between the "savagery" of the Amazon and the urban jungle of Wall Street capitalism. *The Hellstrom Chronicle*'s take on American exploitation of global and natural resources fits squarely within this kind of critique.

[18] Juhasz and Lerner make no distinction between "fake" documentary and "pseudo-" documentary in their collection's framing introduction, preferring the former term to the latter "because it registers both the copying [of factual discourse and aesthetics] and its discovery" (Juhasz, 2006: 7). In Juhasz's identifying in "fake" the notion of a critical practice, I would make a distinction between "fake" and "pseudo-" documentary, which adopts documentary form as a way of speculating about and exploring unknowns with a greater sense of realism than can be offered by fictional narratives covering such topics.

[19] Juhasz and Lerner are responding to pervasive concerns in cinema scholarship with respect to the power of cinematic forms to mediate the <u>real</u> right out of history by reshaping memory—to reform it into a palimpsestic layering of erasures, re-visions. Accordingly, Juhasz and Lerner call for a productive fake documentary project in the form of "films that don't just deconstruct but reconstruct; films that unmake and make reality claims; films that mark that it matters who remembers and in what context," and films that "unlink and link their text and viewer to knowledge about many documentary truths, and an equally many documentary lies, about identity, history, authenticity, and authority" (2006: 16). They would place *The Hellstrom Chronicle* within the category of "sensationalistic pseudodocumentary tales of the uncanny,"

which they say lie "in the murky borderlands of documentary, fiction, and fake" (19). I posit that *The Hellstrom Chronicle*, and the gothumentary more generally, creates a productive space in these "murky borderlands of documentary, fiction, and fake."

[20] As an entry into the debate on cinematic realism, Nichols' six modes are significant in the degrees to which they attempt to either diminish or to emphasize construct as a way of approaching reality. Put in terms of their focus on documentary form, each of the six modes Nichols outlines strive either to achieve greater transparency as a way of achieving a sense of immediacy, or to achieve this same sense of immediacy by increasing spectatorial awareness of the rhetorical, thematic and stylistic strategies of the filmmaker as an active probing into or investigation of the historical world. Nichols's overall model is threefold in its interrogation of documentary realism:

1) From the expository to the observational modes, achieving realism means seeking an increasing transparency, or a diminished sense of the constrictions of cinematic representation;
2) in the interactive and reflexive modes, a sense realism seems to be achieved through a heightened awareness of the medium itself, and of its power to manipulate reality; and
3) in the poetic and performative modes, the sense of realism is attended by an encouragement of the spectator's awareness and appreciation of the work's artistry and affect, respectively.

[21] See especially Sitney's Chapter One, "Meshes of the Afternoon," and Chapter Five, "From Trance to Myth."

III.
Archival Anxiety:
Mockumentary and Fake Found-Footage Horror Cinema

"If everything is recordable, nothing matters except the act of recording itself."

— Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*

Introduction: Archival Anxiety and Its Spectator-Subject

The works discussed in this study become increasingly concerned with a *crisis of witnessing* that acts as both a source of epistemological desire and an ontological framework for 20th- and 21st-century subjectivity, especially since the global horrors of WWII. From the paranoid investigators in 1940s Gothic-realist films, to the skeptical documentary lens of the gothumentary, to the dread-filled archivists of fake found-footage and mockumentary horror cinema discussed in this chapter, these works describe or construct an always-already anxious subject witnessing a traumatic reality, or dreading potential trauma, with a desire to interrogate, to capture, or to chronicle this experience for posterity. As I argue in Chapters I and II, the anxieties in the Gothic-horror tradition regarding the production of narrative, of knowledge, and of meaning, translate to a gothic-realist discourse of negative hermeneutics and sensation as a way of approaching the real. In this chapter, I turn to films that continue the development of Gothic-horror as a mode of investigation into cinematic realism. Fake found-footage and mockumentary horror films such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez), *Diary of the Dead* (2007, George A. Romero), *Home Movie* (2008, Christopher Denham), *Lake Mungo* (2008, Joel Anderson), and *Unfriended* (2015, Levan [Leo] Gabriadze) return to the silent era's originally interconnected relationships between illusion and actuality in cinema—now most often framed as an oppositional binary traced back to Georges Méliès and the Lumière brothers, respectively—to sketch a 20th-century subjectivity formed and agitated by unprecedented access and exposure to recording technologies.[1] Like the gothumentary, these films take as their very subject the privileged rhetorical status of "factual discourse" (Roscoe and Hight, 2001: 14) to tell us what we want to know about ourselves and our world. Their difference may be in the way they shift their site of investigation from the gothumentary sensorial

epistemology to our relationship to the technologies we turn to as a way of archiving the real. Front and center in these films is an investigation of the sensory and ostensibly revelatory power of the cinematic image to tap into an unseen or occulted reality—whether because that reality eludes the human sensorium, or because it suggests itself as sensorial overload, a hypermediated reality received via multiple media sources, screens, networks and platforms. Here, then, is another form of Gothic-realist horror cinema, drawing once again from Gothic-horror's dramatization of the troublesome act of chronicling reality. In fake found-footage and mockumentary horror cinema, Gothic realism becomes a key way of expressing the subject's relationship to, and experience of, a modernity that overwhelms in terms of its immensity, speed and recordability.

According to scholars of proto- and early cinema such as Jonathan Crary (1992) and Mary Ann Doane (2002), a cinematic and now digital reconceptualization of the real—and of the observer's place in it—has been in operation since even before proto- and early cinematic devices began to redefine subjectivity in terms of a relationship to speed, movement and ephemerality. As Doane has argued, the Impressionist works of artists like Turner and Whistler—both of whom used the changing light values of sun on smog, along with industrial factory sites, as sources for their paintings—"[have] been described as the concerted attempt to fix a moment, to grasp it as, precisely, fugitive" (Doane, 2002: 10). Doane adds that "new technologies of representation—photography in particular—are consistently allied with contingency and the ability to seize the ephemeral" (Doane, 2002: 10). There is in the proto-cinematic experiments that Doane discusses, such as the body movement studies of Jules-Etienne Marey and chronophotography of Edweard Muybridge, for example, "a desire to make time visualizable," archiveable, especially in "visual terms that exceed the capacity of the naked eye" (Doane, 2002: 6). The attempts in these early experiments to isolate moments in time suggest a revelatory scientific power to document the invisible in photographic technology that will figure into the privileging of the cinema as a technological advancement on human perception. But there is simultaneously a "magical" power here that reveals an "other," uncanny reality that is constantly present, but eludes the naked eye—one made up of countless fleeting, imperceptible or indivisible moments. Reality itself becomes a potential attraction that might be given presence by the camera. Citing André Bazin's claim that the photograph "embalms time" (quoted in Doane, 2002: 3), Doane writes of an "aesthetic and epistemological anxiety" (Doane, 2002: 3) produced by the photographic image's ghostly

presencing of dead moments. Cinematic works redeploy the photographic image—dead time—into an illusion of presence. But any sense of grounding in the present—the moment, the actual—flies through the perceptual grasp of the subject like the single frames of film speed past a projector's aperture.

It is this sense of a "fugitive" reality captured as dead time that the fake found-footage horror film responds to particularly, especially via its camera-bearing protagonists who become invariably obsessed with "getting everything" on record.[2] The horror films that I discuss in this chapter manifest such archival anxieties rather literally, commenting on how the cinema offers a conceptual framework for exploring history as elusively spectral. One of the primary characteristics of the aesthetic of the fake found-footage horror film, for example, is the destabilizing of its audience's grasp on the diegetic world via frenetic framing and reframing, the result of the frantic efforts of an anxious observer to capture a reality seen as transitory and elusive, especially in that it offers an overwhelming amount of constant data to be preserved for posterity. This feature functions to a somewhat lesser degree in the mockumentary horror film, which tends not to feature the frantic camera-bearer of fake found-footage horror, and therefore can be characterized by generally more muted camera movement and expository conventions. Despite these differences in the primary motivating perspective behind the camera, the troubling factor in these films remains a struggle to represent a reality that exceeds the capacity of the subject to fully grasp, conceive, or cognize it in terms not just of amount of information, but in degree of sensation. An overwhelming reality compels the subject to an act of representation but also maddeningly eludes capture. Extended, uninterrupted shots in these films emphasize the dread-effects of an awareness of absence of information, of duration, and of expectation. Disorienting glitch, erratic focusing, the whirr and blur of images produced by a rapidly moving camera, and the fragmentation of space and time produced by multiple cameras offering multiple points of view—all of these are tools of the fake found-footage and mockumentary horror film meant to emulate the disorientation of the subject-as-witness who sees reality as a sort of constant source of potential evidence.

The underlying "archival anxiety" in this framework shows an agitated subject contemplating a modernity of speed and ephemerality that creates, and resists, a desire for delay and pause. Doane is interested in the "lure" of the elusive "instant," the "imprint of time and all its differentiating force" that the cinema evidences, and that "newer technologies of

representation" continue (2002: 208). Visual technologies are here linked to a modern subjectivity stranded in a "perpetual present" (Shaviro, 2010: 16) that scholars such as Steven Shaviro associate with digital imagery in a so-called "post-cinematic" era.[3] In films like the fake found-footage horror film *The Blair Witch Project* and the recent social media horror film *Unfriended*, this sense of a perpetual present comes forward in an unstable diegesis: in the former's constantly shifting framing and camera movement, and in the overlapping windows of the latter's flattened computer-screen interface. Both films' long takes—and particularly *Unfriended*'s real-time unfolding over 80-plus minutes—emphasize unbroken (unedited) duration itself as a source of horror.

In these works, the moving image stands in for experience, presence, and present-ness—reality as massive archive and imminently archivable, always threatening to slip away, to be lost forever. Doane parallels the "archival desire" (2002: 223) inherent to the preservation of film-as-history, to the notion of "the moment as historical event as lost presence" (2002: 223). She writes that "because film is capable of registering and recording singularities, contingencies—theoretically without limit—it inevitably raises the specter of an archive of noise, linked to issues of legibility, cataloguing, and limitless storage" (Doane, 2002: 222). History—reality—may have become endlessly archivable, but is none-the-more 'legible' for the efforts of its witness-archivists. Even worse, illusory notions of the archive as no longer embodied, but floating somewhere in the atmosphere, accessible at any time, suggests an odd meshing of technological and phenomenological experiences of reality, where archived data becomes an invisible swarm. It is the position of the subject as spectator, confronting such a "limitless" "archive of noise," that I wish to take up vis-à-vis mockumentary and fake found-footage horror. When I refer to "archival anxiety," I have in mind different recording and storing media (photography, cinema, digital imagery, the Internet) as archives themselves, but, as Doane hints, also as models for a 20th- and 21st-century worldview that have refigured modernity in cinematic terms as a constant, proliferating stream of images.

In the fake found-footage and mockumentary horror film, especially following 1999's *The Blair Witch Project*, 20th- and 21st-century modernity increasingly come to be seen as fleeting, incomprehensible, escaping the grasp of a subject who takes on the role of bewildered spectator-witness, compelled to chronicle experience by capturing it for posterity.[4] In the world of this agitated subject, lived experience must be recorded and archived to be seen, felt, believed,

remembered. This follows from the premise that time, history, and memory are fleetingly kinetic and visual (that is, cinematic) and therefore largely resist capture or delay. Fake found-footage and mockumentary horror films explore these implications by focusing on traumatic events that provoke witnessing subjects to chronicle the experience for posterity using recording technologies. In *Unfriended* and the Australian mockumentary *Lake Mungo*, the events even announce themselves as ghostly returns that occur *through* recording technologies, as though they were evidence of the esoteric revelatory properties of photography and cinema that were encouraged by turn-of-the-century practices such as spirit photography,[5] a practice the latter film references in its opening title sequence. In so many fake found-footage and mockumentary horror films, the camera comes to represent the viewing perspective—and diegetic presence—of a chronicler whose face and body are rarely shown unless in moments of self-conscious direct-address. Here, we have one indication of the (disembodied) subjects of archival anxiety, stranded in a perpetually traumatized and dread-filled state of witnessing, compelled to register their visual perspective of a historical world that has come to be seen as an archive of reviewable spectacle. "History" and "reality" thus become commodified versions of experience for users who live a multi-perspective, fragmented existence spread across social media platforms such as Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram and Twitter, and via visual archives such as Vimeo and YouTube. As I will discuss later, films like *The Blair Witch Project* and *Diary of the Dead*, in particular, anticipate or evoke, respectively, the constant state of anxiety generated by what comes to resemble a contemporary phantasmagoria—reality as an arena of mediated spectacle, an *attraction* that compels the subject to contribute more and more to the visual archive of the future as if providing content were akin to crystallizing one's experience.

An archival anxiety produces a desire for the inscription and consignment of one's experience to a receptive and expanding archive of history that comes to substitute in the cultural imaginary as a form of experience itself. Digital technology has compounded archival anxiety, not only in terms of its illusions of limitless, weightless storage "out there" in the cloud, but also in its making the visual archive accessible to the ostensibly democratizing practices of uploading, viewing, re-viewing, alteration, manipulation and redeployment of archival materials.[6] In a recent polemic, Jonathan Crary frames such activity under the "accelerated 24/7 consumerism" (2013: 98) of the Web 2.0 era. Web 2.0 subjectivity is formed, he argues, from attempts to erase any sense of delay, creating a sense of unending continuity—of "seamless[ness]" (2013:75)—that

wipes out pause, reflection, and any sense of meaningful history or real communication in deference to a constant sense of "present-ness" (2013: 76). For Crary, new media—especially beginning with the televisual medium's pervasive reformation of subjectivity in the domestic sphere—turns politically-engaged citizenry into sedentary, ritualized, "anti-nomadic" (2013: 81) spectators of their own ruin. As Crary sees it, the only refuge for the subject of an "attention economy" that attempts to control every aspect of lived experience via a totalizing illusion of freedom is sleep, dream or death (2013: 75).[7] In *Death 24x a Second* Laura Mulvey offers a less pessimistic view, discussing the degree to which new media has made it possible for a more "pensive" (2006: 11) spectator to see the *cinema* anew—to resurrect an "attractions"-based relationship to the cinematic medium itself, in that these technologies make it possible to manipulate the temporality of the cinematic work, speeding up, slowing down, or freezing the images, to renew a sense of the cinema's uncanny relationship to time, and to other, pre- and post-cinematic forms. Mulvey thus sees political possibilities in new media technologies for exposing "a projected film's best-kept secret"—its essential stillness (2006: 22). For Mulvey, the "dialectical relationship between the old and new media" (photography ↔ cinema ↔ digital media) gives rise to "an aesthetic of delay" that "brings the presence of death back to the ageing cinema" (2006: 22) and reveals its particularly uncanny brand of manipulating time. Again, what I term "archival anxiety" lies at least in part in this desire to delay time to better capture fleeting experience; thus, within this state, there also are critical openings. The subjects and obsessive documenters of mockumentary and fake found-footage horror films offer audiences of popular cinema dramatizations of archival anxiety. They feature characters who alternate between exhibiting an incessant desire to make a record of a reality they see as imminently recordable, and being disturbed by their own motives (or those of others) for being compelled to this kind of action. In films like *The Blair Witch Project* and *Diary of the Dead*, this anxiety is often productive. The fictional filmmakers in these fake found-footage films confront, as much as they construct, a reality that is constantly being swept under an incessant accumulation of images, evacuated of meaning and added to a monstrous archive. Negotiating a reality of visual "noise" is the equivalent to the massive archive that comes to be metaphorized as *reality itself* in the films I discuss, again hinting at a kind of Benjaminian phantasmagoria that strands the subject-as-spectator in the role of disoriented observer, simultaneously compelled to be a witness, and frustrated in that compulsion with an overwhelming array of material and evidence.

There are implications here for outlining a contemporary subject position for the (post-) cinematic spectator, a subject position that appears in various forms in the films I will soon turn to in this chapter. For Francesco Casetti, the "decentralize[d]" "sight" (2011: 3) of the digital-age observer is not a gaze or glance, but rather a "multicentered watching" (2011: 4, note) that causes a multiple positionality and a state of "bewilderment" (Casetti, 2004: 11) that could be likened to the variously distracted and engaged observational perspectives that Walter Benjamin contemplated in the reception of turn-of-the-century Paris arcades. Benjamin's early media theory likened the potential for wholesale distractedness of the observer of an overwhelming modernity to the role of the spectator engrossed in the proto-cinematic phantasmagoria entertainments. In its popular incarnation, the phantasmagoria (*fantasmagorie*) show was an immersive entertainment of smoke-and-mirrors spectacle introduced in 1793 by Philip Polidor and popularized in post-Revolution France by Etienne-Gaspard Robertson.[8] Key to Robertson's setup was to remove the distance between observer and spectacle by, in part, "remediating"[9] the theatrical stage, replacing it with a screen upon which images would be projected from behind by a moving projector that caused the images to swell and shrink (Warner, 2006: 147). To push the illusion further, images were projected onto roiling smoke in the audience to create the illusion that audience members were immersed in a phantasmal virtual reality, and proto-cinematic techniques such as fades and dissolves gave the effect of constant movement and transmutability. From such proto-cinematic illusions, to the Web 2.0 era's overwhelming digital archives with their multiple screens and windows, phantasmagoria may remain the concept that best represents the uncanny reality that Adorno and Horkheimer would call the "culture industry," which ostensibly "deludes" its consumers "with false conflicts" and exchanges "consciousness" for "conformity" ([1963] 1975, 17); that Guy Debord would call the "society of the spectacle" (1967), which isolates its subjects into a realm of ideological abstraction and dislocation; and that Jean Baudrillard would call "simulation" (1983), a reified reality where interaction with a sort of 'hyperreality' annihilates engagement with the real, with history (Huyssen 1989: 16). Crary recently has taken this same position of the 'amnesiac' subject of a "24/7 capitalism" that has rewritten the real in terms of an archive of inescapable, empty illusion:

> We are swamped with images and information about the past and its recent catastrophes—but there is also a growing incapacity to engage these traces in ways that could move beyond them, in the interest of a common future. Amid the mass amnesia

> sustained by the culture of global capitalism, images have become one of the many depleted and disposable elements that, in their intrinsic archiveability, end up never being discarded, contributing to an ever more congealed and futureless present" (2013: 35).

Positions like Crary's, however instructive, are ultimately more reductive in their evocations of phantasmagoria than Benjamin was in his own. Crary here constructs completely powerless subjects confronting an overwhelming illusion, a continual ahistorical present-ness that turns them into the damned objects of their own catastrophic spectacle. In Benjamin's configuration, however, a phantasmagoric reality is one whose illusions confront the subject as not just bewildering, but also volatile and destabilizing.

Important to Benjamin's figural use of phantasmagoria as a conceptual parallel to a modernity of increasing malaise is that it does not imply a subject so distracted as to have lost all agency. This is also a testament to the usefulness of the Benjaminian phantasmagoria as a way of addressing a 21st-century hypermediated reality of user-spectators and the (illusions of) interactivity promised by the media platforms they turn to for information and social engagement. Tom Gunning has pointed out that part of the attraction of the phantasmagoria experience was in the revelation to audiences of the inner workings of this new technology before they were led into the phantasmagoria show; thus, audiences were participating in a dialectical spectatorship that negotiated the illusion and the uncanny wonders of the illusion-producing mechanism itself. Gunning parallels this to the phantasmagoria as concept, which exposes the "inherently unstable" deceptions of capitalist modernity (2004a: 13). Gunning here cites Michael Jennings' (2003) reading of Benjamin's book on Charles Baudelaire, which raises the notion of "productive phantasmagoria, phantasmagorias that acknowledge their commodity character yet point back to the actual conditions that produced them" (quoted in Gunning, 2004a: 13). The illusion itself is thus undergirded by a sense of uncanny returns to the source of its production. The article on the Benjaminian phantasmagoria in which Gunning makes these observations begins with a self-conscious rhetorical allusion to the etymology that initiates Freud's essay on the uncanny. Freud's etymology is meant to highlight the paradoxes in the uncanny's invocation of things disturbing because they are also disturbingly close to the subject—a hidden and secreted knowledge that confronts the subject, surfacing from the unconscious in a kind of haunting. Gunning's parallel prefatorial etymology of the term, "phantasmagoria," traces historical, ontological, psychological, literary and political denotations and applications of the concept, to

connote a similar term-in-tension, one that "takes on the weight of modern dialectics of truth and illusion, subjectivity and objectivity, deception and liberation, and even life and death" (2004a: 1). For Gunning, the complex connotations of "phantasmagoria" boil down to illusions that are both cannily celebrated as such and disturbingly implicative of instability in their manipulations. Gunning's rhetorical nod to Freud is thus no mere ludic wink; it is telling and suggestive, since Benjamin's own conceptualization of modernity is itself one of uncannily unsettling illusions, rather than wholesale disillusionment.

Both Gunning and Marina Warner have noted the importance of a critical tension in the phantasmagoria shows being both a wondrous technology and the generator of overwhelming, convincing illusions that Freud in "The Uncanny" (1919) would argue triggered the "resurfacing of primitive (also infantile) beliefs thought to be surmounted" ([1919] 1997: 216). Gunning notes that

> the Phantasmagoria worked in the space between Enlightenment and superstition, seemingly summoning the phantoms of "the dead or absent" in the auditorium while displaying the triumphs of the new sciences in the anteroom to this spectacle. Purveyors of Phantasmagoria shows, not only acknowledged this tension between Enlightenment science and ancient superstition[,] they advertised it as the basis of their attraction. (Gunning, 2004a: 5)

And Warner offers the example that Robertson's phantasmagoria shows conjured images of the French Revolution's recent dead, including an image of "the severed head of [Georges-Jacques] Danton, adapted from his death mask" (2006: 147). Executed in 1793 during the Terror, Danton would have stood as a morbid reminder of very real and recent social and political upheaval; the fantastical appearance of his spectral face would have produced a disturbing shock of actuality. Such effects, combined with the dissolving images of ghosts and scythe-bearing mummers, situated the phantasmagoria—like its later photographic incarnation, spirit photography—somewhere "between seriously intended fears and sly mockery of such beliefs" (Warner, 2006: 153). Warner notes that "Robertson protested that his 'illusions were designed as an antidote to superstition and credulity', and claimed that he was staging a rational exhibition in order to expose the mechanism behind such spectres of the mind" (2006: 153). Gunning cites the preamble offered by Philip Polidor as encouraging a similarly bifurcated spectatorship:

> I will not show you ghosts, because there are no such things; but I will produce before you enactments and images, which are imagined to be ghosts, in the dreams of the imagination or in the falsehoods of charlatans. I am neither priest nor magician. I do not wish to deceive you; but I will astonish you. (quoted in Gunning, 2004a: 5)

As Gunning has argued elsewhere, this aesthetics of "astonishment" (2004b) and "attraction" (1986) continues through the silent era and thrives in genres such as horror, the musical, and, as Linda Williams (1991) has added, melodrama and pornography. Audiences of these genres of attraction respond to the cinematic work with a combination of sensation and cognition that must not be separated out from the intellectual distance supposedly encouraged only by avant-garde and experimental cinema. The proto-cinematic effects of the phantasmagoria shows and their space of reception serve as a challenge to the problematic construction of the spectator as merely distracted by, or plugged into, the cinema as a sort of stimulus. The phantasmagoria show's success as convincing illusion resulted from the alternation between the spectator's awareness of the scientific mechanism behind the show (i.e., it was a wondrous *technology*), and the irrational sensations made possible by those mechanisms. Audiences thus would have been held in a sort of dialectical thrall, situated somewhere between canny skepticism and unnerving (dis)belief—a spectatorial position that spirit photography would encourage not long after (Chéroux, 2004: 46).[10] The conventional links between Gothic horror and the shocks and thrills of the phantasmagoria shows will seem rather clear; yet I also want to stress the way both strand the (reader-)spectator in a sensorial state that is as dependent on a canny awareness of form and technology as it is on an ability to lose oneself in the illusions produced by them. It is this state of spectatorial liminality that must be accounted for in any figural applications of the phantasmagoria used to explore both modernity and the proliferating visual technologies that it produces.

Walter Benjamin also was aware of such a spectatorial liminality and its potential for a *questing*, *questioning* subjectivity. In an implicit acknowledgment of the power of horror and detection as a mode for investigating modernity's impact on the subject, Benjamin turns to Edgar Poe's short story, "The Man of the Crowd" (1840). Poe's tale concerns a convalescent observing the rush of passersby in the streets of London with emotional and aesthetic distance through a café window, only to be compelled to plunge into the throng in investigative pursuit of a singular, enigmatic figure. Predating Poe's first C. August Dupin story, "Murders in the Rue Morgue"

(1841), "The Man of the Crowd" has been cited by Patricia Merivale (1999) as the *actual* first example of literary detection (Poe's term was "ratiocination"), its observer-subject compelled into an act of interpretation of his urban environment that leads him into an epistemological impasse.[11] And Gunning (1990) sees the tale as offering Benjamin a fictional proto-theorization of the subject-as-observer. Poe ends the tale with the implication that the observer and the unreadable object of his gaze are uncannily related—that the pursuit shows the distracted observer to have become, like the "man of the crowd," bewildered by the visceral spectacle—(the real as attraction) outside the comfortable distance he had maintained in the café interior, separated from the urban spectacle by the intriguingly proto-cinematic café window. As it grows darker and the more seedy denizens of the London night surface, the narrator observes: "The wild effects of the light enchained me to an examination of individual faces; and although the rapidity with which the world of light flitted before the window, prevented me from casting more than a glance upon each visage, still it seemed that, in my then peculiar mental state, I could frequently read, even in that brief interval of a glance, the history of long years" (Poe, 392). There is a parallel here to Doane's evocation of a cinematic time that impinges upon reality a sense of ephemeral and ungraspable history in the face of a present of images that rush past the observer. Additionally, a sense of agency and position in such a phantasmagoria diminishes in the narrator-observer's wish to make the man of the crowd more present through seeing, while also (like a cinemagoer) remaining invisible himself, in "a detective-like act of shadowing" (Gunning, 1997: 27). Gunning writes of the tale's ending as "a paradox of visuality" (1997: 56), where the narrator-pursuer finally reaches the object of his roving gaze only to be gazed back at, but not seen. Poe's suggestion seems to be that the observer has been uncannily in pursuit of *himself* in this phantasmagorical arena of many faces, many gazes. His tale is—to borrow Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik's phrase—a tale of "Gothic flânerie" (2001), proto-modernist in its connotations of wandering around the massive industrial city in a state of engagement with a disturbing, disjointed reality that mirrors the "fissured nature of a modern subjectivity" (Horner and Zlosnik, 2001: 90). As Gunning notes, citing Dana Brand (1990), Benjamin's interest in Poe's tale comes in its multiple figurations of the modern spectator. First is the *flâneur*, who views distractedly in the café "from a single vantage point" (Gunning, 1997: 27) that offers a certain mastery over the scene. Next is "the *badaud*" ("gawker," "gaper") (Gunning, 1997, 29), who becomes consumed by the crowd, "merges" (Gunning, 1997: 29) with it, "absorb[s]" (Gunning, 1997: 40) it, and

therefore loses himself within it. And, third, is the detective-observer, who, agitated and skeptical of certain unreadable elements in the spectacle, investigates it for some meaning (Gunning, 1997: 26). As Gunning explains, the detective role and Benjamin's less fully theorized *badaud* become "bifurcate[ed]" active-passive (Gunning, 1997: 29) spectatorial positions manifested in the *flâneur* once the exigencies of modernity have transformed his "composure" into "manic behavior" (Benjamin, quoted in Gunning, 1997: 29).

The camera-bearing protagonists of many fake found-footage horror films will play out this drama of spectatorial anxiety, driven to "manic behavior" in their incessant acts of recording and chronicling. In these films the camera-bearing subjects alternate consistently between two spectatorial positions in the phantasmagoria: that of the *badaud* who 'gawks' and 'gapes' and tries to "get everything," and that of the detective, who feels compelled to engage with the spectacle. In such a way, the immersed and mobile positionality these films demonstrate—one trapped in a phantasmagorical visual arena that is received as always-already mediated in the ways one engages with it—shows popular horror cinema's interest in investigating the spectator's role as both observer and observed, documenter and documented. In films like *Paranormal Activity 2*, *Cloverfield*, and *Home Movie*, characters willfully put themselves under surveillance in ways that suggest the *badaud*—their putting themselves on record is less in service of becoming introspective, politicized, or critical than it is in securing their world by documenting it. These characters can often be seen gazing at their own faces, scanning through footage of their own lives. Though they may discover certain important evidence about their world (its being haunted in *Paranormal Activity*, or invaded in *Cloverfield*, for example), they rarely investigate the cause or motives of their own obsessive recording. In other words, they rarely take on the motives and perspective of the detective.

While Crary's implicit evocation of a phantasmagorical Web 2.0 reality presents a sedentary subject stranded in the illusion of immediacy and mobility, Benjamin's allusion to Poe suggests a roving or decentered spectatorship that is capable of seeing in the mechanisms of the phantasmagoria the potential for its own undoing. The "man of the crowd" is a figure trapped among subject-positions and spectator roles: idle observer, absorbed gawker, engaged investigator. This unanchored observer inhabiting liminal spaces of subjectivity, caught somewhere among the positions of distraction, absorption, and detection, prophetically suggests Richard Grusin and Jay David Bolter's notion of "achieving self-presence through a newly

mobilized point of view" (1999: 243) in virtual reality. Anne Friedberg in her book, *Window Shopping*, has a similar "roving" subjectivity in mind in her focus on what she terms a "mobilized and virtual gaze" (1994: 15). Friedberg, like Crary (1992), addresses pre-photographic, proto-cinematic technologies in her positioning of this spectator-observer. But, where Crary, in *Techniques of the Observer*, sees this position as fixed—and, in his later work, *24/7* (2013), as deceptively *stilled*—Friedberg argues that it is "mobilized" by proto-cinematic and cinematic technologies such as the panorama and the diorama in much the same way as Benjamin's *flâneur* was mobile in his[12] explorations of 19th century Paris. She contrasts a mobilized gaze with the panoptic model of subjectivity, which "emphasizes the subjective effects of imagined scrutiny and 'permanent visibility' on the *observed*, but does not explore the subjectivity of the *observer*" (1994: 20). Friedberg's proto-cinematic models take into account the virtual *flâneur's* more mobile position vis-à-vis the visual field, even if this is only an imagined, illusory mobility (1994: 20). Once again, it is in the tripartite configuration of *flâneur*, *badaud* and detective that this mobility becomes actualized.

Like Friedberg, and recalling Gunning's exploration of Benjamin's interest in Poe, Casetti describes the cinema as "a field of cross-gazes that includes and embraces observer, observed and situation" (2004: 14). For Casetti, the place of the observer is an "unstable" one akin to the "inherently unstable" (Gunning, 2004b: 13) modernity that Benjamin used the phantasmagoria to describe: "'Inside' the observed world, but also with no precise place" (Casetti, 2004: 12). Casetti defines what might be termed a (hyper)mediated subjectivity, "a condition marked by an overlapping of presences, instead of a strict division of roles, and by an interweaving of gazes, instead of the dominion of one amongst them" (2004: 12). Casetti concerns himself here with the spaces of reception—the spectators' position and interaction in the cinema space in particular, as well as their observation of the screen. In later work (2011), he will revisit this "unstable" spectatorship in terms of the different attentions to, and modulations of, multiple screens via the spectator's access to other devices (e.g., cell phones) sometimes used simultaneously to communicate the experience, or to extra-mediate it (in the sense of recording what you're viewing to show someone else, or watching a film in on a cinema screen and simultaneously viewing other images on a digital device). In a parallel to the uncanny confrontation between gazing self and gazing other that caps Poe's tale, Casetti notes that "to find oneself in the middle of the spectacle, to discover oneself as the object of one's own gaze, to perceive oneself as itself

and as other, and thus feeling a sense of bewilderment," engenders a "sense of unease" that reveals "a self never met before" (2004: 11). The similarities here with respect to the doubling and multiple gazes found in Poe parallel what Anna Everett calls the "*fundamental hyperattentiveness*" of the new media user (Everett 9). Discussing the immersive experience in her own formulations of a "*pixilated gaze*" of the new media user that combines "spectatorship, reception and new media interaction," Everett cites Wheeler Winston Dixon's idea of the "returned gaze"—the medium looking back at the spectator: "This is the gaze of the object returned—of the frame that possesses the object—of the projected image that possesses the viewer" (Dixon, quoted in Everett, 9).

The 'field of cross-gazes' and the roving subject that are envisioned in these theorizations relate to a culture that is conscious of being under constant surveillance, and where private selves are often rather willingly played out on a public canvas via constant access to recording devices. What Jon Dovey in 1996 called "camcorder culture," an intersection of surveillance, self-policing and suspicion, transforms into wholesale archival anxiety that the films in this chapter investigate and/or evoke through adopting a variety of forms of "factual discourse" that both double for lived experience and have collapsed the public and private spheres: from the hyperreality of the multiple screens and scrolling news tickers of news networks, to the actuality aesthetics of reality television; from the pervasive hovering presence of surveillance footage, to the intriguing temptation of submitting a visual record of one's experience to the "living" archive of YouTube. Yet again, within this seeming loss of the subject within a hypermediated morass, appear potential crucial openings. In her 2004 essay, "Will the New Media Produce New Narratives?," Marie-Laure Ryan offers a way to recover the role of the Benjaminian detective for the subject confronting a society of the spectacle for the digital age. For Ryan, digital media has overall amped up, rather than diminished, the critical role of the spectator-user because of its transformability, its "volatile" ephemerality, and its "modularity," a term she uses to describe reproducible data that can be reconfigured, recontextualized, recombined and transformed (2004: 338). Ryan argues that these "distinctive properties of digital media" (2004: 338) encourage four types of user participation in the text: internal/exploratory, internal/ontological, external/exploratory, and external/ontological" (2004: 339). Here, "internal" implies a user situated within the digital world via an avatar; "external" suggests a position of greater mastery, such as "navigating a database"; "exploratory" is a positioning where users "have no impact on

the destiny of the virtual world"; and "ontological" suggests a usership that can alter or transform the "history" of the virtual world (2004: 339). For Ryan, these interrelated positionalities for the digital-user have created demands for new types of narrative, and they also suggest a kind of navigating subject that brings us back to the realm of the Gothic quester: "Readers of these texts will be cast into the role of an investigator who digs into the history of the textual world by freely exploring a collection of documents" (2004: 343). These effects in new media have their ripple effect in horror films that place diegetic observers and the spectator in the role of recorder—in *The Blair Witch Project*, for example, the entire visual-aural text comes in through the eye of the observers' hand-held cameras and sound recorders; and in *Diary of the Dead*, the combination of (fake) found footage and observer-recorded footage is pieced together by the protagonist-observer as a way of subverting a wholesale media spectacle. Important here is that the films I discuss below sometimes waver on the degree of critical capacity they want allow for their obsessive media users (and, perhaps by implication, their audiences), and the degree of skepticism they maintain around the question of a hypermediated reality.

In these contexts, I first discuss the 2015 film, *Unfriended*, which creates the hypermediated realism characteristic of a digital phantasmagoria by carefully reconstructing the flat, multi-window diegesis of a single laptop screen. Next, in fake found-footage works, *The Blair Witch Project*, *Diary of the Dead*, and *Home Movie*, I explore the camera-bearing subjects of archival anxiety who seem to extend this hypermediated reality to an equivalent subjectivity that views reality as primarily a field of visual evidence to be captured, and secured for posterity, cushioning the subject to various degrees against the harshness of the historical moment. Compelled to record, to document, the subjects of these films' archival anxiety see the real as a kind of archive already, and in a sense feel compelled to "copy" it for storage in a secure place. In the final section, I turn to the Australian Gothic film, *Lake Mungo*, which yanks these implications of a hypermediated reality back to the revelatory tradition and the beginnings of cinema that inform them, with references to spirit photography that suggest the film as an investigation of our mediated reality. Here—figured through spectrality, ghosts, and hauntings—the earliest anxieties attending the medium return to highlight the "'technological uncanny' [that] waxes and wanes" (Mulvey, 2006: 36) in the development of new visual technologies.

I. A Social Media Phantasmagoria: The Hypermediated Reality of *Unfriended*

A contemporary horror cinema that wishes to engage with such archival anxieties must turn (even further) away from the Bazinian illusions of transparent access to the image, and instead to a focus on what Richard Grusin and Jay David Bolter (1999) term, "hypermediacy." Under the realist logic of hypermediacy, the visual sphere is a "heterogeneous space" (Grusin and Bolter, 1999: 31) where simultaneous multiple windows and media formats stand in for a lived experience that the viewer has come to associate with visual mediation. The multiple representations and visual surfaces and screens of hypermediacy are indicative of the user's relationship to a reality in which "multimedia" (Grusin and Bolter, 1999: 32) is not just a catchword but a confirmation to viewers of the fragmented or diffuse visual experience that has come to define their subjectivity (Grusin and Bolter, 1999: 34). Mary Ann Doane links such subjectivity to Freud's "understanding of the 'external world' […] as a surplus of stimulations, an overwhelming mass of energies perpetually assaulting the subject and liable to break through its defenses" (2002: 43). The sensorial overload that constitutes a hypermediated reality provokes the need to escape to spaces that insulate the subject from overstimulation. Here, the exigencies of modernity require a retreat from the real—for Freud, the space of repression in the form of the unconscious, and for the Gothic into sequestered spaces that double for the psyche, like attics, locked rooms, and cellars. Not so much an ahistorical formulation of subjectivity as an example of a compulsion to retreat from history, the invocation of the unconscious here recalls Benjamin's notions of the uncanny "phantasmagoria of the interior" (2002: 14), a 19th century Victorian dwelling that, "[i]n the most extreme instance […] becomes a shell" (2002: 220). The phantasmagoric dream existence is uncanny. Something is amiss in the over-ripeness of the interior that is, essentially, an indication of a culture in hiding from itself. The world that seems conjured for hypnotic comfort also disturbs. Benjamin thus offers historical conditions for the uncanny reality he sees as manifesting a wider, half-conscious social anxiety. The collector, the curator, the researcher, the archivist, all perhaps manifest an archival anxiety based upon a disturbing too-much-ness of experience. Hence, the home—and very likely what we call the archive—is a fortress containing fortresses, a means of defense against a threat that every subject of the phantasmagoria knows is there, but struggles to find the tools to do more than simply stir up the smoke and move the mirrors from wall to wall. I argue that there are useful connections here between the kind of phantasmagoric modernity Benjamin describes and the idea of a

hypermediated reality that sees the subject as a user negotiating the ostensibly illusory reality of multiple screens, windows, tabs, apps, databases, and devices—all of which bring the 21st-century phantasmagoria similarly, disturbingly into the interior. The only difference may be in the collapse of public and private spaces constituted by the "invasion" of these multiple windows into the supposedly fortified space of the interior.

It is a sense of the real as an overwhelming sensorial experience that calls into being a Gothic realism of hypermediation and sensation that once again focuses on subjectivity as a perpetual act of witnessing and chronicling—a realism designed to evoke (and encourage) the subject's continual suspicion of its degree of agency in social, cultural, and historical terms. Such a self-conscious realism is all the more necessary in an era that experienced the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, as a multimedia event constructed and received via multiple platforms and screens that came nowhere near generating the global frisson of the *idea* of the event itself. Much has been written about the transformations of the horror genre in the "post-9/11" era, but rarely has the era been framed in terms of the "new regime of realism" that Jon Dovey announced as early as 1996—one of multiple screens, and a collapse of the private and public spheres into total visibility, to match the sense of the subject under constant surveillance.[13] This new, "unstable" reality requires an aesthetics of hypermediation—multiple screens and windows; constant motion and reframing; shallow, haptic surfaces of blur and glitch—to present reality filtered through a Gothic lens darkly. That is, within this new regime, cinema is tinged with the skeptical tendency of the Gothic to investigate the sacrosanctity of all representations. In the new regime of reality implied by this hypermediated real, to be absent from mediation—from storage in the digital archive that stands in for history, memory—is not to exist. Further, to confront an event that is not under surveillance—or that has not been recorded, archived and assigned to an appropriate space for posterity—is to leave one's experience invalidated as real, as actual. There is in this configuration a simultaneous attraction, or counter-desire, in the kind of insulation that might be offered by being absent from the record. In social media apps like Snapchat, for example, images and messages are ephemeral; they last up to a maximum of 10 seconds, then disappear—die. The built-in disposal of content here strives to recapture the immediacy (and possibly something of the anonymity) of a shared moment that has evaded capture by the all-important record.

The 2015 horror film, *Unfriended* (Levan [Leo] Gabriadze), follows the new, hypermediated realist aesthetic outlined thus far. Gabriadze's film opens with the viewing of a snuff video on a computer screen by an unseen user. The video window, showing distraught teenager Laura Barns committing suicide by shooting herself in the head with a shotgun, is partially minimized to reveal the surrounding layers of media that frame the footage: Internet window, YouTube database, and Macbook desktop screen, cluttered with other open windows, scattered and layered in a kind of relief. The digital imagery in the video is degraded and fogged, and Laura Barns's desperate act is framed from a distance, diminishing all detail in her face and features, effectively burying her as much as is possible within the shallow grave of the digital screen. In effect, Laura Barns appears as a *digital* ghost in the footage even before she takes her own life—the final images of the visual record of her life revealing only a distorted, blurred, glitchy blot trapped and embedded within a digital archive. The antagonizing element of this digitally retrieved footage parallels anxieties generated prior to the digital era by film's relationship to time. Laura Barns has been—in terms that Mary Ann Doane reserves for the filmic medium—"stored" (2002: 23), preserved for posterity to be viewed and reviewed, a presence that is no longer *present*, but suffused with a sense of "historicity" (Doane, 2002: 23). We later learn that Laura turned to this final solution after being made the shame of school and community by another video record. The source of the online bullying that led to Laura's death is an earlier video of her, recorded on a cell phone, and made very public on Facebook by a group of her peers. The video shows Laura in a state of extreme abjection—drunk, passed out, lying on the ground with the crotch of her cut-off short-shorts soaked with menstrual blood. One year later (in keeping with conventional ghost-story tradition, on the anniversary of her death), the five teenagers involved in the scandal find their Skype group chat invaded virally by the ghost of their former classmate. Appearing now in disturbingly banal form as a staring, blank-faced Skype icon, the ghost of Laura Barns is a digital specter out for cosmic justice and moral comeuppance. Using the very social media that ultimately condemned her to death, Barns posthumously pits her former, so-called friends against each other by manipulating them into exposing their secret guilt through a series of "Never have I ever" questions in Skype video chat, and by publicly shaming them via revealing and incriminating images and videos of them posted on Facebook. Then, one-by-one, she picks off each member of the group who wronged her, as the film's spectators

gradually learn the unsavory backstory of cheating, back-stabbing, and rumor-spreading from the group members themselves.

Unfriended is a virtuosic reinvention of a fairly typical ghost story scenario: the specter returning to right the moral wrongs of the past. The narrative perspective in the film is that of Blair Lily, whose MacBook laptop screen fills the cinema frame for all but the final seconds of the film's duration. *Unfriended*'s unprecedented mise-en-scène is the result of a painstaking simulation of the hypermediated world of the digital user's desktop, achieved in the film through digitally animated versions of Skype, Spotify, Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Chatroulette. Despite the numerous overlapping windows on Blair's screen, and the multiple faces confronting her (including her own), the film's diegesis is peculiarly two-dimensional, collapsing into a backlit surface that yields an almost suffocating flatness—a malaise-causing uniformity—even as it flickers, blurs, and flashes with layer-upon-layer of moving, appearing, and vanishing windows. What depth of field there is in the film is reserved for the physical space within the numerous smaller Skype video chat windows confronting the spectator, most of which show faces in close-up, staring at the computer cameras that allow them to be "present" in the conversation with their friends.[14] The space behind these faces—when it can be seen at all—retreats from view like an image seen at the end of a tube or tunnel. Cinematographer Adam Sidman[15] and director Gabriadze strand the viewer in this virtual world of frenzied movement and shallow space. The film also plays out in real-time, which the spectator can see ticking away in the top-right corner of Blair's screen, highlighting this sense of virtual containment and the increasing agitation of the online activity of its subjects.

In this context of instantaneity and continuous interaction, it makes sense that the ghost of Laura Banks ultimately demands the complete *stasis* of her victims: she threatens the characters with death if they leave the diegetic space, and, while she causes them to die horrible deaths, allows only their frozen, motionless stares to be seen by the others who view their cameras. It is difficult at times to tell whether the impending victims' stilled gazes are the result of a paranormal paralysis or a kind of freeze-frame due to a stoppage in the digital feed—or both. Against the frenzy of hypermediated action occurring on Blair Lily's screen, these moments resonate with the similar anxieties attending the filmic medium's spatial and temporal reconfiguration; that is, with a sense of the "embalm[ed] time" of the photographic image discussed by Andre Bazin (quoted in Doane, 3). Both Laura Mulvey and Mary Ann Doane

suggest that an awareness of the stillness of the images on the film strip that create the illusion of movement renews for the spectator a sense of the uncanniness of the cinematic medium. "While movement tends to assert the presence of a continuous 'now'," writes Mulvey, "stillness brings a resonance of 'then' to the surface" (2006: 13). And Doane writes that "because time's corruption is 'proper' to it, its [time's] fixed representation also poses a threat, produces aesthetic and epistemological anxiety" (2002: 3). *Unfriended* in a way remediates the *anxieties* of a prior filmic medium in Laura Barns's ability to "still" her victims for at least part of the duration of their violent deaths. Barns "make[s] time visualizable" (Doane, 2002: 6), renewing for the digital age a sense of time as a "source of anxiety," a "problem of representation," and a "temporal demand" that Doane sees as symptomatic of modernity in the filmic medium (2002: 4).

Unfriended ends when there is no longer any user present to contribute more visual content, perhaps an unintentional allusion to the notion that social media relies on its users as unpaid laborers—digital "serfs" in activist and filmmaker Astra Taylor's critical terms (2014: 18). In what is perhaps the film's most striking critique of the policed and performing panoptic selves that appear on social media, we see Blair as she types, deletes, and re-types responses, delaying before clicking the "send" or "reply" button, to make sure she presents her public self in the best possible way. The film's soundtrack abounds with the familiar (and sometimes maddening) repetitive sounds of fingers tapping away at keyboards, mouse-clicking, Skype's incoming message tune, the broken-bell clang of a key struck in (t)error, and the other blips, beeps and tones familiar to the user of Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Google and Chatroulette. All of these applications bear their real names, adding to the film's diegetic realism (and becoming potentially a stroke of product-placement genius, since these company's names are fixed onscreen for the duration that Blair uses them). Several reviewers of the film remarked upon *Unfriended*'s paratextual allusions to actual new-media applications partly as the source of its uncanny-realist effect. For Matt Donato, writing in *We Got This Covered*, the "cameos" by these familiar search engines and social media applications "[elevate] our fear on the simple basis of relatability" (2015, n.p.). Peter Bradshaw, writing in *The Guardian*, notes that "[p]art of the creepy effect of this movie […] is just showing there's something uncanny and strange about living your life online. This is the huge altar at which we are all worshipping" (2015, n.p.). And Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* writes that the film's use of visual glitch and aural noise causes "the characters [to] break apart aurally and visually, becoming near-ghosts in their own

machine world" (2015, n.p.). Dargis's comments are interesting in that, when Laura Barns warns the characters, "You wouldn't like it here," there is a clear sense that "here" is meant not only to connote that she is stuck in a paranormal purgatorial limbo reserved for teens who committed suicide, but also that she is stuck in a world offering only illusory agency, a slave to an online "altar."

Not quite a fake found-footage horror film, and not quite a mockumentary, *Unfriended* is what might be called (the first?) social media horror film, where the computer screen itself is the medium, showcasing multiple social media platforms, Internet windows, sidebar "those who liked this, also liked …" ads, and computer "help" and "preferences" windows as a virtual world unto itself.[16] It is in this case a paean to Marshal McLuhan's notion in *Understanding Media* (1964) that new media subsume and replicate older media—or that each new medium "remediates" (Grusin and Bolter, 1999) the old, and that the old medium responds by re-remediating the new: the computer screen as cinema screen as computer screen. The diegetic reality of *Unfriended* is full of quick clicks, typed, erased and re-typed text, and a field of digital images so flattened it might have been ironed onto the screen. Here, the rapid appearance and disappearance of the windows superseding each other become the only element that "edit" or change the scene. The music comes diegetically from the background in Blair's attempts to use Spotify to gain some agency in her online session by underscoring it with appropriate themes, and by Laura Barns's own invasive and ironic musical commentary (e.g., playing Katie Herzig's folksy "I Hurt Too" during scenes where she punishes or exposes the group). And the only glimpses of orientation that give us a sense of space in this continuous master shot come when the teens leave the camera to show an abandoned frame (usually while they are being brutally killed outside the camera's visual range), or when we have time to contemplate the "space" of Blair's laptop screen itself. *Unfriended* is, in short, an extended act of enunciation—an evidentiary text in the making. The fact that its content exists at all is due to the almost total collapse of multiple private realms into a public arena (social media in the film's diegesis, the cinema for its audience), and the film manifests an aesthetics designed to reveal this collapse as one of shallowness, flatness that reflects—gazes back at—the narcissism and superficiality of the user.

In *Unfriended*, cinematic reality is subsumed entirely by a digital world that remediates a number of other media—television and computer screens particularly—to replicate the

experience of living virtually within and through onscreen chat and social media applications. The emphasis of new media on immediacy here becomes conflated with connectivity and openness, where the "world" is at the fingertips of the subject who both identifies with the screen, and works to arrange and rearrange it to suit her desires and (increasingly dire) needs. The "digital citizen" as Blair Lily might be called "has to invent a self-understanding that optimizes or facilitates [her] participation in digital milieus and speeds. Paradoxically, this means impersonating the inert and inanimate" (Crary, 2013: 100). In Crary's terms here, the sense of immediacy and activity is an illusion, leaving the subject-user of social media ironically stilled. This, then, follows the Debordian "logic of spectacle" where "there is a reassembling of the self into a new hybrid of consumer and object of consumption, and in which one becomes a permanent site of data-harvesting and surveillance" (Crary, 2013: 104). The virtual world of *Unfriended* is entirely dictated by Blair Lily's unseen hand as she moves the cursor, opens and closes windows, and types messages. And while *Unfriended* isn't necessarily concerned with being a profound investigation into the kind of new-media spectatorial gaze attending virtual life online—one that, as Francesco Casetti notes, shows the subject caught between "overlapping attendance and performance" (2011: 12)—it is a fascinating tour-de-force re-enactment of one increasingly frantic new media subject's virtuosic navigation and investigation of a reality in which she has become trapped. If you move, you die; if you warn others, someone dies; if you try to close a window, it multiplies; if you try to delete the program, the spinning "wheel of death" (itself a disturbing marker of duration) causes delay; and so on.

The "archived" selves that appear in *Unfriended* are already slipping into the unreality in which Laura Barns finds herself as a ghost. They are made to be witnesses of their own guilt *and* their own helplessness, logged and archived for posterity by a phantom hand that haunts and hacks them. The word "hacked" is used incessantly to refer to Barns's haunting throughout the film. Initially, it suggests that her online persona has been adopted by an unseen user ("Who hacks a dead girl?" asks one character). Barns's specter is a puppeteer standing in for the corporate hands that guide all activity on the "free" internet, manipulating everything with an unseen, immaterial hand, as if her actions represent the technology itself having taken over. The link here between Web 2.0 technology and the supernatural (the film's original title was *Cybernatural*) is clear—technology has so outgrown its users' sense of their own agency and control in this supposedly "open" access realm, that it leaves users stripped of all agency and

manipulated like puppets. In the film's final moments, Blair stares through tears at her own frozen and laughing face at the end of the Laura Barns shaming video, which Blair herself recorded—a final indictment of her as the initiator of all the film's ensuing events. We see the triangular "play" symbol in a circle over Blair's grotesquely mirthful face, indicating that the evidence can be played and replayed, forever shaming Blair herself for her horrendous act. Meanwhile, comment upon comment pile up beneath the video window, labeling Blair a "monster." In the context set up by the film—and a wider context of online bullying reported in recent years in the U.S. and Canadian media—it is a fitting punishment for Blair Lily, whose callous actions ruined a life. Had the film ended here, its topical anti-bullying theme might have added to its thematic implications an interesting critique of a social media that traps its content providers into an endless virtual call-and-response at the service of the corporate interests that act as puppeteers behind these applications. An ill-advised shock ending, however, snaps the laptop closed in Blair's and the spectator's face to reveal, presumably, the ghost of Laura Barns, seemingly free of the digital domain and released into the world at large. Her first "real-world" act is to attack the user: Blair Lily. Even considering this unfortunate closure pulling the spectator out of the digital realm, the world of *Unfriended* comes through as a digitally mediated reality where even the ghosts of history are trapped in the social media sphere, in a seemingly endless archival loop.

Unfriended manifests as a formally novel take on the concept that I call archival anxiety, in that, even though its characters are not compelled to *record* their experiences for an imagined future digital archive, they are nonetheless trapped virtually in it and compelled to contribute to it as users. Were Blair Lily to survive her harrowing experience within the digital realm (she doesn't appear to), she would face a future of shame, viewable and re-viewable, and rapidly disseminated across the digisphere through comments, shares, likes, and re-posts. Her own archivability is therefore her downfall. *Unfriended* is ultimately a *manifestation* of archival anxiety more than it is an interrogation into it. While it thematizes bullying, it does little to investigate the questions regarding the new reality it conjures. Yet, this is not to suggest that it has nothing to say about the hypermediated reality that results from the communication among these teenagers. Instead, I suggest that *Unfriended* manifests an aesthetics of surface and anxiety about these media, rather than directly confronting the subjective fragmentation it implies. Instead, it produces, like the various faux documents that form the ultimately coherent narratives

of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, an uncomfortable manipulation of our trust in the evidentiary text (here, the digital real) and not a full-scale critique of that trust.

Unfriended is, I would argue, a Gothic-realist depiction of a hypermediated reality, a literal take on Trond Lunderno's notion that "[c]yberspace is a ghostly matter with important connections to the all-surrounding ether of modern media transmissions'" (quoted in Leeder, 2015: 3). The computer screen itself is the archive that traps its subjects in a frenzied activity of scrolling through webpages; opening, closing and rearranging windows; viewing embedded videos; reacting to each other's tightly-framed video faces; and rearranging screens. This activity suggests a multivalent spatiality—of being everywhere at once, and having access to the world at one's fingertips—that ultimately strands the subject in a nowhere space. The film's unsettlingly shallow diegesis, its replacement in many instances of human voices with tapping and clicking and onscreen text, and its suggestion of the digital archive as a virtual live burial—a repository for the already-dead—emphasize that Web 2.0 might be an appropriate current embodiment of the "infinite," "receptive" and "retentive" spaces that Doane (2002: 42) suggests can be found in psychoanalytical constructs of the unconscious. Doane writes, "What Freud requires [for the unconscious] is a virtual space—a space that is thinkable but not localizable" (42). Web 2.0 subjects, like the Web itself, also exist in a space that is "thinkable but not localizable." This is a life lived through the drive *submit* to the digital archive—that is, a life lived as a content provider to ensure one's own representation in the digi-sphere. The anxieties attendant to such a condition would then revolve around the subject's digital "capture" as insurance against an ostensible erasure from history. The Internet-as-archive promises permanent storage and legibility. Yet, ironically, the constant sense of present-ness and permanence that it offers becomes a consignation of the act of remembering (so much the concern of a film like Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog*, as I discussed in Chapter II), to a supplementary device that, like the unconscious, becomes an illimitable space for simultaneous storage and forgetting. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Jacques Derrida discusses the idea that "consignation in an *external place* which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, of reimpression," can only lead to "destruction" (79, original emphasis). In short, archival anxiety is a kind of death-drive to archive. *Unfriended* both warns against the Web's archival potential—it makes ghosts of its users—and celebrates it as a record that can be drawn upon for justice (here, a kind of remediation of the retributive or purgative function of hauntings in returning us to a sense of

occulted history). Blair Lily's screen is her, and ostensibly the spectator's, very experience of reality from a stilled subject position offering her only the illusion of connectivity and movement. For Blair, turning away from the screen to investigate what lies beyond it means death, nonexistence. In Benjaminian terms, she has moved from dreamy *flâneur* to bewildered *badaud*. She becomes consumed by the illusion of a mobilized gaze and perspective, an ontological dead-end that is literally staring her in the face. *Unfriended* conjures Gothic anxieties related to the failure to gain clear perspective on, or full knowledge of, one's experience. In doing so, it harkens back to its closest relative in the fake found-footage horror sub-genre, *The Blair Witch Project*, whose obsessive documentarian Heather Donahue—exhausted, pursued by unseen forces, and frozen in fear—confesses in direct-address to her camera, "I'm scared to close my eyes."

II. Archival Anxiety as a Subject Position: *The Blair Witch Project*, *Diary of the Dead* and *Home Movie*

In fake found-footage[17] horror films—perhaps currently best exemplified by hits such as the *Paranormal Activity* series (2007-2015), the Spanish-produced *[•Rec]* (2007, Jaume Balagueró, Paco Plaza), its remake *Quarantine* (2008, John Erick Dowdle), and J.J. Abrams' big-budget monster movie, *Cloverfield* (2008, Matt Reeves)—characters with cameras struggle to frame events as though they were Gothic narrators wrestling with the task of telling it like it is, and conveying it like it feels. The mock social actors and diegetic filmmakers in these films confront a reality and a sense of history as archivable, searchable, and characterized by spectacular visuality: photographs, found-footage, home movies, raw newsfeeds, digital/video blogs, podcasts, digital/video clips, GIFs, and amateur footage posted on YouTube. I use the term "mock social actors" when referring to the subjects of fake found-footage horror and mockumentary horror, adding the qualifier, "mock" to indicate performances by actors who bring fictional characters to life through gestures to the aleatory aesthetics of actuality (documentary, found-footage, home movies), including improvisatory dialogue and movement that attempt to indicate a degree of contingency in the performance. Bill Nichols defines social actors as documentary subjects who can "'be themselves' before the camera in an emotionally revealing manner" (1991: 120), or those who can hold in check their "camera-consciousness" (1991:

122)—that is, their self-consciousness in the presence of a camera—depending on the degree of medium-awareness necessary to the project's goals and aesthetics. Tom Waugh outlines different styles of documentary performance that experiment with a range of possibilities for camera-consciousness, including a "representational" mode where the social actor is encouraged to "perform unawareness of the camera" (1990: 67) and a "presentational" mode, where "presenting oneself explicitly for the camera" (1990: 68) is encouraged. The fake found-footage horror film in particular typically relies on a heightened degree of camera-consciousness in its mock social actors' performances, especially considering that at least one character in these films is affixed to, and embodied by, a camera that has diegetic presence and significance.

The goal of the camera-bearing subject in the fake found-footage horror film seems to be to keep the camera on at all costs, even in the face of death and danger, for fear of having one's experience excluded from the visual archive of history. And yet to be included (i.e., *stored*) in that archive may also constitute a state of being lost or illegible in the overwhelming data of the archive itself. This is at least in part because the camera-bearer in these films is unseen, and therefore illegible. This dialectical struggle that equates selfhood, agency and existence with recordability, visual legibility, and ultimate searchability, reveals an archival anxiety, a need to document something—an emotion, a state of mind, an event, a life—that is as great or greater than the need for self-preservation. But with this compulsion to document also comes a sense of dread, of an ungraspable, fleeting reality that always-already resists capture, and leaves the subject stranded in temporal flux. This, as Donald Winnicott has described, is dread as "memory in the future tense" (quoted in van 't Zelfde, 2013: 15), where presence and present-tense give way to anxieties about future inscription. The fake found-footage horror film manifests an ontological state of anxiety in subjects who might be labeled as slaves to an ocular-centric and future-oriented view of reality that equates being-in-the-world with visual archivability and continual content-providership. This is something like the stranded and engulfed subjectivity painted by *Unfriended*, but with the camera, not the computer screen, as its central tool. Accordingly, the camera becomes not just a documenting apparatus, but also, to a significant degree, a sort of first-person embodiment of the documentarian. In the films I discuss in this section, documentarian-characters such as Heather Donahue in *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), Jason Creed and Debra Moynihan in *Diary of the Dead* (2007), and the entire Poe family in *Home Movie* (2008), use the lens of their recording devices as both a kino-eye, and a kind of

dream screen—that is, as both a record of events, and as a shield onto which to project an image in an effort to store it, to forget it. The dream screen, traceable back to Bertram Lewin's (1946) Freudian formulation of a "wish to sleep" (1946: 420) is thus a device to deaden the impact of the spectacle of reality that the ill-fated characters in these films would otherwise have to confront with their own eyes.

Though produced independently of a Hollywood system that equates the establishment of successful generic conventions with future profit, these three films are nonetheless characteristic examples of an enormously successful horror subgenre that teases out the rootedness in sensation and spectacle shared by both horror and documentary. *The Blair Witch Project* is not the earliest contemporary example of this subgenre—that claim likely goes to films as early as Benjamin Christensen's highly reflexive pseudo-documentary hybrid, *Haxan, or Witchcraft through the Ages* (1922), which uses expressionistic anecdotal horror reenactments to conjure dread and anxiety around religious mania and fundamentalist fears from medieval times to Christensen's early 20th-century present.[18] Later, *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980, Ruggero Deodato), would become perhaps the closest precursor to *Blair Witch* with its documentary crew seeking to exploit "forbidden" knowledge in the jungles of the Amazon. However, *Blair Witch* has become the touchstone for the 21st-century fake found-footage horror film's aesthetic, thematic and narrative appeals to traditional archival practices and notions. As Alexandra Heller-Nicholas has noted, "The Paradox—and power—of [fake] found footage horror is that its particular type of realism hinges explicitly upon exposing itself as a media artifact" (2014: Introduction, n.p.). These films strive to achieve the look of unfinished, pieced-together projects; this look incorporates a naturalistic or "unpolished" aesthetic that combines a mise-en-scène in constant movement, with blurred images, unstable framing, and abrupt editing. Within the context of this documentary aesthetic, fake found-footage horror films privilege the camera to the point of making it a character, or a stand-in for one or several otherwise disembodied characters, and they simultaneously criticize and valorize the image-maker's obsessive efforts to capture "the truth" on video.

These films are meant to be taken as though they were "raw" records of events; thus, ironically, they are *manipulated* to look as though they were found in various states of incompletion: *Blair Witch* takes shape as discovered footage documenting an ill-fated pseudo-documentary that has been edited together anonymously; *Diary* is constructed as an expository

documentary comprised of found- and recorded footage, re-appropriated and pieced together by the ex-girlfriend of an obsessive student filmmaker who died before his film could be completed; and *Home Movie* strives to achieve the look of amateur "home movie" footage, manipulated only by the various mock social actors who struggle for a diegetic control that they equate with their sense of agency. Like so many fake found-footage horror films, these films are, almost without exception, constructed to look like extended and incessant acts of present-tense enunciation, where subjects anxious about their significance in light of traumatic events become obsessive chroniclers of those events as they unfold. In all cases, these films are comprised of visual records that never come close to capturing the full impact of the usually traumatic events that drive them. In many cases—and in *The Blair Witch Project* in particular—they maintain a relentless aesthetic dictum that the monstrous presence that initiates their narratives be all but impossible to show in its entirety or full scope, emphasizing a sort of aesthetics of absence—a blank or void where the audience expects visual and epistemological revelation. The fake found-footage horror film is skeptical of any reliance on the visual (or sonic) record to fully capture the real, particularly in moments of crisis or trauma. That the visual record so often turns up a disturbing lack or void of desired information in these films, is key to the gothumentary and so many 1940s horror films, where the fullness of reality always lies outside the realm of representation. In a film like *Blair Witch*, this sense of incomprehensibility by the camera is essential to the film's uncanny atmosphere and sense of unease; it is thus a continuation of the Gothic tradition initiated in 1940s cinema, as discussed in Chapter I.

Co-directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, with footage shot by, and dialogue improvised largely by, its main cast members, *The Blair Witch Project* is the most likely prototype for the burgeoning sub-genre of fake found-footage and mockumentary horror films that have become so popular in 21st century global cinema. *The Blair Witch Project* is framed as found film and video footage (discovered and deftly edited together by an unseen hand) that traces the ill-fated making of a pseudo-documentary in the style of television's *In Search of* ... (1977-82, 2002) and other series devoted to exploring legends, folklore, alternative readings of history, cryptozoology, and paranormal phenomena.[19] Having set out in the Maryland woods to document local folklore around the film's titular witch, the group of three documentarians in *Blair Witch* find themselves pursued by a sinister and seemingly ubiquitous presence (perhaps local, perhaps supernatural) that their equipment cannot capture; the crew of three eventually

become lost, increasingly frustrated, and ultimately hopeless. Near the end of the film, they find themselves continually circling back upon the same spot—scientifically impossible, since they have been using a compass to guide them. Project leader Heather Donahue tries to reassure her friends, asserting: "If we keep going south we'll get out." And while her comment refers to escaping the woods, the moment equally can be read as a parallel to the footage in which the characters are trapped; the implication is that they may not "get out" of the image sphere of their own creation. And, indeed, they do not—their footage becomes a memorial and a premature burial, dug up later from beneath the burnt remains of the house where their project and lives ostensibly ended.[20] The fact that the filmmakers keep circling around to the same spot while guided by a compass is not only an eruption of the paranormal into the otherwise naturalistic diegesis in the film, it is also further indication of the visual loop in which the three filmmakers have found themselves stuck.

Much is made in the film's improvised dialogue of Heather's archival anxiety—that is, her obsession to document as much of the three filmmakers' experience as possible. Earlier in the film, after a harrowing night that has culminated in the three finding their camp at dawn ravaged by an unseen (and undocumented) presence, distraught cameraman, Michael, just before he disappears, offers a telling justification of Heather's incessant filming of every moment of their dilemma: "I see why you like this video camera so much. […] It's not quite reality. […] It's totally like a filtered reality, man. It's like you can pretend everything's not quite the way it is." The implication is that the camera deflects or softens the blow of reality for Heather, insulates her from the real to a degree that lessens the shock of the moment. If Heather sees the world through a "filtered reality," the suggestion is that this insular reality has taken on unexpectedly sinister possibilities when the documentary footage begins to evidence a preternatural bleed into the real, characterized by the cinema's technological manipulation of time and space. While in actuality one does not walk in a straight line and return to where one started, in the realm of the video and digital image it is quite possible to find an elliptical version of reality that repeats itself in loops, eternally returning back to the beginning. Like Poe's "man of the crowd," Heather and company are both pursuer and pursued, trapped somewhere between roles of detective and gawker, moving in circles just as the enigmatic figure of Poe's tale does in a public square at the story's end, leading his pursuer (the other "man of the crowd") in what seems to be a nonsensically repetitive pattern. Here, Heather has attributed her investigative power to the camera, but in fake found-

footage horror films, the camera gets in the way of seeing. As Heller-Nicholas writes, "Rather than acting as a surrogate eye that does our seeing for us, the camera [in fake found-footage horror cinema] obscures our vision, and stands between our eye and the things we wish to see" (2014: Chapter 1, n.p.). *The Blair Witch Project* is skeptical of the way we experience the world through an almost unflinching turn to visual technology; in the key scene of harmful disorientation outlined here, we see film and video technology creating a spatial and temporal paradox to suggest, as scholars like Doane and Mulvey do, that visual media have intervened in the way we think of time and space. The result is a fantastical enactment of the increasing collapse of the link between visual record and reality in the film's diegesis that becomes a significant source of the film's creeping dread.

The Blair Witch Project's technological skepticism fits squarely within a pre-9/11 cultural context, teasing out millennial fears that with the advent of the next thousand years of history the technologically-determined world would implode: specifically, computers—and thus the world they now run—would somehow go back to zero, yanking us back to the beginning of the Common Era, and all as the result of a potential computer glitch that did not account for the numerical change to the year 2000. This dreaded event was characteristic of full-scale archival anxiety, equating a technological apocalypse with global degeneration: databases might be thrown into chaos; the economies, societies and nations that depend upon them might crumble; important histories and records might disappear. Blank screens and the spinning-rainbow "wheels of death" that mark endless processing leading nowhere would be the result. Such anxieties were ripe territory for a film whose three student filmmakers become increasingly lost in a seemingly bewitched forest that bewilders those who enter it through *cinematic* temporal and spatial anomalies that complicate the notion of reality itself. (The implications here render ironic Heather's snide comment that "It's impossible to get lost in America," meant to imply a country that has mined, mapped, and "manifested its destiny" to the detriment of the natural environment.) Two years after *The Blair Witch Project*'s theatrical run, the events of 11 September, 2001, would shift the paradigm of dread to the more globally-implicated spectacle of trauma witnessed across media platforms, and the fake found-footage film would settle into an aesthetics of hypermediation to evince a new techno-dread more fitting for the post-9/11, Web 2.0[21] era's realm of user-supplied content and commodified connectivity and a "tendency […] to confuse consumer sovereignty with citizen sovereignty" (Andrejevic, 2007: 260). While *Blair*

Witch's pre-9/11 skepticism revolves around the subject's relationship to and identification with the camera, the film's implications of a full-scale hypermediated reality anticipate wider concerns about the effects of new media on their users, such as one finds in *Unfriended*.

Arguing that *The Blair Witch Project* anticipates these wider media concerns, Brigid Cherry observes that in *Blair Witch* the "camera [becomes] a weapon or torture device; it is the object that has trapped" (2009: 190) the subjects recording the film's documentary-within-a-mockumentary "in a *media hell*" (2009: 190, my emphasis). Cherry's observation identifies something of a key conceit of the post-*Blair Witch* fake found-footage horror film, which links anxieties regarding recording media to a full-scale ontological disruption by the recording devices they turn to. "Nothing it seems is 'real'," she notes, "until it has been recorded and replayed" in fake found-footage horror films like 2008's *Cloverfield* (2009: 192). Cherry's comments here revolve around *Cloverfield*'s main camera-bearing character, who feels compelled to "get everything" because "people are gonna want to watch this, people are gonna want to see this." This character's motives for recording a wide-scale disaster—here, specifically, the pandemonium caused by the destruction of a New York City bridge by a monster from the depths[22]—suggest a subject stranded in a state of archival anxiety. In the way *Cloverfield* implicitly thematizes it, archival anxiety is a liminal state that manifests the more counter-productive aspects of dread's paradoxical temporal contingencies, here an emotional response that leaves the subject stuck in a past-present-future state of fearful speculation, and frenzied action with no clear critical goal. According to the logic of archival anxiety, every moment is seen to be archivable, and is therefore stripped of its present-ness, already assigned a role as evidence for a future archive. Thus, the moment is framed at once as occurring *here-and-now*, but also imaginably storable *there-in-the-future*. The independently-produced films, *Diary of the Dead* and *Home Movie*, manifest similar camera-bearing characters who develop an archival anxiety, forming a tenuous trust in the recording devices to which they turn as a means of either insulating themselves from, or exposing others to, a troubled and troubling present. The act of capturing the moment in these films not only assigns it to preservation for an idealized future scanning or scrutiny, but also represents a degree of control over the event by rendering it something that will exist somewhere else—not *here* and *now*, but *there*, in the *future*. That is, it is not just the camera lens that literally shields the subject from the reality of the moment, but the act of recording itself, which the subject sees as wresting away the present-ness of the moment,

and consigning it to a safer space of the future. The camera's role in these films is, then, one that, ironically, potentially strips the subject of informed choice gained by feeling the necessary shock of the event—reality is seen by these characters as always-already a visual record. The bleak outlook of these fake found-footage films' frenzied subjects—moved to contribute to the historical record, but ultimately becoming lost in a media dead-zone—relates directly to the Gothic realist genealogy that figures the real as a kind of resistant force, a "Thing" (Farnell, 2009) that pricks, agitates, disturbs—compels documentation, but cannot be represented. That the subject can become literally consumed by the attempt to capture reality—or by the mediums they turn to as a way of crystalizing their experience—is a key conceit traceable back to the 19th-century Gothic tradition's focus on subjects whose very identity is conferred by documents that have the power to write them into or out of a family inheritance or legacy.[23] Rather than a tool for democratizing experience, the camera here, becomes an instrument in service of what Mark Andrejevic calls "digital enclosure," a networked reality that promises freedoms through interactivity, but becomes a prison of surveillance "wherein every action and transaction generates information about itself" (2007: 2).

As early as 1996, Jon Dovey, exploring the democratizing potential of what he dubs "camcorder culture," worried about the false sense of agency offered by increased access to video-recording technologies: "The camcorder has become a ubiquitous symbol of being, of having control, of presence," he argues. "It has replaced the ghetto blaster on the streets of the US as the sign of being there, of patrolling, controlling your space. It is the physical manifestation for intervention in social systems mediated through looking. Camcorder practice is compelling, pleasurably, reassuringly self-defining" (1996: 119). Beyond these implications of the recording device as embodying (and perhaps usurping) the subject itself, Dovey is concerned that the video camera's increasing presence in all aspects of life—from being a means of "authenticating our domestic lives" (1996: 120), to serving the oppressive, policing gaze of the "video vigilante" (1996: 125-26)—may ultimately usher in a new regime of panoptic surveillance that turns citizens into obsessive, paranoid gazers. Here, the subject who seeks to have the effect on history that a Benjaminian detective might have, instead internalizes the gaze of institutional power, becoming a mere *badaud*, a disoriented, puppetted gawker.

The typical fake found-footage horror witness-character moves between these two poles. *Blair Witch*'s Heather Donahue, for example, has her most self-reflexive moment in the film

when she turns the camera on herself to record an apologetic, tearful confession. In the terms set up by the film, this moment signifies her having fully transformed the nature of her "project" to make a documentary investigation (or spectacle) of herself, securing her role and responsibility in the failed project that has also failed her collaborators, family and friends. In doing so, however, Heather further asserts her trust in the power of the record, the archive, to fix her place in this record of events, and perhaps to secure for herself a form of absolution. In this moment of abject horror, Heather's face fills the frame, reacting with sobbing and sniffling to the inexplicable, distant sounds that terrify her. She turns to the camera as a form of moral redemption: tears attest to her remorse and need for atonement, dripping snot to her physical suffering in the extreme cold of the forest.[24] But Heather does not see that she has substituted one archival anxiety—the compulsion to capture everything for future visual record—for another—the need to position oneself within the official visual record. In other words, rather than offering her footage as a critique of her own obsessions, Heather instead offers herself as evidence that *this happened, and I was a part of it*.

Like Heather, *Diary of the Dead*'s camera-bearing filmmaker-subject, Jason Creed, keeps himself strapped to his camera, which he believes will expose the media corruption at the core of a large-scale collective trauma—the onset of a zombie apocalypse that, like *Cloverfield*'s monster invasion of New York City, recalls the pervasive mayhem and media frenzy cultivated by the events of 9/11. Jason is willing to sacrifice his life to preserve his record of events, protesting at one point, "I can't leave without the camera. The camera's the whole thing." Similar to *Blair Witch*'s Heather, Jason will become the part-subject of his own documentary, as his ex-girlfriend, Debra Moynahan, who ultimately takes over the film's final cut, increasingly turns the camera on him in the interest of interrogating his archival obsessions. Debra uses Jason's footage to refashion his film from his own attempt to capture a record of events as they unfold, to a retrospective interrogation of Jason's naïve, idealistic belief that he can get at the heart of a traumatic event by constantly recording it. Debra's voice-over and editing of Creed's and her own footage identify the film as a document that has been carefully constructed as an associative combination of found footage and visual chronicle, along with added music and sound effects, for her stated purpose of critique: here, to blow open a mass reliance on corruptible media spectacle, including Creed's own unselfconscious reliance on visuality.

Diary of the Dead takes *The Blair Witch Project*'s Gothic realist investigation of representation one step further. That is, it adds a focus on the political implications of full-scale media manipulation to *Blair Witch*'s exploration of the failure of documentary imagery to encompass holistically the trauma of a mass event. The film is almost essayistic in its reflexive tracing-out of the links between recording devices and powerful manipulation. Two key segments in the film interrupt the narrative to offer Debra's critical commentary on the proceedings as they unfold, and, seemingly, on her own process as a filmmaker. The first occurs after the film's opening scene of a zombie attack on a newscaster and her crew. Over a montage of explosions, flames, pandemonium, and a scrambling police and military presence, Debra interrupts the narrative to comment on the raw materials of the film we are about to see: "We downloaded a lot of what we found on television, on the Net, off blogs—images and commentary on those first three days. Most of it was bullshit. None of it was useful. This is what we were getting from the news networks." She then cedes her own voice to feature some of the news commentary that has been buzzing in the background of her own commentary. One such voice intones: "None of us can claim to know exactly what has caused the chaos we've been experiencing. A natural calamity or some sort of massive or monstrous hoax. I'm old enough to remember Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds*, possibly the greatest hoax ever perpetrated. And that was when it was just radio. Now, it's 24/7." The final voice in this segment notes, "People are willing to believe almost anything," confirming Romero's film's potential as a critique of the overwhelming flood of images and framing commentary provided by the media in the wake of any major event.

Debra and Jason at different points in the film gesture to the camera as a weapon. Both gun and camera in the film are described as "too easy to use." And late in the film a dying Jason will say, "Shoot me," while handing his camera over to Debra, who then fires a gun into his head.[25] As here, the presence of the camera can be disturbing in-and-of-itself in fake found-footage horror films like 2008's *Home Movie*, the *Paranormal Activity* series (2009-2015), and the mockumentary film, *Lake Mungo* (discussed in the final section of this chapter). In these films, home video and surveillance cameras may or may not manifest the paranormal phenomena their characters believe themselves to be experiencing, but the very presence of this technology in the domestic sphere creates a blanket psychic disturbance for more than just the films' obsessive documentarians. The archival anxiety produced here can be read in terms of the pervasive state of

corporate, government and self-surveillance that has come to define a Web 2.0 subjectivity—one that has collapsed the public and private spheres into a state (and a State) of near-total visibility. Addressing this sense of public-private collapse, Mark Andrejevic cites Theodor Adorno's discussion of the 19th century bourgeois parlour's "window mirror" in *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (1989: 42; quoted in Andrejevic, 2007: 117), which reflected the outside world endlessly, bringing a safer semblance of public into the private space. Andrejevic likens this to the anecdote of a Texas man, "DotComGuy," who in 1999 isolated himself in his home for one year, acquiring all he needed from the Internet (2007: 116). For Andrejevic, the "conjunction of interiority with its apparent opposite" (2007: 117), escaping into the interior but recreating within it a fantasy of the public sphere, smacks of the "double movement of the impulse of interiorization: the attempt to domesticate the external world in the privacy of one's home or office and to extend the reach of a customized interior to encompass an increasing range and variety of spaces" (2007: 119). Andrejevic sees this as a sort of Web 2.0 perfection of the bourgeois entombment within the private sphere, though he goes on to explore the increased visibility of the users who become exposed through digital media to increasing monitoring and surveillance (2007: 126-7). There is also a degree of increased exposure of that interior sphere with the user's expanded "presence" over multiple social media sites, databases, applications, webcam sites, gaming platforms, and home surveillance footage. *Paranormal Activity 2* offers an example of archival anxiety actively brought into the home: when its suburban family members initially assume the disruptive demonic presence in their home to be an attempted burglary, they invest in a security surveillance system that gives them overhead wide-angle views of the main living spaces in and around their home. The film is cut together almost entirely of this surveillance footage, often in split-screen showing up to four images of the home—an effect that suggests an uncannily mediated and mapped "private" existence made ready for public consumption. This conceit is investigated further in *Home Movie*, with its domestic subjects retreating to the country to isolate themselves in an attempt to heal their psychopathic twins, yet keeping their family under constant video surveillance as though they had a public audience ultimately in mind.

In *Home Movie*, mock-amateur video footage serves multiple purposes, all of which are ultimately related to the disintegrating Poe family's attempts to impose their own vision of "family" upon each other. While the footage begins as a record of the family's supposedly

archetypal holiday activities (significant recordings happen on Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter), it becomes increasingly clear that the family is struggling for dominance over each other via their performances in, or control of, the video footage. Psychologist-mother, Claire, has purchased the video camera to document case studies of her clients; Reverend-and-father David Poe hijacks the camera to attempt absurd and delusional happy-family portraits (and later to record practice-sermons that he finds unconvincing). Both parents eventually turn to the camera privately as a sort of confessional, testifying to the fact that they have lost control of their increasingly violent (and psychopathic) twin children, Jack and Emily. And the twins themselves will finally take control of the camera to create "The Jack and Emily Show," starring their parents in the role of victims of their vengeance. At all times in this film, the presence of the camera is pervasive and disruptive; the only "lesson" that Jack and Emily learn is to equate possession of the camera with confirmation of their power over their parental oppressors. The Poes live in a hypermediated home of their own creation, riddled with the uncanny residue of their own battles for supremacy over each other via home video technology.

Camera-bearing characters like the Poe family, *Blair Witch*'s Heather Donahue, and *Diary of the Dead's* Jason Creed struggle against a growing sense that the events they wish to chronicle are monstrous in their resistance to capture; however, they continue to see the real as that which has to be recorded to be believed. And they equate their own control over the situation with their ability to dictate the spectacle to a potential audience. Characteristically, every member of the Poe family in *Home Movie* seems to live and act with the idea that there is a potential audience for their perpetual performance in front of the camera. David and Claire initially use the camera as a way to mask the turmoil bubbling up in their family—even to the point of adopting roles and donning costumes themselves—but they increasingly turn to the visual document as *evidence* of their children's pathological cruelty, and their increasing role as emotional victims of the twins. Whether literally masking themselves, or hiding behind their footage, the two Poe parents turn their camera on to shield themselves from present or future unpleasantness, as well as from any sense that they might be emotional abusers themselves. Jack and Emily Poe are abusive and violent, killing the family pets and torturing their school friends in their playhouse in the woods—but David and Claire, too, are abusers, forcing the twins to submit to their idyllic vision of family in front of the camera, and against their will. An early scene in particular shows the twins wearing Pilgrim costumes at Thanksgiving, forced by their parents into an

unintentionally farcical re-enactment of the so-called origins of America's most popular family holiday ritual. The moment is a clever subversion (and even perversion) of America's origin story, and an uncanny hint of the country's repressed colonial history. In the end, even the twisted Poe twins, Jack and Emily, do not *dispose* of their parents' instrument of domestic torture once they wrest control of it; instead, they turn to the camera to exploit their cathartic revenge-torture of Claire and David as evidence of their victory over them. The film ends with the twins posing at the dinner table, fork and knife in-hand and staring out at the camera in simultaneous acknowledgement of their audience and celebration of their own absurd parody of the videotaped Thanksgiving meal they had to endure at the film's opening. On the table: their parents, tied down and seemingly ready to be eaten alive. As a serious challenge to—and even mockery of—America's valorization of family values via the ridiculously affected behaviors captured by the two Poe parents, *Home Movie* becomes a terrifying and ironic enactment of the premise put forward by Patricia Zimmerman that, "[i]n amateur film, the family, dreams, nightmares, and elsewheres create new hybrids to define the nation differently" (Zimmerman, 2008b: 276). As in *Home Movie*, lived experience in fake found-footage horror films becomes mere raw material for the archive of visual records to which the characters see themselves contributing. This archive may be represented by the news media and by online visual databases like YouTube, but it is also part of the cultural imaginary—its sense of storage-as-memory, or storage-as-history becomes a kind of reality itself. Its size is ever-increasing, its extent ungraspable, and its space a liminal one constituting a collapse of public and private, where the subject-as-content-provider has a potential audience perpetually in mind. Contemplating one's own relationship to the accumulation and proliferation of images in such an archive becomes a frenzied state like that which *Unfriended* reveals—one of frantic, yet ultimately static, existence.

The Blair Witch Project, *Diary of the Dead* and *Home Movie* are fairly straightforwardly critical in their intentions to challenge the power of the image as truth-bearing, or as a viable stand-in for history or memory. *Blair Witch* manifests this challenge through its introduction of spatial and temporal anomalies in its diegesis, as well as through a meta-textual existence that complicates the film's ontological viability. The film's website, for example, places it on a timeline of manifestations as one, incomplete textual record among many that contribute to the Blair Witch folklore, including a production diary by Heather Donahue, and a more conventional pseudo-documentary, *Curse of the Blair Witch*, which suggests yet another anomaly: the

impossibility of the film's footage ever having been found at all. George A. Romero's *Diary of the Dead* identifies itself as a blatant manipulation *and* a critique of such media manipulations—a carefully-constructed document that, in the words of its filmmaker-protagonist, "hop[es] to scare you, so that maybe you'll wake up." And *Home Movie* constructs an entire narrative around the home movie as less a raw record than a concept—that the reality of the home movie is always-already a performed reflection of the way amateur filmmakers see and confront the world, and want it to see and confront them. In the home movie, the "'real' and the 'performed' act is twofold" (Forgács, 2008: 52). That is, the home movie is both a localized and personal record of "history from below" (Jim Sharpe, quoted in Zimmerman, 2008a: 3) and a manipulation, with both subversive and reactionary potential in terms of its offering access to otherwise unsanctioned voices and experiences of subjects who may nonetheless appeal to sanctioned narratives of history. In their evocation of archival anxiety, and their self-conscious investigation of this troubled subjectivity and its implications, these films open up possible escape routes in the hallucinatory spectacle they draw from to form their mock visual documents.

These films equivocate on whether the subjectivities they trace are more like the idle observer, absorbed gawker, or engaged investigator that Benjamin traces. The archival anxieties they outline show their obsessive recorders to actively seek an investigative role, only to be overwhelmed by a task that reduces them to mere gawkers, contributors to the hypermediated existence that strips them of agency. In Romero's *Diary of the Dead*, reluctant filmmaker Debra Moynihan calls the image archive into question, directly identifying her project as a deliberate manipulation of her found footage to wrench some meaning out of it. And yet in doing so, she simultaneously betrays a belief in her ability to present the footage (and the images themselves) as a way of getting to the truth of the trauma she documents:

> We made a film, the one I'm going to show you now. Actually, Jason was the one who wanted to make it. […] He wanted to upload it so that people—you—could be told the truth. The film was shot with a Panasonic HDX-900 and an HBX-200. I did the final cut on Jason's laptop. I've added music occasionally for effect, hoping to scare you. You see, in addition to trying to tell you the truth, I *am* hoping to scare you, so that maybe you'll wake up. Maybe you won't make any of the same mistakes that we made. Anyway, here it is, Jason Creed's *The Death of Death*.

As exemplified here, the fake-found-footage horror film makes constant reference to the presence of the camera, not just as a recording device, but as an object worthy of introduction in its own right. Debra gives us the make and model of the cameras that were used to create the film's footage. In this and other fake found-footage horror films, characters turn cameras upon themselves in mirrors, filming themselves in the act of filming; they speak to the camera, as Heather does in *Blair Witch*; and, as I mentioned before, they often see the camera as a weapon. The film *Quarantine*, the 2008 remake of the Spanish film, *[rec]*, takes this notion perhaps to its most literal and bodily implications when the news cameraman who shoots the entire film saves the lives of three people by using the camera itself to bash in the head of an aggressive, infected female victim. As the lens thrusts downward and into the skull of the woman, amidst the crunching sounds of bone and the imagery of viscous folds of red zombie flesh, the camera takes on multiple powers as recorder of the event, revelatory technology, and primitive tool for bludgeoning one's enemies. Ultimately, the camera means death.

In the context of Romero's overt critique of archival compulsions throughout *Diary of the Dead*, the seemingly nonsensical title of Jason Creed's film, *The Death of Death*, serves as not just a reference to a world of the living dead—where "death" has taken on a new, hybrid meaning—but also as an indication of Jason's misguided faith in the media archive. The "death of death" is, perhaps, Romero's no-jokes-aside allusion both to a death-obsessed public's craving for carnage, and to the futility of its efforts to document itself through spectacle. That is, Jason Creed's title indicates his belief that his exposé will have some permanence and importance in the archive of history, that it will exert a powerful fixing of the fleeting moment (embalming it, or to use the film's own terms, making it "living dead"). But Creed's title also suggests an oblique parallel to the Derridian notion of the archival process as a kind of eulogy—a collecting of history for posterity to assign it new meaning in an archive. In archival practice, "consignation" or "gathering together" (Derrida, 1995: 10) of experience to a localizable, governable (privileged and institutionally sanctioned) place signifies "order," but at the same time that ordering undermines experience by drawing a circle around something that categorizes it as *this thing*, and no longer any other thing. For Derrida, the archive "will never be either memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience. On the contrary: the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory" (1995: 14).[26] The compulsive recorders in fake found-footage horror are something less than Benjaminian collectors

repurposing the tools of mass media to recover the detritus of culture, recovering the shock of everyday; instead, they have manifested an archival death drive to collect anything and everything for an imagined archive of history, out there, that grows increasingly and exponentially too large to be comprehended.

Debra's framing voice-over in *Diary*'s opening moments complicate her completion of *The Death of Death* as having a dual motive: first, it is a critique of the visual archive she draws upon (including Creed's footage), and second, it is a heroic effort of truth-telling that adds to the traditional narrative of the archive as a collection of important documents preserved for posterity. The message is mixed. Debra's equivocal status here is a symptom of the fake-found-footage horror film's constant confirmation of the camera-bearer's right to document as a sort of ethical imperative, no matter how much they feature other characters skeptical of said imperative: "Tape everything," says *Quarantine*'s eager newscaster. "People need to see what's going on in here." This particular film misses an opportunity to call into question the motives for such a claim that people "*need* to see" anything. Even when she later screams at her cameraman, "Did you get that?" after a brutal death is captured on video, and then demands, "Show it to me," the newscaster's motives are treated as forthright—her own problematic need to contribute spectacular imagery to the spectacle comes with an ethical imperative that goes unchallenged in the film, though her desire to review it for herself in all its bloody glory on playback provides one of the film's more disturbing moments. In *Blair Witch*, Heather Donahue continually comes under fire for her continued devotion to documenting the film's strange events. When fellow filmmaker, Josh, attacks the camera she holds, screaming: "Turn the fucking thing off!" Heather's reply establishes her as a sufferer for a cause similar to *Quarantine*'s newscaster: "I wanna go home, but it's important—I just wanna get what we can." In *Cloverfield*, when the cameraman is asked incredulously by a friend, "Are you still filming?" he responds: "People are gonna want to know how it all went down. […] People need to see this, you know? This is gonna be important. People are gonna watch this." The reason it seems to be so "important" for all of these obsessive documenters to continue filming is linked not just to capturing the truth of a *moment*, but to contributing to the making of an *event* that is ultimately (re)viewable at a later date—to parse out to the public every little part of the event as spectacle, so that they might have greater emotional access to it through being privileged to "see" more of it. The implicit *faith* of these "heroic" documenters that the accumulation of images will lead to a complete picture

archive of the truth is clear in their justification of their goals. Even *Home Movie*'s David Poe, who initially creates his footage as an elaborate *denial*, eventually attempts to use his camera to document his version of the harsher truth he has come to admit about his morally bankrupt, sadistic children. One such disturbing scene shows his attempt to exorcise his "possessed" children by tying them to their beds and physically abusing them. The moment can be read both as a fevered defense of David's beliefs and actions, and, ironically, as a record of abusive tendencies he has manifested in more subtle ways throughout the film with the ridiculously farcical role-playing he forces his family to perform for the camera. David's act of witnessing in this scene, however, is a betrayal of his original goal: he attempts to chronicle his experience as a defense, but ultimately offers up evidence for a confession. Literary precursors to this inverted narrative in the American Gothic tradition include tales such as Poe's first-person monologue, "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), and the trial monologue of the religious fanatic, Theodore Wieland, in Charles Brockden-Brown's 1798 novel, *Wieland*. Both of these narrators see their acts of witnessing as a defense of their "logical" murders of their loved ones, but they betray themselves with "evidence" based upon delusional, irrational and highly emotional readings of their surroundings. As in these early American Gothic tales, the account that David Poe purports to offer in *Home Movie* belies a darker reality that lies traceable only around the edges of the chronicler's intention. Above all, these films make a spectacle of the medium itself. This and other fake found-footage works relentlessly maintain an aesthetics based upon showing little, even as their characters struggle obsessively to show all.

This struggle parallels similar acts of investigation and interpretation in the gothumentary, which, as I argue in Chapter II, force a shift from documenter to spectator in searching for knowledge. Late in *Home Movie*, for example, Jack challenges the spectator, in direct address to the camera: "Let's have a staring contest. I dare you to stare until our movie's done." This irreverent dare suggests that Jack and Emily can add a twisted sense of humor to their already confirmed psychopathy, and yet in such moments they express an awareness of the horror film's conventionalization of a returned gaze that confronts spectators with their own desire for visual and narrative mastery (and perhaps the documentary viewer's desire for exploitative imagery presented as mere evidence). This desire for mastery is one that *Home Movie* enacts through canny gestures to the power of amateur footage ostensiblly to "transform" history into "something particular, local, specific" and communal (Zimmerman, 2008a: 17); that is, to create

"history as memory generated from the point of view of participants" (Zimmerman, 2008a: 20). And yet, as Dovey remarks, there survives in personal footage the same structures of power that overwhelm private experience by ascribing it to a preconceived narrative or goal. As Patricia Zimmerman notes, "The amateur camera mediates between self and fantasy, between self and others" (2008b: 276). The "heteroglossic" (Zimmerman, 2008b: 277) nature of the home movie maker's perspective and impact on historical narratives is potentially both revolutionary and reactionary. Following this line of criticism, Péter Forgács situates the home movie maker "somewhere between the citizen and the voyeur" (2008a: 51). The archival anxieties traced in fake found-footage come not solely out of a misguided obsession to capture images for an official history, but from the subject's desire to act as witness to potentially forgotten moments, to traces that they deem must be accounted for, to those fragmentary moments that complicate and pluralize history—to history from below. But they can also, as Derrida tells us, function in service of repression.

Home Movie enacts this drama of repression through its dramatization of a struggle to be a good witness versus the desire to assert control. In *Home Movie*, the footage is at the center of a power struggle: it is shot by David Poe to maintain an illusion of a stable, god-fearing American family; by Claire Poe to shore up her trust in the institutional power of psychoanalysis and medicative treatment; and later supplemented and edited by Jack and Emily Poe to expose everything their parents stand for as a sham. What all four characters do share, however, is the sense that the footage they present has an audience. The Poe parents construct an elaborate act of denial not only in their attempt at home movie-making as totalizing fantasy, but even before this by removing their troubled children from the city to an idyllic rural setting, withdrawing into an isolated domestic haven. There is a metaphorical relationship between the film's setting and the archive as a space of consignation and forgetting. Disturbing hints of both a repressed recent family history and a colonial American past that haunts the present are suggested in the family's relocation from the city to a colonial home, perched at the edge of—even surrounded by—forest. The children's playhouse is constructed decidedly out in the woods—home to the "savages" in the lore of American historical origins narratives. And the children react violently to their being dressed up as Pilgrims, refusing to give thanks on the American holiday most associated with a ritualized erasure of violence and genocide. David and Claire Poe in the film are figured as obsessed with progress and forgetting—recuperating through moving forward, moving on. And

their use of certain tools of denial or deferral (bedtime storytelling, psychiatric medication, and, of course, video recording of a bankrupt family fantasy) are the dominant force in achieving their goals. The Poe children are the savage reminders of a legacy of violence as much as they are the inheritors of it. Throughout *Home Movie*, David Poe has extended the colonial settler fantasy by trying to teach his children Boy Scout-style survival skills—all of which Jack and Emily eventually use against both parents. But David's fantasy is ironically undercut if we consider the kind of power the camera has had in similar colonial framings by ethnographic portraits. The camera, like the written chronicle, can be used to reframe or rewrite history and place. As Trinh T. Minh-ha has argued of the different quests for the most "transparent" or "truest" documentary form, "it is therefore important also to keep on asking: How is truth being ruled?" (1993: 97). In *Home Movie*, it is the camera itself, which, via both parents, the twins learn to view as a tool of power, a weapon against the oppressive delusions of normality maintained by their parents, and an instrument with which they can assert the primacy of their own fantasy. At the center of all of this re-inscription—and forgetting—is the camera, a technology associated with the ability to "rule."

The consistent associations of the camera lens with acts that are primitive, violent, abusive, obsessive, intrusive and degenerative in these films suggests an anti-revelatory modality for the fake found-footage horror film. If recording technology is in these films a form of "modern magic," to borrow Rachel O. Moore's (2000) phrase, that magic is decidedly in service of the inscription of one's position in the historical narrative through dictation and manipulation. *Home Movie* and *Diary of the Dead* confront us directly as dramas of struggle for the power to, by turns, investigate and manipulate the real. In *The Blair Witch Project*, it is often the film's emphasis on frenetic framing and darkness that, according to James Keller, "draw[s] attention to the camera as a limited and limiting artistic medium as opposed to a window on reality" (2004: 56). I would add that *Blair Witch* is nothing if not a film that asks its spectators to contemplate the textures and surfaces of its black-and-white film and video footage. The film turns to abstraction via its featuring of blur, frenetic movement, shadows, high-contrast spotlighting, and pure blackness. It is not just a drama of the presence of the camera, but a film that reaches out to spectators through the materiality of the medium. Keller adds that the "audience becomes hyperconscious of the camera's presence" because of a lack of "artful, well-designed images" (2004: 56) in the film. This phrasing does the film a disservice, considering that *Blair Witch* is

chock-full of starkly beautiful, poetic moments of pause where its filmmakers turn their cameras on the forest around them, and the canopy of leaves above them, seemingly trying to break through with their lenses to a distant sky. The lens here takes on a power of both enlightenment rationality *and* spiritual transcendence, neither of which rescues the characters from their Platonic cave of illusions. However, Keller's observation that the presencing of the camera itself as a fallible, visible technology in *Blair Witch*—something like a dirty window, a smearing of the real that reveals the medium, not the transparency typically sought by efforts at realism—is in keeping with the fake found-footage horror film's sense of Gothic realism more generally.

The Blair Witch Project, *Diary of the Dead* and *Home Movie* all play out like premature burials for the mock-social actors who feature prominently in their diegesis. *Blair Witch* is footage found, literally buried; *Diary of the Dead* effectively embeds Jason Creed's posthumous exposé within a filmic revision completed by Debra, a factor that calls into question whose "diary" the film is meant to be; and *Home Movie* becomes the sinister and deadly "Jack and Emily Show," a record of the masterfully orchestrated termination of their parents by the Poe twins. Jack and Emily's footage seals the fate of their parents not only in the film's final images of the twins posed at the dinner table and seemingly prepared to ritually cannibalize them, but also in one disconcerting moment where the footage that we watch is suddenly *rewound* by an unseen hand. To view *Home Movie* is, then, not the spectator's viewing experience alone, but is a privileged experience presumably allowed for and guided by Jack and Emily, remote in-hand. The footage we see in *Home Movie* is not only a presentation by Jack and Emily for the audience of the "Jack and Emily Show," but also a private *re-viewing* of the footage by a triumphant Jack and Emily that the spectator sits in on with seemingly fly-on-the-wall invisibility. Here, *Home Movie*'s fated Poe family recall the characters lost in *Blair Witch*'s endlessly looping forest; the events of the film constitute a visual preservation of a "hidden" (Zimmerman, 2008a: 22) and localized domestic trauma that can be endlessly scanned, paused, rewound and reviewed.

Fake found-footage horror films often pit their protagonists' impassioned recording of traumatic events against the general impression that the trauma is not "gettable" in its entirety—that it is variously too fleeting, frenetic, fragmented or vast to capture, or that it is simply not there to be recorded at all. Though they stage a desire to archive, the films are ultimately about the impossibility of achieving a coherent narrative or voice via the characters' contributions. They are the fictional equivalent of the gothumentary in that they presume a reality that is greater

in every way than our attempts to draw circles around it emotionally, or to chronicle our experience of it comprehensively in our narratives. In the absence of a visible, viable object to document, or of any logical response to an overdetermination of such evidence, the characters invariably turn the camera upon themselves through an urge to fill the frame with *something*. This process is especially apparent in *Blair Witch*, whose filmmakers are constantly recording but never seem to capture anything but themselves, [27] their increasingly dread-inducing surroundings, or the haptic surfaces of a limited medium. In *Blair Witch*, a sense that there is potentially nothing there at all to record drives the film, pushes its documenters to continue recording as long as it takes to reveal something meaningful, or until they, too, are swallowed up in that absence that they have so painstakingly documented—until they become the very monsters they seek. In this way, the fake found-footage horror film—like the gothumentary, and the gothic realism of 1940s horror—turns a reflexive gaze upon the user's usually misguided trust in technologies to enact some sort of rescue from the shock of experience. Whether they use the camera lens to soften the blows of their reality, or attempt to turn the critical eye of detection on such efforts, these films show us that the greater critique lies in exploring the productive impasses to which these efforts lead us.

III. Haptic Tactics and Dreadful Revelation: Spirit Cinematography in *Lake Mungo*

I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the 2008 mockumentary horror film, *Lake Mungo* (Joel Anderson), because it is something of a compendium of this study's focus on the interwoven epistemologies of horror and documentary. Like *The Blair Witch Project*, writer-director Joel Anderson's Australian sleeper is a total fiction, but it presents itself as a straightforward pseudo-documentary with a monster at its center. Through this framework, it thematizes issues around the remediation of older media by newer media, featuring photography, film, video and digital imagery, all combined in service of one purpose: to resurrect (both supernaturally and technologically) the dead subject at its center. As with so many films concerned in this study, both fiction and nonfiction, *Lake Mungo* touches upon anxieties around film, video and digital representation in its investigation of an absent, enigmatic subject who cannot be fully represented. The film's exceedingly melancholy tone underscores both the death of Alice Palmer and the (potential) death or obsolescence of the media that manifest or feature

her image and voice. The film draws parallels between these issues and the complicated reception and uncanny power of spirit photography at the turn of the 20th century. In doing so, *Lake Mungo* traces a genealogy of anxieties around "new" media stretching from the eerily revelatory potential of the still photograph, through the moving image, to the potentially dreadful future announced by digital imagery. As I will discuss later, the film displaces focus on the embodiment of the ghostly Alice Palmer—monstrous in its resistance to full capture—turning instead to the materiality of the different media it incorporates to encourage a "haptic," or tactile, sensorial spectatorship. Ultimately, the film becomes a complex look at the ambivalent attitudes—from fascination, to paranoia, to terror—that attend the current relationship to visual media, and the kind of reality they both respond to, and inform.

Lake Mungo is a film about getting lost, being ghostly, being archived. The film explores archival anxiety in self-conscious ways that wrest 21st-century mockumentary and fake found-footage horror cinema back to their roots in turn-of-the-20th-century anxieties attending the "new" medium of cinema, its remediation of photography, and the disorienting effects of these technologies on subjectivity and embodiment. An early title card frames the film as a "record of ... events" in which young drowning victim Alice Palmer appears posthumously to her family as a spectral image in a variety of media, including photographs, cell phone footage, and amateur video recordings. Throughout the film, Anderson emulates a classical expository pseudo-documentary aesthetic of probing zooms, surface-scanning of archival material, and voice-over testimonial and analysis, to construct an epistephilic, scopophilic and sensorial expectation of a future visual manifestation of the spectral Alice. I include "sensorial" because the techno-dread that *Lake Mungo* generates is not exclusively due to the desired photographic and cinematographic revelation of a ghostly embodiment of Alice; it is also the result of the film's haptic visuality. That is, *Lake Mungo* highlights the very materiality of filmic, video and digital surfaces—the scratch, grain, pixilation, and digital and aural noise that emphasize the media themselves as objects worthy of reflection. As Laura U. Marks defines it, haptic cinema appeals to the tactility of the medium not as an obstruction to seeing clearly, but to increase the spectator's sensorial relationship to, and awareness of the medium. For Marks, haptic tactics like "changes in focus, graininess […], and effects of under-and overexposure" that emphasize surface flatness and lack of depth "discourage the viewer from distinguishing objects [within the diegesis] and encourage a relationship to the screen as a whole" (Marks, 2000: 172). These

effects, often encouraged by experimental filmmakers by purposely using expired film, burying it underground, or baking it in ovens, create an effect that emphasizes the materiality of the film. In films like *Decasia* (2002) and *The Great Flood* (2012), Bill Morrison has constructed a critical history and a sense of mournful remembrance from footage found in various stages of sublime decay. An uncanny glitch aesthetic also has become a characteristic technique in experimental video art, such as Gratuitous Art Films' video glitch piece, *Thistle* (2009), which features analog imagery that is stretched and distressed, the images often sliding off frame or reduced to glowing primary colors that remove detail to highlight the more expressionistic surfaces of the medium. Lucas Hilderbrand, discusses similar haptic effects—"rolling black lines," pixilation, and distorted sound (2004: 70-71, 78)—that appear as evidence of generational loss of resolution typical of copying, filming and re-copying analogue video images. Hilderbrand's focus is on the degenerated image and sound quality of Todd Haynes's *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (1988), a factor both built into the film's aesthetic of recording and then filming images from television screens, and augmented by the difficult-to-find film's primary mode of reception on bootlegged video copies. Like the more popular films discussed in this chapter, the primary focus of such films is on the sensorial and critical implications of contemplating the limitations of the medium itself.

The Blair Witch Project, for example, draws thematic weight and sensorial shock from the over-lit faces popping out of grainy-black nighttime footage like hazy moons, features that strip its subjects of embodiment in the diegesis and function to smear them into the subsuming murk of video-night. Additionally, its frenetic film and video camera movement produces what might be called a haptic blur—a sustained visual smudge—that can encourage a spectatorial awareness of the presence of frame, screen, and medium materiality. While *Lake Mungo* is more deliberated and measured in pace, and more meditative and somber in tone, than *Blair Witch*, Anderson creates a similar visual tactility with slow, probing zooms that pull the gaze onto and into the image surfaces, emphasizing, in effect, a textured, layered, palimpsestic visuality. The film's visual "evidence" of Alice primarily consists of degraded, glitchy, murky and blurred film and video images that only become further abstracted and expressionistic with sustained scanning and probing. As I discuss further on, Alice's brother, Mathew, will later combine both early photographic techniques used to create spirit photography, with the avant-garde strategies above—such as the re-videotaping of images played on video screens—to create a fairly

elaborate hoax of Alice's haunting. The suggestiveness of Alice's presence in these images—and the very believability of her appearing supernaturally—occurs almost entirely through the obscurity, not the clarity, of such images. The dispersal of Alice's image (when she does appear) over multiple visual documents and formats—home movies, family photographs, police and news footage, forensic video and photographs, televisual images, hoax footage and photographs, video and aural recordings of her secret sessions with a medium, and even a sex tape—suggests the impossibility of a comprehensive representation of Alice as a (mock-) documentary subject, whether alive or ghost, however. And it is this effect that situates the film within Gothic realism.

The resulting dread and desire for revelation—for a full embodiment of Alice that never really comes—renders her a potentially monstrous absence worthy of several of the gothumentary subjects discussed in Chapter II. It would seem, then, that the different media at play in *Lake Mungo*—photography, film, video, digital imagery—themselves get in the way of a scopophilic, epistephilic drive. The result might be something like the pre-cable, pre-satellite situation of trying to tune into a late-night horror film on a staticky channel. As Andrew Schopp suggests of *The Blair Witch Project*, there may remain a "disturbing relationship between immediacy and obscurity" (2004: 137) in *Lake Mungo*'s highlighting the limitations of its various media representations. However, the heightened surfaces and materiality of the different media that form *Lake Mungo*'s aesthetic are themselves spectral enough to *supplant* our need for representation of a ghostly Alice (and, I would argue, of the titular monster of *Blair Witch*). Again, as in the gothumentary's treatment of the historical world, *Lake Mungo* becomes something of an extended meditation on how much of documentary desire resides in a sensory experience derived from a spectacle of absence. Alice's presence in *Lake Mungo* comes to us not just from what *glimpses* we have of her, but from the sense of her imminence suggested by the expressionistic—even painterly—materiality of the media that attempt to make her visible. The spectacular and spectral dispersal and fragmentation of Alice's body in the film across various visual surfaces attract the spectator's pleasurable and dread-filled gaze. The footage that attempts to give Alice presence thus becomes a monstrous object worthy of equal investment and scrutiny. In other words, Anderson's film is a meditation on both the limitations and *intimations* of visual technologies and documentary form to give Alice a clear voice and presence. Ultimately, despite its pseudo-documentary appeals to what Noel Carroll terms horror's typically narrative-driven "drama of iterated disclosure" (2002: 35) of a monstrous entity, *Lake Mungo* is also a meditation

on the productive sensations generated by gazing upon the medium itself, and "the way the eye is compelled to 'touch'" (Marks, 2000: 173) the medium.

Lake Mungo is a ghost story about the mourning process, a cinematic *memento mori* that evokes the same desire to memorialize the dead as the spirit photographs it references in its opening title sequence. The experience of mourning sets up conditions for the exploration of belief and skepticism that lie behind two of the major popular uses of early photography: Memorial and Spirit Photography. Spirit (or Ghost) Photography was a popular practice in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the typical spirit photograph showing stone-faced men and women staring out blankly at the camera with hollow-eyed apparitions (commonly called "extras") fading in from a shadowy curtained background behind them, or looming over them from above. These silent observers from an ethereal realm beyond the reach of the naked eye could be produced by any number of techniques of double exposure, including the uncanny palimpsest-like images created accidentally when the residue of images retained on photographic plates are imprinted upon subsequent exposures. *Lake Mungo*'s citations of spirit photography in its opening sequence marks its exploration of loss and melancholia as a form of archival anxiety—here, a will by the mourning subject to render the lost loved one present through visual media. Like the practice of Memorial (also called Post-mortem) Photography—which featured images such as deceased children posed as though sleeping or at play, and grieving parents and spouses in mourning poses cradling or gazing upon their lost loved ones—spirit photography came at a time when the new photographic medium suggested the technological potential of arresting time, aiding memory, and thereby rendering for the mourner an object on which to focus their grief.[28] Ghostly extras in spirit photographs often gesture towards the living sitter, or place a comforting hand upon the sitter's shoulders—poses that obviously are meant to gently reassure the living that their loved ones live on in spirit as well as memory.[29] In this context, *Lake Mungo* marks itself as a kind of *spirit cinematography*,[30] teasing out 21st-century attitudes towards visual media that derive from an early 20th-century revelatory tradition of cinephilia. This parallel that the film makes between current hesitations around film, video and digital technology and the conflicted reception of earlier recording technologies seen as magically tuned into another, more spectral or invisible reality, requires some contextualization.

Significantly, the introduction and popularity of spirit photography in the mid-19th century coincided with what Murray Leeder (channeling Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Pereen [2010:

xviii]) calls the "'scientification' of the supernatural, in which hauntings are justified with references to electromagnetism, mesmerism, telegraphy, etc." (2015: 42), as well as with the advent of the Spiritualist movement, which quickly turned to photographic technology as documentary evidence of its claim that there was an *other* reality, a ghost-haunted sphere reproducible or accessible only by technological means. This reality, more sensed than seen, required a new technological medium that could capture its combinatory feelings of disturbing otherness and uncanny closeness; whatever technology documented this ulterior reality would be the record of a "spiritual truth" in the words of American spirit photographer William Mumler (quoted in Kaplan, 2003: 19), one of the most important practitioners of the craft. The paradox here is, of course, that spirit photography both uses the photographic medium as visual *evidence* in its indexical relationship to the referent, and—because it is also a fabrication—highlights photography's status as a *manipulation* or *mediation* of the referent. In this way, the practice of spirit photography anticipated longstanding debates on whether photography should be classed as a technology or an art form. In *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*, Geoffrey Batchen argues, for example, that still photography "is consistently positioned by its commentators within some sort of play between activity and passivity, presence and absence, time and space, fixity and transiency, observer and observed, real and representation, original and imitation, original and difference" (1997: 179). The spirit photograph is itself a figuration of this contested theoretical ground of irreconcilable binaries regarding the practice of photography.

As one of the 19th century's new media, photography raised issues posed by new communications technologies, especially around the subject's position within a world of images, that would preoccupy 20th century media scholars as well. Jeffrey Sconce has argued, for example, that "electronic presence" (2000: 6) from the telegraph to the television and on into digital media, has seen the body increasingly disseminated and fragmented in space and time, causing new anxieties around presence and embodiment with the advent each new medium that extends the subject into an increasingly virtual reality. With telegraphy, for example the subject could communicate over vast distance with unimaginable speed, collapsing vast spaces together in an instantaneous moment; and with wireless, telephony and radio, the disembodied voice could enter other spaces, be both here and there, "haunting" the ether (Sconce, 2000). Telegraphy was quickly taken up by the Spiritualist movement in the form of the "spiritual telegraph," which, like a human medium, could transmit messages from the spirit world seen as a constant electronic

data stream (2000: 12-14, 24). Photography was itself another type of haunting, a memorial record of a dead moment (and eventually a dead subject) that could stare back at the observer. Spirit photography made this uncanny implication explicit. Historically, it spoke to a general cultural reality produced by high infant death rates and a general malaise caused by a rapidly industrializing and secularizing Europe and America, but it also was met with a fairly sophisticated reception by the public. Audiences of spirit photography are said to have negotiated between regarding the spirit photograph as a mode of entertainment *and* as a suggestion of paranormal or preternatural phenomena. Clement Chéroux, for example, makes it clear that spirit photography developed two simultaneous trends, one straightforwardly "recreational" and used in service of promotional imagery for phantasmagoria shows of Henri Robin, for example; and the other an earnest and deliberate attempt to create a record of spirits on film" (2004: 46). Other practices would follow, such as the Polaroid "thoughtography" experiments in the 1960s by Chicago bellhop and self-proclaimed psychic Ted Serios, which were purportedly a record of Serios's thoughts imprinted directly onto the film.[31] In an observation that implies some of the more esoteric desires attending documentary discussed in this study, photography and new media scholar Louis Kaplan has spoken of spirit photography as a "new type of documentary method" that "underscores the use of new technology to document" (2009, n.p.). Kaplan also sees the practice of spirit photography as part of the 19th century "technological imaginary" that ultimately "disturbs photography's truth claims" (2009, n.p.). The practice of spirit photography generated intense skepticism from critics who dreaded the potentially full-scale manipulation of the public by what they saw as a form of entertainment given credence as document. Kaplan relates such negotiations to a dichotomy of skepticism and paranoia around images in the 19th century, adding the suggestion that the gaze of the dead loved one looking down upon the living also suggests an attitude of surveillance—that the dead affix a constant gaze upon the living that can only be captured visually by photography. This is, again, reality as configured by a phantasmagoric "field of cross-gazes" (Cassetti, 2004: 14). For Kaplan, "the satisfied consumer who invests in spirit photography acknowledges the paranoid impulse in becoming subject to the gaze of the dead relative or friend who watches (and watches over) from beyond the grave" (2003: 23). Within this dual sense of "being-watched and being-watched-over" (2003: 27), there is a "slippage between being pursued and in pursuit" (2003: 27). If the former sense (of being-watched) suggests the anxiety of being at the center of a panoptic multifarious gaze, the latter

sense (of being-watched-over) offers an odd sort of "comfort and hope" in the protective, enveloping "surveillance" by dead loved ones (Kaplan, 2003: 23). The liminal positionality of being pursued by, and in pursuit of one's place in this space of gazes suggests the modern subject position discussed earlier in this chapter with reference to Poe's "The Man of the Crowd"; that is, the roving subjectivity that exists both to look and to be looked at, both pursuer-observer and pursued-observed. And the alternating skepticism and belief that Kaplan argues met the practice of spirit photography has its parallels in the ambivalent attitude towards images and clips posted as evidence on databases like YouTube.

A world under the surveillance of a constant, ghostly eye—of the past, of mourning, of loss—is a paranoid world. Kaplan deploys a number of frameworks in service of his argument that attitudes towards spirit photography in its heyday were indicative of deep paranoia in both its skeptics and believers. For the skeptics, this paranoia revolves around the potential for photography to manipulate reality through trickery—that is, to pick up on the medium's potential for creating compelling illusions because of its simultaneous indexical status as a "record" of the real. The skeptic worries about the potential political implications of uses of the medium to dupe the spectator. But, according to Kaplan, the believers, too, are paranoid in that their desire for proof of a spirit realm watching over them shows them willingly to accept a role as essentially—even necessarily—haunted subjects. Here we find the Gothic tradition alive and well as a paradigmatic force in the way people think of their reality—that is, a present swarming with surveillance that can be read as both protective and oppressive. In the typical spirit photograph, the deceased loved one can usually be seen to be observing the sitter. Kaplan argues that this omnipresence of the invisible dead, made visible via photography, acts as a kind of surveillance that is both desired in its reassurance that the deceased will always be with their progeny, and also uncannily disturbing in its implications of an accumulation of gazes. Kaplan here alludes to the Lacanian notion of the unfixed gaze—the subject's sense of a ubiquitous gaze that comes from everywhere and nowhere—as well as to Foucault's use of Bentham's Panopticon, where prisoners live in cells arranged around a central observation tower under threat of a constant, scrutinizing gaze that they eventually internalize. In both senses, the observed subject adapts the disciplining gaze as his/her own way of constructing self. There are obvious connections here to the kind of paranoia generated by contemporary surveillance of so much of public space, from security cameras to Google Earth. Kaplan's investigations of spirit photography are thus

conceptually useful for looking at films that draw out anxieties around how new technologies serve, disserve, and distract their users.

The paranoid worldview that Kaplan sees dramatized in spirit photography has parallels particularly in the kind of "new paranoid" style one finds in reality horror films' frenetic filmmaker-characters attempting to capture every angle and bit of a reality that disturbs them. The creation of new images for a growing visual archive-of-everything made possible by 21st century visual technologies is both comforting and potentially disturbing. There is here the millennial sense that technology will eventually elude the conceptual grasp of the everyday subject—that the technologies we use to observe the world will somehow gaze back at, and reveal us. In this context, the meshing of horror and actuality in films like *Paranormal Activity* and *Unfriended*—both of which turn on the technologically-mediated revelation of unseen realities—seems a natural aesthetic hybrid. The burden of proof of many a horror work rests on the narrator or chronicler of untold and impossible events, working against the odds posed by nature and his/her audience. It is perhaps the idea of the horror story as proof of something thought to be unprovable, impossible, or so shockingly traumatic that it cannot be digested, that makes documentary aesthetics and rhetoric so attractive to horror filmmakers who wish to exploit horror's particular epistephilic thrust in films such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and its cinematic descendent, *Lake Mungo* (2008).

Like the spirit photography that inspired it, *Lake Mungo* equates the mourning process with anxieties around conjuring forms for remembering, and with the uncanny power of the cinematic medium's complex archival temporality—its making present the (dead) past. The film is thus Gothic-realist in its emphasis on both the limitations of visual representations of reality, and those representations' seemingly preternatural ability to conjure other, more affective realities. Here one finds what Doane calls the "pathos of archival desire" the idea that one (in Kracauer's words in his seminal essay, "On Photography") experiences a "shudder" (quoted in Doane, 2002: 23) regarding the photograph's (and, Doane adds, film's) "mak[ing] visible not a knowledge of the original but a certain passing temporal configuration" (Doane, 2002: 23)—a dead moment. A sort of highlighting of this effect occurs in *Lake Mungo*'s first line, spoken posthumously by the subject at the film's center, Alice Palmer, in voice-over, over images of 19th- and early 20th-century spirit photographs by Edward Wyllie, William Hope and others: "I feel like something bad is going to happen to me; I feel like something bad <u>has</u> happened." The

sequence continues with Anderson's camera scanning and pushing closer into the grain of the series of tightly-framed spirit photographs that make up the sequence.[32] We next hear Alice's boyfriend, Jason Whittle, whose comment undercuts some of the power of these images: "It helps people deal with their loss […] making up stories about ghosts." In setting up Jason Whittle's comment as a kind of retort to Alice's, the sequence initiates a strain of skepticism around both the film's paranormal events, and the revelatory powers of visual media. Like the opening sequence of the gothumentary *Cropsey*, discussed in chapter II, this sequence in *Lake Mungo* self-consciously recalls both the Gothic's emphasis on haunted subjectivity, and pseudo-documentary investigations of the limitations of rational discourse, here inviting spectators to make direct links between ostensibly paranormal events and the uncanny-revelatory powers of the cinema to capture them.

Alice's voice in the opening sequence comes to us posthumously—from a recording, we learn later in the film, of one of her therapy sessions with a psychic advisor, Ray Kemeney. Alice's invocation of time conflates two temporalities—of something dreadful that "is going to happen" and that already "*has* happened"—a suggestion of the cinema's phantasmal technological recreation of the past before the spectator's eyes. The odd temporality expressed in Alice's sentiment seems an uncanny echo of comments by one of cinema's earliest revelatory theoreticians, Jean Epstein: "The present is an uneasy convention. In the flow of time it is an exception to time. It eludes the chronometer. You look at your watch; strictly speaking the present is no longer there; and strictly speaking it is there again, and always will be from one midnight to the next. I think, therefore I *was*" (quoted in Stern, 1997: 352). Alice's comment indicates that she feels she is stranded in a temporally liminal state that cannot be pinpointed, just as she will be later on as a ghost to be captured by various recording technologies that also strand her (and others) in between temporalities. For, in *Lake Mungo*—as in *Unfriended* and, to some degree, *The Blair Witch Project* and other fake found-footage horror films—to be recorded is to be ghostly, both there and not there, and both past and present, whether you're alive or dead.

This techno-dread in the film is tied also to its failure to fully document—or, better, conjure—Alice. Like its nonfiction counterpart in the gothumentary film, *Lake Mungo* (mock-) documents a subject that is both everywhere and nowhere, spread across various media but never fully embodied in the diegesis. The suggestion is that the growing need to presence Alice archivally by her family may have to do with the fact that no one witnessed Alice's death: all that

turned up after was a bloated, drowned body that cannot tell the full story. Annalee Newitz argues that "dead bodies themselves become textualized—that is, readable or interpretable" (2006: 16), but *Lake Mungo* continually suggests that discovering the "real" Alice—someone who in the words of a friend, "kept the fact that she kept secrets a secret"—requires an act not just of cinematic forensics, but of a kind of evocative conjuring via mediation. Anderson's film is organized around Alice Palmer as a subject whose past resists full representation, and whose memorial re-embodiment by visual and audio records can only result in the tracing of endless circles around the "real" Alice. Any presence Alice achieves in *Lake Mungo* is the result of an elaborate, networked and trans-textual media production, existing in photographic, moving-image, and audio traces that are interspersed with the voices of others who speak *for* her. Additionally, there is almost no footage where Alice's voice comes from her directly speaking to a camera. An exception to this is a curious moment in which Alice, viewed from the doorway of her room by her brother Matthew's intrusive home movie lens, yells "Get out!" and closes her door. The moment is disturbing not only for its implications of a vaguely incestuous invasion of Alice's privacy, but also for its featuring of Alice in degraded video imagery, her voice smudged out and overwritten by a more dominant voice-over track. Furthermore, the perspective is Matthew's here, not Alice's. In this context, Alice's own narrative voice—her ability to speak for herself—is a deeply embedded text in a document initiated by others who feel compelled to rescue her memory from timeless oblivion. Alice's drowning was an event unwitnessed by anyone, and though her body is discovered later by local authorities, and identified by her father, the sense that Alice is still somehow at large (and uncapturable) remains, even before her disturbing visually-mediated ghostly re-entries into the world of the living. During the long mourning process (of which the film itself forms the final movement), Alice's family members describe a feeling that Alice is still present among them. As in *Paranormal Activity 2* and *Home Movie*, a sense that something is disturbing in the home prompts the invasive installation of recording technology to monitor the domestic space. In *Lake Mungo*, this project of domestic surveillance is largely the initiative of Alice's brother, Matthew.

Matthew is the central focus of the film's characterization of archival anxiety. Like a parody of *Blair Witch*'s Heather, or *Diary of the Dead*'s Jason Creed, Matthew is obsessed with visual technology: he holds a job as a projectionist at the local Ararat cinema, he later joins psychic Ray Kemeney on a road trip to video-document Kemeney's sessions with clients, he puts

the Palmer home under constant video surveillance, and, perhaps most tellingly, he has an amateur interest in photography that will produce some of the film's most indelible and haunting images. The first images that Mathew produces in the film are hoaxes. The earliest images of a ghostly Alice are fakes, created by Matthew through superimposing pre-existing images of Alice into a series of photos that he has taken of the same spot in the backyard for over a year, starting before Alice's death. A trick of double-exposure in the photography lab imprints Alice's "presence" from other photographs onto these photographs, suggesting a technological record of her phantasmal resurfacing. The film even includes a scene, once Matthew's hoaxing has been exposed, where Matthew explains his spirit photography techniques, and there is a certain pleasure in contemplating the method of this humble illusionist. There is also a sequence devoted to Matthew's amateur photography, which include multiple-exposure chronophotographic[33] images of objects, such as swinging sides of beef in a local slaughterhouse where his friend works, and a split-frame self-portrait of Matthew in a mirror—a sort of doubled-doubling of his face, partly-obscured by the camera's flash, and an image perhaps meant to suggest his spirit-photo trickery as a projection of his own troubled psyche. Matthew also creates trick video footage of Alice's televisual image mirrored in reflective surfaces to appear as though her spectral presence had manifested in the space in flickering and ethereal shadows and light. Matthew's use not only of photographic and video technology, but also of mirror reflections to create a sense of visual disorientation in the space of the Palmer home once again recalls proto-cinematic techniques such as the phantasmagoria shows, which relied on reflective surfaces to manifest their ghostly images. Matthew turns the Palmer home into a phantasmagoria show, where illusion and reality collapse disturbingly and convincingly. The disconcerting effect of Matthew's initial hoax images is so convincing to his parents that they decide to disinter Alice's body to verify that the body identified by her father, Russell, was indeed Alice. Later, once they learn of the hoax, Russell and June Palmer equivocate on Matthew's possible reasons for having duped his own family. Matthew himself will only half-regret his actions, seeing that they gave his parents a degree of hope, at least temporarily, that Alice might still be with them. He even sounds like *Blair Witch* documentarian Heather Donoghue, desperate to turn up evidence in place of absence, when he says, "It wasn't a matter of trying to trick people. It was a matter of, something was better than nothing." Mathew thus seems to turn to recording technology ultimately rather cannily as a way of crystallizing the *memory* of Alice, as much as to conjure her presence. His

motives are emotional, requiring an object on which to focus his mourning like the memorial photographs made popular a century before him. While initially the film links Mathew's archival method more to "conjuring" than "capturing" the desired evidence, *Lake Mungo* later makes no distinction between the obsession with representing the real, and the obsession with recreating it as one's own.

Matthew is not alone in his archival anxiety: he is at the center of a diegetic world in *Lake Mungo* that *abounds* with subjects compelled to record. Matthew's hoax is later discovered, for example, by other amateur videographers, Cathy and Douglas Withers, who happen to be wandering and recording video in the same woods as Matthew the day that he, wearing a red-hoodie, was mistaken for Alice and allowed the mistake to circulate as evidence of a haunting. The Witherses make their discovery while reviewing their recordings, and thus the "Withers Video" becomes evidence suggesting Matthew's complicity in the wider public hoax of Alice's haunting. Everybody in the film is recording and/or watching footage shot by themselves or others. Alice's mother, June, similarly decides to review the hoax tapes that Matthew had created; there, she discovers her neighbor, James Toohey, lurking in Alice's bedroom looking for the sex tape that June will later find hidden in Alice's room. The "Toohey Video" itself becomes another piece of the evidence accumulating around Alice's secretive personality and gradual withdrawal from her family. It shows 17 year-old Alice in an intimate conversation on the Tooheys' bed, and then in a threesome with them, where once again Alice's ability to communicate is diminished: the muddled sound in the mix renders her utterances interpretable as both ecstatic and distressed. Other evidence in Alice's hiding spot leads to the discovery of Alice's journal, and subsequently her lost cell phone at Lake Mungo. As I noted before, Alice's phone records a premonition of her death; but for this to be possible, Alice would have had to be using the phone to shoot video while she was walking at night in the bottom of the ancient lake. In other words, it seems she was not merely holding the phone out in front of her, seemingly using it in some way as a tool to supplement her poor night vision, but that she was also actively recording the empty terrain that lay ahead of her, as though it were not just a supplement to, but a replacement for her own vision. Her motivation for doing so seems as oddly suspicious as the Withers' recording (and later reviewing) footage of a walk in the woods, as if all three characters were wandering, and recording, in expectation of some revelation through the technological intervention into an otherwise everyday setting. In perhaps the most quotidian use of visual recording in the film,

psychic Ray Kemeney keeps an archive of videotapes of all of his psychic sessions with clients, including Alice and June. His recordings suggest evidence that mother and daughter have had shared preternatural experiences—visitations and a sort of transmigration of dreams—where each sensed the presence of the other. Alice tells of a dream of her mother entering her room while she is there, but not noticing Alice's presence; June tells of a similar experience of entering Alice's room, and also dreams of being visited by Alice at the foot of her bed, soaking wet.

Lake Mungo ebbs and flows through periods of revelatory belief, skeptical disclosure, and uncanny ambiguity attending its media phantasmagoria, both within its diegesis and in its address to the spectator. The revelation of Matthew's clever media hoax comes as a shock to the viewer of the film, as well as to the characters—in other words, *Lake Mungo* itself is, for a time, a carefully constructed hoax. Later, the film will reintroduce the possibility of the paranormal, with manifestations of Alice's ghost appearing in video footage taken while Matthew was away; and the film's end title sequence suggests that even Matthew's original hoax photographs include evidence of Alice's ghost, either on the margins or buried in murky or blurred imagery that the film has withheld from the spectator.[34] The film thus ends on a decidedly supernatural note, a note of continued melancholia even as the Palmers leave their home to move past the mourning stage. With this lingering melancholia, the film in no way means to pander to its audience's most puerile speculations about "other" realities in the way certain pseudo-documentaries would. Instead, its willingness to reestablish links between media and magic that recall nineteenth-century debates suggests an interest in what might be termed a "new/old media imaginary" that accompanies the introduction of new media, and the potential "death" of older media. According to Simone Natale and Gabriele Balbi, an archaeology of media must take into account two main factors: the notion of a "technological sublime," which they derive from the work of Leo Marx (1967), and the idea that all cultural narratives around media are important. In media archaeology, for example, "beliefs and fantasies, including religious visions and 'narratives of madmen,' are pieces of evidences [sic] just as relevant to historical analysis as patents and institutional sources" (2014: 204). According to Natale and Balbi, these two traditions have not developed a methodology by which scholars can study specific historical conditions of possibility around media development and reception. They advocate looking at a model for examining the temporal "dynamic" in media and the fantasies that attend certain stages of media development and history, or the medium's "life cycle" (2014: 204). This cycle consists of 1) "fantasies that are

conceived before the invention of a medium," or "media prophecies"; 2) "fantasies associated with the earliest period after the introduction of a medium," or when it is a "new medium"; and 3) "fantasies connected to what media historians call 'old' media, once the technologies are fully institutionalized or have even become obsolete" (2014: 205). Certainly popular culture becomes a major contributor to such new- and old-media imaginaries. In a gruesome parody of the "selfie," Alice's cell phone "prophesizes" a sort of total consumption of the subject by digital technology by presenting her own dead face in close-up. From the BBC's production of *The Stone Tape* (1972, Peter Sasdy) to its mass-hysteria-inducing "live"[35] program, *Ghostwatch* (1992, Stephen Volk), to *The Ring* (2002, Gore Verbinski), *Sinister* (2012, Scott Derrickson), and the two *V/H/S* films (2012 and 2013, Adam Wingard, et al), popular cinema has endowed media technologies themselves with the power to haunt and to shock, especially when they malfunction, become obsolete, or are preternaturally re-purposed to reveal realities beyond the visible.[36] The two *V/H/S* films, for example, repurpose the "dead" VHS format itself as a haunted house, with camera-bearing characters stumbling upon stacks of tapes containing any number of archived horrors awaiting reviewing/release. Marc Olivier has posited the concept of "glitch gothic," or shock and horror derived directly from the failure of media to fulfill its practical purpose of remaining transparent. "The glitch is the semi-opaque counterpart to the terror of transparent vision," he argues. "A digital glitch stuns the viewer through the sudden opacity of a medium designed for transparency" (Olivier, 2015: 259). Though not as sustained a disruption as certain other haptic tactics, the "glitch" similarly highlights the presence of mediation in the form of momentary visual abstraction. Olivier himself suggests an essential difference between glitch and "noise" (2015: 260). Where glitch is a disruption of data, the "graininess" of certain film stocks, for example, is "an inherent property of the film stock" that highlights the more opaque qualities of the medium (2015: 260). While mockumentary and fake found-footage horror films often do incorporate glitch as part of their aesthetics of shock, I am more inclined to use the term, "haptic Gothic," with films like *Lake Mungo* and *Blair Witch*, in the sense that it is not just the punctuating moments of technological failure or distortion that create a sense of dread, but the disturbing effects of sustained contemplation of the medium itself—its opaque surfaces, its flatness, its essential grain or pixillation.

The melancholia that *Lake Mungo* attaches to the ghostly Alice extends to the sense of decay and failure of the media formats that give her presence in the film. As I argued earlier, the

various appearances and apparitions of Alice spread across multiple media surfaces that the viewer is encouraged to scan and contemplate in *Lake Mungo* in a sense *become* an embodiment of Alice. The film mourns her loss in both the film's diegetic reality, as well as in its oft-degraded video, its grainy film and photographic surfaces, and its audio echoes of her voice. Certain avant-garde found-footage films will generate a similar melancholic, uneasy contemplation of the decaying materiality of media formats. As I have mentioned, in experimental cinema, Peter Tscherkassky's *Outer Space* (1999), Bill Morrison's *Decasia* (2002) and *The Great Flood* (2012), and Gratuitous Art Films' video glitch piece, *Thistle* (2009) are characteristic of a parallel trend to identify with the decay, demise and/or limitations of the medium itself. In these films, as in *Lake Mungo*, there is a kind of nostalgia for old media, a melancholic longing for the past as experienced through the opacity of degraded imagery and sound. The scanning of the film's haptic surfaces that encourages such longing is no simple nostalgia, however. It is a reminder of the fragility of all visual media, from film, to analog video to digital. In her essay, "Loving a Disappearing Image," Laura U. Marks finds a productive, "devotional mourning," a "loving regard" (1997: 105), that occurs in such haptic contemplation of the decaying or dying medium. "Because it does not rely on the recognition of figures [in the diegesis]," she argues, "haptic looking permits identification with (among other things) loss, in the decay and partialness of the image" (1997: 104). For Marks, "devotional mourning" is "mourning without morbidity," where the all-important ego of psychoanalysis is not threatened with fragmentation (1997: 107). Instead, devotional mourning allows the subject to "[move] beyond identification to an acknowledgment of dispersion" (1997: 100) in a kind of mournful transcendence that recalls the sublime. For Freud the end of mourning requires a sort of forgetting, or leaving-behind—in Marks's words, a "killing the loved one again in memory" (1997: 103)—an event that *Lake Mungo* literalizes when the Palmers drive away from their still-haunted home in a moving truck near the film's closing. The film's final images remind the spectator that her ghost remains when they present Alice's grainy, smudged, blurred and shadowy presence staring at the Palmer's departure from a darkened window. This, and the end credit sequence's re-presentation of Alice's ghostly appearance in images we have seen throughout the film (even the ones that were initially debunked as Mathew's hoaxes), attests to a lingering melancholia of the sort described by Marks when attending the "dying image," one that "may produce not dread but a loving regard" (105). I would argue that the "devotional melancholy" (Marks, 1997: 106) conjured by *Lake Mungo*

produces both dread *and* a "loving regard." In other words, *Lake Mungo*'s haptic melancholy meditation on the fading media it presents creates a sense of the sublime that does not strand spectators in a state of total dissolution. Instead this sublime demands that they contemplate a certain desire for what Lyotard would call the "spasmodic state" (quoted in Johnson, 2012: 121) of thought when it hits the limits of the absolute, where no relation or synthesis can be formed, and where there is a "humbling failure of the imagination before reason" (Johnson, 2012: 120). In a sense, sublimity is an act of simultaneous annihilation and reconstitution of self, the paradoxical terror-wonder dichotomy simultaneously stripping the self and shoring it back up in contemplation of something that lies outside of representation and stretches the cognition to its limits.

Lake Mungo mashes up its two melancholic subjects: the diegetic loss of Alice Palmer, and the incapacity of various media to stabilize her—to keep her from fading out of memory. While Anderson's mock-documentary film mimics the conventions of an expository documentary, it does, like the avant-garde films Marks discusses, "[move] beyond identification to an acknowledgment of dispersion" (Marks, 1997: 100), asking spectators to experience Alice as less a figure, than an *occurrence* over multiple media formats that cannot fully presence her. In doing so, *Lake Mungo* becomes a contemplation of the materiality and limitations of photographic, cinematographic and digital media that connects directly to the kinds of Gothic-realist films I discuss across this dissertation, shifting the focus perhaps even more exclusively to both the ephemeral materiality and endurance of the various media it references. To allude once again to Mulvey, Anderson's film brings an awareness of "the presence of death back to the aging cinema" (2006: 22). As D.N. Rodowick's has suggested, contemplating the end of film in the face of digital media, the cinematic medium is "an uncertain object" in its essential mechanical reproducibility, its status as a "multi-stage" (Rodowick, 2007: 15) art, and its essential degradability. The cinematic work plays out ephemerally, over time, and is itself ephemeral—hence the ghosts *Lake Mungo* can conjure just in contemplation of its limitations and its uncanny "presence." Yet *Lake Mungo* also conjures a healthy sense of dread in contemplating the new, digital technology. One of the film's most profound images of digital dread is the lingering, gruesome image of Alice's blue-green drowned face, captured on her cell phone.

During a trip with friends to the film's titular location—an ancient, dried-up lakebed—Alice, alone and holding her cell phone in front of her as a guide through the night, confronts her

own dead, bloated face, appearing out of the darkness. The image of Alice's dead face is a revelatory premonition, a recording of the future—the image it captures identical to the photograph that Alice's father, Russell, identifies near the film's beginning. The phone not only presents this image to an unsuspecting Alice, but simultaneously records it for posterity. Alice will bury the phone soon after this discovery at the Lake Mungo site[37] in a kind of ritual, a superstitious gesture suggestively meant to ward off any future harm.[38] There is a peculiar sort of parallel here to the title of the film being made by Jason Creed in George Romero's *Diary of the Dead*, "The Death of Death," in that the recording preserves evidence in the chronicle of events that led up to Alice's death, but also suggests that the future is already dead, already archived. That the recording technology Alice uses ultimately serves to predict the exact manner of her death is part of a technophobic conceit that *Lake Mungo* teases out to a great thematic extent. This digital pronouncement of Alice's death is not a direct video mediation of an ethereal image appearing before Alice on her nighttime walk; rather, it is a premonitory duplication—a copy—of the forensic photograph that later will be taken of her drowned face. To add to the moment's intersecting remediation(s), the face appears out of the darkness like an analog video image on pause—lined, blurred, fuzzed out, slightly quivering. The moment is a kind of meshing of the spirit photograph's revelatory magic, and a dreadful portent of the subject's total erasure from the real into the future death of the digital realm. In one of her recorded sessions with psychic Ray Kemeney, Alice can be heard to say that after this shocking revelation, "Everything felt wrong. My body. The way things looked." The *frisson* that results for Alice—and likely for the audience—derives from a simultaneous celebration and dread of the medium-as-magic. In Alice's blue-bloated, post-mortem digital likeness, *Lake Mungo*, like *Unfriended*, seems to suggest that there is both fear and fascination in losing oneself within the ever-expanding, growing digital archive. The future specters of the digital realm are looming in a maddening, potentially unreadable glyph of un-sortable ones and zeroes, with their hands on our shoulders.

While *Lake Mungo* may seem to turn away from the present in its melancholy back-looking, I would suggest that, on the contrary, its refusal to see anything "new" about the media it traces situates the film within Gothic realism's skepticism of all forms of representation. Rather than couching its anxieties in the newness of digital, *Lake Mungo* links them to anxieties accompanying the old. In placing digital technology so squarely on its timeline of technological anxieties, from photography to cinema, to video, to digital, its rather explicit message is that

nothing is new. *Lake Mungo*, like other mockumentary and fake found-footage horror films, thus shows itself to be engaged with the cultural moment in both subtle and unsubtle ways, especially insofar as it is linked to: 1) a generalized dread and anxiety about the real as manipulable by technology, 2) the desire to manifest presence where there is absence, 3) seeing reality as always-already haunted and uncanny, observed (surveyed) by ghosts; 4) a focus on generalized melancholia and a desire to manifest something lost (an object, a person, an event, a history); 5) anxiety about a future where new visual technologies dominate subjectivity, and 6) a fragmented subjectivity of multiple perspectives, stranded in a virtual world of frames, screens, and databases. As in the other films discussed in this chapter, *Lake Mungo*'s reality is best represented in terms of Gothic sublimity, where, as Elizabeth Cowie states, experience does not come from ultimate comprehensiveness or "sense-making," but instead from the contemplation of the limits of representation, "of senselessness as such" (Cowie, 2011: 11). The fake found-footage and mockumentary horror film generally make an attractions-based drama of the limitations of the medium, asking for speculation through sensation. Their key Gothic-realist strategies combine the 1940s horror film's stress on a darker reality that compels but resists capture, and the gothumentary's tracing of the widening circles around our attempts to comprehend events and subjects comprehensively. Their form emphasizes ultimate absence, even as they offer excessive spectacle. And their aesthetic of haptic surfaces of glitch, blur, grain, and other hypermediation asks the spectator to seek information through considerations of the materiality and ephemerality of the medium itself. Above all, *Lake Mungo*, like these other evocations of archival anxiety, traces subjects stranded somewhere between the Benjaminian detective's role of active inquiry, and the *badaud* or gawker's state of bemusement and bewilderment. If these films offer few solutions or openings out of the hypermediated phantasmagoria they depict, they do so, I would argue, with the idea that their spectators will find the implications of these dead-ends productively terrifying.

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[1] The stylistic and emotional excesses integral to horror allow these films to straddle the line between the magical Méliès tradition and the actualities of the Lumiéres—they collapse this ostensible divide in straightforward ways that have not been seen since the silent era. Tom Gunning (1986) has argued that the cinema of attractions was a factor of both the Méliès and the Lumiéres traditions—in other words, that both the illusionist and documentary traditions arose

from an emphasis on confrontational, performative spectacle. Genres like horror, the musical, melodrama and pornography have, perhaps more self-consciously than other genres, maintained this emphasis on spectacle. Horror and melodrama in particular have even drawn upon acting and aesthetics from the silent era, such as the *tableau vivant*, direct-address (i.e., breaking the fourth wall), and "gestural soliloquy" (Pearson, 2004: 61) of the period's transfer from "histrionic" to "verisimilar code" of performance (Pearson 2004).

[2] This phrase occurs with only slight variations in *The Blair Witch Project*, *Diary of the Dead*, *[Rec]* (2007) and its American remake, *Quarantine* (2008), and *Cloverfield* (2008), among many others.

[3] Steven Shaviro suggests that digital imagery exists in a "perpetual present" in his book, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (2010: 16).

[4] *The Blair Witch Project*'s primary contribution to cinema—and the reason it has been so influential and is so important—is that it thematizes and aestheticizes archival anxiety. *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980) is perhaps the clearest precursor, with *Haxan: Witchcraft through the Ages* (1922) perhaps the fully-fledged prototype of the pseudodocumentary aesthetic that inspires *Blair Witch*'s elusive subject matter. But *Blair Witch* is arguably the first film to investigate the degree to which recording technologies compel the subject to intervene in a reality seen as spectacle. The technologies continually referenced throughout the film are as much the focus as that which they record. And they come to stand in for the subject bodily.

[5] As Louis Kaplan (2003) points out, there were significant cases of spirit photography where the ghostly image was thought to have been imprinted, not as an indexical record of light through a lens, but directly on the film from the "ether."

[6] The current archive may be seen to have dematerialized more than ever before, reduced to data stored on smaller and smaller surfaces, and accessible everywhere via wireless networks that act like preternatural conduits. Astra Taylor, in her book, *The People's Platform* (2014), cautions about the "ignored materiality" of the "weightless rhetoric" of the Web 2.0 world, especially considering the physical waste produced by planned obsolescence of technological devices ("products designed for the dump") (2014: 182), the toxic environments in which these devices must be produced, and the sizeable facilities, energy, and environmental impact required to maintain this illusion of weightlessness.

[7] In Crary's configuration, the spectator's power to move from distracted observer to engaged witness has been bankrupted by "an ethic of watchfulness; the act of witnessing and its monotony" that, like a state of insomnia, "become a mere enduring of the night, of the disaster" (2013: 19). Here, "watchfulness" is linked to the exposure and vulnerability of the 24/7 subject's reality: "a generalized inscription of human life into duration without breaks, defined by a principle of continuous functioning" (8).

[8] The first phantasmagoria shows were conducted by Philip Polidor in Paris in 1793 (Gunning, 2004a: 5). Those by Robertson came soon after, his theatre opening in 1799 in an abandoned convent repurposed and bedecked with black draperies and mystical writings and symbols (Warner, 2006: 148-49).

[9] Richard Grusin and Jay David Bolter (1999) define "remediation" in terms of the borrowing or mimicking or "reform[ing]" (1999: 56) of an older medium by a new one. Inherent to what they call the paradoxical "double logic of remediation" (1999: 55) is the idea that a certain heightening of the medium itself is necessary to satisfy the claims of the newer medium to achieving a greater degree of immediacy and transparency (Grusin and Bolter, 1999: 55-56).

[10] As Warner and Gunning also note of the split reception of phantasmagoria shows, Chéroux looks at "the problem posed by the dialectical relationship between" spirit photography's "two functions," one "reinforc[ing] the spiritualist hypothesis by demonstrating the possibility of communicating, if only visually, with the dead," and the other "gently mock[ing] this belief" (2004: 46). Chéroux argues that spirit photography developed two simultaneous trends in its reception, one "recreational" and used in service of promotional imagery for phantasmagoria shows of Henri Robin, for example; the other an earnest and deliberate attempt to create a record of spirits on film" (2004: 46). I will have more to say on this when I discuss Joel Anderson's 2009 ghost-cinematography film, *Lake Mungo*, later in this chapter.

[11] Poe's tales of ratiocination are "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Roget" (1842), "The Gold Bug" (1843), and "The Purloined Letter" (1843), with "Murders in the Rue Morgue" typically considered also to be the first detective story.

[12] Friedberg also contends with Crary's essentially genderless spectating subject, identifying the gaze of the *flâneur* as definitively male, and noting the rise of a female viewing subjectivity, the

flâneuse, who becomes active in the commodity arenas of the arcade and, later, the department store.

[13] Dovey was writing in the nascent stages of reality TV, and though his implications that this new format would be an ephemeral fad for a fickle public proved to be a hasty conclusion, his predictions for a "new regime of realism" of hypermediation—multiple screens, reflexivity, and paranoid self-surveillance—has come to pass in a cinema that wants to explore the anxieties of "old" media passing into the realm of the "new."

[14] The actors recorded their own performances with GoPro cameras. The videos were edited and later positioned within the various familiar applications (Skype, Chatroulette) that the film carefully recreates and exploits.

[15] His prior credits are as a producer for the reality TV series *Auction Hunters* (2010 – present, *Spike TV*) and the made-for-television documentary, *Mayday, Bering Sea* (2010, *Discovery Channel*).

[16] Other contenders for this category include Zachary Donohue's fake found-footage horror film, *The Den* (2013), and Nacho Vigalondo's social media surveillance horror film, *Open Windows* (2014). I suggest *Unfriended* (which toured the festival circuit in 2014 under the title, *Cybernatural*, before its major release in 2015) is a precedent-setter because of its combination of real-time and its sustained onscreen environment. Neither *The Den*, nor *Open Windows* limits its diegetic world strictly to the computer screen and social media applications that concern it.

[17] This subgenre is more commonly referred to in both journalism and scholarship as "found-footage" horror (see Brigid Cherry [2009], Alexandra Heller-Nicholas [2014], and Linnie Blake and Xavier Aldana-Reyes [2015]). I add the qualifier "fake" to differentiate fictional horror films like *The Blair Witch Project*, which attempt to recreate the look and feel of archival materials to create or interrogate documentary realism, from an already-established filmmaking practice of "found-footage" horror, which redeploys actual archival material and other existing sources to generate a sense of dread and shock out of the tactility of film, video and digital media. Examples of the latter include Peter Tscherkassky's *Outer Space* (1999), Bill Morrison's *Decasia* (2002) and *The Great Flood* (2012), Ben Rivers' *Terror!* (2007), and Gratuitous Art Films' video glitch piece, *Thistle* (2009).

[18] The *Blair Witch Project* filmmakers, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, named their production company, Haxan Films, an allusion to Christensen's subject matter, and an homage to his groundbreaking hybrid work—an experimental documentary before documentary cinema had been properly defined as a practice, much less a mode.

[19] See Chapter II for a brief discussion of *In Search of ...* in terms of conventional pseudo-documentary themes, subject matter and style.

[20] The information regarding the discovery of the footage as having been dug up from beneath the burnt remains of the terrible house in the woods comes extra-diegetically from the more conventional pseudo-documentary companion film, *The Curse of the Blair Witch*, which aired on *The Sci-Fi Channel* on 11 July, 1999, as part of the promotional campaign before the film's release on 30 July, 1999.

[21] The term, Web 2.0, comes into wide circulation in 2004.

[22] Or from outer space, as the film's 2016 sequel, *10 Cloverfield Lane* (Dan Trachtenberg), makes clear.

[23] In, for example, novels such as Wilkie Collins' *No Name* (1862).

[24] There is an added, aleatory dimension here that the actress (who, like the other leads, used her real name in the production) in this moment is actively suffering the same trials as the character—that, in effect, this scene in *Blair Witch* is both a performance and a record of suffering. In an interview conducted with the filmmakers at the time of the film's release, Anthony Kaufman explains the production's guerrilla filming strategies that guaranteed that its actors' behaviors on camera were somewhere between performance and actuality:

> Shooting over eight days in Maryland's Seneca Creek State Park, the Haxan team developed an improvisational technique where the actors (Heather Donahue, Joshua Leonard, and Michael Williams) were given 16mm film and Hi-8 video cameras, then thrust into the woods to capture the action themselves. Using handheld Global Positioning System tracking devices ("technology that was used in the Gulf War to steer the MX missiles—you can get it in any Sears," says Sanchez), crew and cast maneuvered through the woods, with checkpoints along the way where directing notes, gear, and food were left in baskets marked with Day-Glo orange flags. Producer Hale, a former U.S. Special Army

> Forces linguist, used his SERE (Survival Evasion Resistance and Escape) skills to coordinate the shoot. (1999, n.p.)

Considering the film's occasional dual status as both fiction and document, it is no wonder that viewers had difficulty accepting the film as a fabrication, even once they had this confirmed. (See Margrit Schreier's 2004 article, "'Please Help Me; All I Want to Know Is: Is It Real or Not?': How Recipients View the Reality Status of *The Blair Witch Project*," for an extensive investigation of the film's hybrid reception, though not one that discusses performance in this capacity.)

[25] The conceit carries over into the film's marketing campaign, with one of the posters featuring a camera-bearing figure staring out at the viewer through the lens of a handheld video camera, accompanied by the tagline, "Shoot the dead."

[26] Derrida will make a similar argument on the idea of genrefication in his "Law of Genre," which stresses the total breakdown of the idea of a genre the moment one assigns it any kind of enduring structure: "Every text participates in one or several genres," writes Derrida, "there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such a participation never amounts to belonging" (1981: 61). Despite the sense of 'purity' inherent to traditional conceptualizations of *genre* as somehow mythical or eternal, there exists, according to Derrida, an essential "law of impurity or a principle of contamination" for genre to function (1981: 53). In Derridean terms, to say this or that "genre" is *pure* is to speak of a closing up and a death, when "genre," to persist—or even form at all—has to be thought of as a continual opening up. Therefore, the concept of genre itself is paradoxical, a concept of *exclusion* that depends upon perpetual *inclusions*, "essential disruption[s]," and subsequent transformations (Derrida, 1981: 53).

[27] If the fake-found-footage horror film is a spectacle at all, it is primarily one of faces in close-up—perhaps the most striking and important feature of these films. According to these films, there is an idea that no spectacle is quite so profound as the human face—evidence of the locality and specificity of place and context that threatens to be erased.

[28] Memorial photographs of family members were also sent as death announcements; and there are other, more potentially sensational uses that derive from a longstanding interest in "true crime," such as an image of the entire, murdered Parsons family (1906), laid out neatly next to each other on a double bed (Burns, 1990: 66).

[29] In a contemporary reframing of photographic technology and mourning, Georgina Banita makes the parallel between that 9/11 missing persons photos and spirit photography, suggesting that "[a]lthough couched in the guise of empathy and ethical concern, the images ostensibly work to train the viewer into replacing the painful absence of the WTC victims by their soothing pictures, usually taken at festive or generally more pleasurable moments of their lives" (2010: 98).

[30] In the introduction to his edited collection, *Cinematic Ghosts: Haunting and Spectrality from Silent Cinema to the Digital Era* (2015), Murray Leeder uses the term, "spirit cinema" (2015: 2) to express this revelatory focus on the cinematic medium as a channeler of ghosts. I prefer to use the term "spirit cinematography" to emphasize *Lake Mungo*'s explicit focus on photographic technology as medium and "medium," and to avoid the potentially broader association of the term "spirit cinema" to cinematic ghost stories.

[31] Some spirit photographs were also thought to have appeared directly on the film, apparently having manifested without the opening of the camera's shutter (Kaplan, 2004). See also Stephen E. Braude's essay, "The Thoughtography of Ted Serios" (2004) and María del Pilar Blanco's essay, "The Haunting of the Everyday in the Thoughtographs of Ted Serios," (2010) both cited in references.

[32] The complete list of spirit photos in the film's opening sequence, in their order of their appearance: "Woman with an extra of a baby in her lap" (1910, Wyllie); "Fred Barlow, his mother and cousin (Mrs. Burgess) with an unrecognized extra" (1920, Hope); "Unidentified sitter and extra" (1910, Wyllie); "Medium in cloud of light" (n.d., Society for Psychical Research); "Professor Haraldur Nielsson from Iceland with extra" (1923, Hope); "Woman with a boy extra over her heart and spirit" (1910, Wyllie); "F.C. Barnes and an extra (1908, Richard Bournsell); "Mrs. [sic] Houton and Spirit" (1874, Frederick Hudson); "Woman in black smock with spirits" (1910, Wyllie); "Two women" (1922, Ada Deane); and "Unidentified sitters and extra (1922 [detail], Ada Deane).

[33] Chronophotographic prints present multiple exposures in a single image that looks something like a visual stutter, multiple images record the temporal and spatial evidence of a single motion (such as a runner leaping over a hurdle).

[34] A similar startling technique of revelation is used in Errol Morris's *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), which the director called "a non-fiction horror movie" (Macnab, 2008: n.p.). Morris reveals that photographs were cropped to exclude exculpatory evidence linking certain of its subjects to torture and murder in the U.S.'s Abu Ghraib prison.

[35] The program was recorded several weeks earlier, but framed in broadcast as though live.

[36] As Natale notes in a 2011 article, "The Invisible Made Visible: X-Rays as Attraction and Visual Medium at the End of the Nineteenth Century," the X-ray was not just a scientific development, but was, for a time, a form of entertainment spectacle. In media archaeology, the task is, in part, to remember how much these technologies, whether intended for science or recreation, can be shown to have informed the current climate around media reception.

[37] Lake Mungo is a site of archaeological import: in it was discovered the oldest human remains in Australia, and the oldest human remains in the world that provide evidence of a sophisticated ritual cremation and burial.

[38] The practice of concealing objects in buildings and locations as a kind of ritual has been linked to folkloric traditions in the UK and Australia. See Ian Joseph Evans, *Touching Magic: Deliberately Concealed Objects in Old Australian Houses and Buildings*. October 2010, PhD Thesis. University of Newcastle, NSW, Australia.

Epilogue:
Gothic Realism and the Hyper-Sensorial

> "The representation of affect becomes disruptive, slicing through the referential chains that tie experience to words. This is not a process of laying bare the workings of an unknown real, but a direct confrontation with it."
>
> Xavier Aldana Reyes, "Beyond Psychoanalysis: Post-Millennial Horror Film and Affect Theory"

This study began with a discussion of a film that reaches out to an occulted reality via direct appeals to the senses. Aligned toward the melancholic, but without languishing in nostalgic back-looking, *General Orders No. 9* (2009, Robert Persons) situates the spectator within a realm of meditative imagery, sound and text that produces understandings of the historical world which cannot be grasped through rational investigation, and do not give themselves up to positivistic solutions, or formal closure. Like the gothumentaries *Wisconsin Death Trip* (1999, James Marsh) and *The Sound of Insects: Record of a Mummy* (2009, Peter Liechti), discussed in Chapter II, it is a hybrid film that rests trickily on the line between documentary and avant-garde, evoking a reality that compels examination, but resisting attempts to fully configure or cognize it. And, like the horror films of the 1940s and the later fake found-footage and mockumentary horror films discussed in Chapters I and III, respectively, it dwells within a complicated emotional reality of inscrutability, dread, and suspicion. Its strategy as a documentary is to encourage an active sensory seeker in its spectator through an aesthetics of attraction and affect. Here, the affective "corporeal transgression" (Reyes, 2012: 244) occurs less in the diegesis than in the structure and style of the film itself. *General Orders No. 9*'s lyrical imagery and poetic text do offer suggestive readings of the paved-over, vacant reality of the post-industrial South it traces. But the disturbing sheen that glosses over this reality comes in the film's textual refrains, and in its repetition of lingering shots—of twisting concrete structures, endless antiseptic corridors, and ethereal, calendar-ready images of nature, for example. The film is Gothic-realist in that it suggests reality as lying in between lived experience and its documentation, existing as felt, though not articulated and potentially in-articulable. In Xavier Aldana Reyes's terms, cited in the epigraph

above, it forms "a direct confrontation" with an "unknown real" (2012: 251) that has profound potential for critical awareness. More generally, Gothic realism's "direct confrontation" with reality comes not from attempts at objectivity or transparency, but instead through evocation, sensation, and reflexive contemplation of form and style. In the introduction, and throughout this dissertation, I connect the excessive, disruptive, sensorial realism of films like *General Orders No. 9* to strategies that have manifested in Gothic discourse, especially the Gothic text's reflexive emphasis on the "difficulty the story has in getting itself told" (Sedgwick, 1986: 13). The films I discuss, whether fiction or putatively nonfiction, build into their rhetoric a crisis of witnessing—a compulsion to represent the fullness of experience. Gothic realism appeals to cognitive processes such as investigation, interrogation, and hypothesis, but encourages a reception that is at least as embodied and sensory as it is interpretive.

In my final observations, I turn briefly to a film that, like *General Orders No. 9*, suggests the rich potential and wide applicability of Gothic realism for future study of documentary, horror, and avant-garde cinema: Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Veréna Paravel's experimental documentary film, *Leviathan* (2012). The overwhelming sensorial experience that *Leviathan* creates may seem an unusual focal point; it is, after all, a film of astonishing presence rather than suggestive absence. Virtually wordless, but aurally and visually visceral in every other way, *Leviathan* is characteristic of a turn to an ethnography of the senses that not only eschews positivistic closure, but encourages a fully embodied viewing.[1] As opposed to the relative reserve and restraint of the elegiac *General Orders No. 9*, *Leviathan* is an example of Gothic realism at its most visceral and aggressive. Here, there is an overdetermination of information where multiple perspectives, hypermediation, and a visual and sound design of noise and motion generally thrust the spectator into an overwhelming sense of presence that leads to a cognitive impasse. It teaches us that too much information can result in its opposite: an occlusion of reality. *Leviathan* creates a sensory reality of shock and awe in confronting both the dying mechanized monstrosity that is industrial fishing, and the monstrous natural world that diminishes its bulky machinery as absurd attempts to dominate nature. Rejecting didactic rhetorical strategies, *Leviathan* actualizes a politics of sensation, a Benjaminian emphasis on micro-shocks as ongoing "interruption[s]" of the "process of association" of the spectator (Shaviro, 1993: 48). It is at once an animal rights argument, an indictment of current industrial over-fishing of the ocean, and a lament for the workers whose labor reduces them to part of a vast machinery, and alienates them

from a social world outside of the day-to-day production process that rules their lives. Like an impressionist painting, it is politically engaged by the waste of industrial processes, generating a sublimely catastrophic[2] pronouncement about anthropocentric attempts to dominate the natural environment, on the one hand, and the absolute futility of the machinery and technology of the human animal against the massive forces of nature, on the other.

As Kara Selmin and Alanna Thain have noted, *Leviathan* is a "monster film" (2015: 187), a reading not only encouraged by its title's allusion to Biblical monsters, but also by its strategies of overwhelming the spectator with sensory experience while simultaneously relentlessly fragmenting any orienting perspective. Everything in the film is in flux: the groaning industrial cranes, grinding chains, and trawling nets of the massive boat; the even more massive and endlessly swelling, choppy sea; skies filled with the flapping wings of scavenging seagulls; and the dying, dead, and half-shredded-and-gutted fish bodies slopping around to the rocking of the ship. Added to this are the workers whose constant routinized gestures mark them as cogs in an industrial process that dwarfs them, and whose private moments while showering or falling asleep in front of a television show them in transitional states. In addition to this constant emphasis on movement and transition, the film shuttles the spectator across multiple perspectives. To achieve this perspectival fragmentation, the filmmakers used GoPro cameras mounted on objects (some of which plunge underwater, render the sky and sea upside-down, thrust spectators out before the prow of the ship, or strand them from high above), people (above eye-level and near waist-level), and at locations which turn the struggling and dead carcasses of fish into a focus for identification themselves. The result is, as Selmin and Thain have argued, "[a]n intensive folding of subjectivities and materialities" (2015: 195) that decenters and renders ambiguous the relational elements between ship, nature, fish, and human, offering no grounding perspective (2015: 196). One of the film's directors, Veréna Paravel, has stated that the purpose of attaching GoPro cameras to the film's workers and to objects on the ship, in addition to operating cameras themselves, was to resist an anthropocentric positioning of the spectator, and to diminish a sense of spectatorial mastery and agency: "the whole film is a kind of palimpsest of performances," she says. "We perform and the fishermen perform. But so do the fish, in a way, even when they are dead. So do the boat, the sea, and the sky. *Leviathan* gives an almost extraterrestrial vision of its subject" (Castaing-Taylor, et al, 2016: 54). The film's decentering of perspective shifts the focus from the anthropocentric to the cosmic concerns of a film like

General Orders No. 9, where the refusal of contextual grounding is similarly an ethical choice to highlight a sense of deep history, and a diminishment of human mastery.

Leviathan's dis-identification and fragmentation of subject positions are part of a consistent refusal to "locate" the viewer in space, even as its generally long takes emphasize the "real" passage of time aboard ship. Part of the film's sublimity rests in the mixed pleasures and torments of an aesthetic that "actively works to disrupt temporal and spatial points of orientation," including those "that fall outside" the "reach" of the fishermen (Selma and Thain, 2015: 194). Such moments occur especially when cameras plunge into the sea and out again (as Selma and Thain note) sometimes reorienting the viewer upside-down so that the occasional glimpses of sky and screeching gulls come from below instead of above. Similar imagery shot at night illuminates the mass of flocking seagulls like screeching banshees dogging the ship, and some shots come from cameras mounted to the side of the ship to show cascades of blood flowing off the deck into the ocean. The accumulation of images and cues here is clearly meant to suggest a Ship of Death, churning out blood and bodies; and the film accompanies this theme of horrific waste by generating a raw sense of malaise as the spectator attempts to negotiate the multiple perspectives, constant movement and reorientation, and cacophonic noise. The affective construct here is a kind of activation of Steven Shaviro's point that cinematic pleasure need "not put the spectator in a position of active mastery of the gaze," but "can just as well be linked to the destruction of identification and objectification, to the undermining of subjective stability, and to an affirmation of the multiple techniques that denaturalize (or de-Cartesianize) cinematic perception" (Shaviro, 1993: 43). This 'undermining of subjective stability' is key to the critical spectatorship encouraged by films like *Leviathan*, and, slightly more conventionally, a film like *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003, Andrew Jarecki), discussed in Chapter II. Both films disseminate subjective identification across multiple positions to form a source of often visceral sensation derived from uncomfortable perspectival shifts. In both of these films, the contemplation of the source of the monstrous reality evoked by the film leads to a critically productive impasse. As Selma and Thain argue of *Leviathan*'s brand of body horror, "the ambiguity of the body extends to its embededness in the abstract machine of threat and monstrosity that is the driving metaphor of the film, even as the origin of this threat remains critically unassignable to particular agents" (2015: 189). This 'unassignable threat' is a crucial element of both films' Gothic "Thing-ness" (Farnell, 2009); that is, their evocation of a reality

that suggests a troubling fullness that begs for representation, for presencing, even as it spectrally resists and lies outside of any attempt at doing so.

Paravel notes the stripping-down of context in *Leviathan* as crucial to the film's cosmic philosophical reach. She suggests that the lack of historical specificity (absent, for example is the film's status as salvage ethnography of a soon-to-disappear industry) need not diminish the film's overall critical impact. Paravel explains that

> there are almost no temporal or even spatial moorings in the film. We were after a more cosmological portrait of our relationship to the sea—tacking back and forth between the sublimity and horror of it—than something straightforwardly ethnographic. At the same time, for a variety of ecological and economic reasons—including the fact that we have so depleted the stocks of most of the species we see in *Leviathan* that there are almost none left to catch—this kind of industrial fishing is in its death throes. But unless the spectator brings this added knowledge to the film, there's virtually nothing in it to tell you that it depicts a disappearing world, except very suggestively, as one senses the enormous toll on the toiling bodies that seem so vulnerable and overburdened. (Castaing-Taylor, Paravel, and Rivers, 2016: 58)

In its pointed 'suggestiveness', the film picks up on the strategies of a pseudo-documentary like *The Hellstrom Chronicle* (1971, Walon Green), discussed in Chapter II, in that its paring down of historical specificity reaches outward to more philosophical implications of the devastating effects of Enlightenment-inspired anthropocentrism and human capacity to change the environment, but not to adapt to it. The cosmic horror here, as in *Hellstrom*, lies in the sense that the human within this context comes off as impossibly frail and vulnerable, despite humanity's advanced technologies. The human machinery in *Leviathan* must be substantial to withstand the massive and eternal power of the sea, but for all its monstrous, metallic grinding and clanging, it also manifests an uncanny vulnerability as this hulking ship is tossed around by the massive ocean swells—and the viewer with it.

Both Scott Macdonald (2013) and Selmin and Thain (2015) have argued that the film privileges sound over image as part of its disorienting strategies, fully plunging the spectator into its milieu of crashing waves, sloshing and swaying fish bodies, impressionistic images of skies full of flapping gull wings, grinding machinery, and drowned-out human voices among all the

din. But this emphasis on carefully layered, cacophonic noise (designed by Ernst Karel) is at least equaled by the film's visual noise—in images that literally thrust the spectator under water, or to the heights of the ship's mast, or directly out in front of the hulking metal ship's imposing prow. It is in this relational design that brings together subject, object and spectator that *Leviathan* extends Gothic realism's resistance to hermeneutical closure, and openness to potentiality, to its most critically productive extremes. The sense of dislocation and ambiguity generated by these strategies is largely what situates *Leviathan* within the Gothic-realist mode.

Considering the abundance of attractions (both visual and aural) with which *Leviathan* confronts the spectator, a key question arises: How could this film of sensory overload, multiple perspectives, and fullness of sound and image, be an example of a realism that attempts to emphasize impasses, absences and vacancies in what we can or want to know? The answer is that *Leviathan* offers no determining perspective, and not even an anthropocentric viewpoint from which to gauge its material. In the raw environment depicted by the film, humans are as reduced by the process as the largely wasted, dying fish themselves, and even the mechanized monster ship is devoured by the monstrous size of the sky and sea. If there is any political argument here around capitalist alienation of its workforce, or cruelty to and decimation of nonhuman animals, then it comes through in the film not as a didactic text based on illuminating conclusive evidence, but instead through an overwhelming, embodied sensorial experience: through the ears and eyes, of course, but also—in the rocking, swaying, motions of the ship; the hacked, shredded and bloated bodies of fish; and the constant collapsing together of bodies and objects—through the appeals to the touch, smell, and gut of the spectator-witness.

Similar to the haptic surfaces at play in recent fictional horror films that I discussed in Chapter III, especially *The Blair Witch Project* (1999, Daniel Myrick, Eduardo Sanchez), *Lake Mungo* (2008, Joel Anderson) and *Unfriended* (2015, Levan [Leo] Gabriadze), *Leviathan*'s content is deployed in ways that encourage not only an embodied spectatorship, but a kind of scanning of the materiality—or body—of the medium. *Leviathan* encourages a sensory engagement with its visual and aural design that not only plunges spectators into its diegesis, but also asks them to be swept up in, and destabilized by, its intensity and movement as a piece of cinema. *Leviathan* is, to allude to Poe once again, a "text that refuses to be read." Instead, it demands to be received through the body, to be conceptualized through thinking-feeling. The turn to affect in such works enables a discussion of not just visceral content that reaches out to the

spectator through the body, but visceral form. It allows for discussion of a sensual relationship to the medium itself, especially in terms of what Laura Marks calls the "haptic," that aesthetic which highlights the surface of the cinematic text (whether film, videotape, or digital). In Shaviro's terms, "Cinema is at once a form of perception and a material perceived, a new way of encountering reality and a part of the reality thereby discovered for the first time. The kino-eye does not transform reality, so much as it is itself caught up in the dynamic transformations that constitute the material and social real" (1993: 41). Gothic realism's particularly cinematic qualities are tied up in exactly the "dynamic" apparatus-like configuration of intersecting perspectives, embodiments, and materialities that Shaviro identifies here.

Leviathan's combination of hypermediation and sensory overload suggests potential political and humanistic realities that remain in excess of what the filmmakers can trace through the limitations of their medium. Its Gothic realism is sublime in that it implies an overwhelming beyond-ness that resists representation, a viscerality and a fullness that compels the spectator to reach out through the senses. Its is a return to the aesthetics of attraction that Tom Gunning (1986) identifies, to a "hypertrophy of the visual" as Shaviro puts it (1993: 9). As I have discussed, this metaphor of a kind of visual muscularity extends to the fullness of the film's aural and tactile environment as well. In Gothic realism, this kind of sublimity is, to borrow the words of David B. Johnson, "an aestheticization of the fundamental irresolvability in the relation between presentation and a domain that exceeds it" (2012: 121). Yet a Gothic-realist sublime need not indicate an arena of superficial surfaces that merely overwhelm spectators, stripping them of critical agency. Within the fullness of absence that constitutes the paradoxical "*presentation of the unpresentable*" (Johnson, 2012: 120) lies a negative hermeneutics that is critical and productive. As Johnson explains, citing Lyotard's *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (1994), "Rather than resulting in a kind of stultified impasse […], the irresolvability of this situation itself becomes generative: it produces a negative presentation of what exceeds presentation, 'a sign of the presence of the absolute'" (2012: 121). Castaing-Taylor and Paravel could have made *Leviathan* a straightforward polemical statement about the subject matter of their film, whether that be the waste and environmental damages of late-capitalism, the wasted bodies of both human and nonhuman animal that it leaves behind, the terrifying insignificance of all human-centered "progress" in the blank face of raw nature, or all of the above. Instead, they choose to evoke a sense of coming crisis implicitly, because it is woven together from too many

strands, and from a real that speaks from perspectives outside the human. Of the new materialist sensory ethnography that she and Lucien Castaing-Taylor practice, Paravel explains that "we're increasingly interested in the non-human, which has an agency of its own, even if we tend to overlook or deny it. We're interested in the mutual constitution of the human and the non-human, whether animal, technological, or natural. Humans have increasingly receded from getting pride of place in our films. We try to relativize and resituate them in a much wider ecological sphere" (2016: 53). The (Gothic) reality here is expressive in ways that need not be tied strictly to expository pronouncements linking the subject matter directly to historical context. As in *General Orders No. 9*, *Wisconsin Death Trip*, and other films discussed in this dissertation, the spectator becomes a witness to irresolvable desires and dread confronting a reality that has political, cultural, and cosmic implications. They share the Gothic-realist focus on capturing an ephemeral reality that calls to us from the overlooked details and detritus of our everyday experience. The films that form the corpus of this study—whether popular or experimental, fiction or nonfiction—all come to the conclusion that the spaces between reality and our readings of it are not only our most critically productive spaces, but also the best representation of a reality always formed by intersecting lines of meaning.

As I argue across this study, the most profound (if intangible) specter of the modern Gothic is reality itself. It haunts, it pricks, and it resists encapsulation. It is liminal rather than limitable. Thus, when I call Gothic realism a critical realist mode, I mean that it is, like the more figural aspects of Foucault's apparatus, a site of productive intersections that can help artists, scholars, and audiences to investigate and experience the contingencies of historical reality by considering what our texts cannot tell us. Gothic realist works are critical in the way they skirt the edges of not just what we want to know, but what we *can* know or conceive. By emphasizing ambiguity over certainty in its hermeneutics, the Gothic realist work opens up a productive space of actuality through the senses. The possibilities here are many for both a horror and a documentary cinema that want to tap into the critical potential of the current mainstream interest in spectacle over narrative and characterization. Especially since the advent of computer-generated imagery, and the turn to spectacle over narrative in "event" films like *Star Wars, Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999, George Lucas), Hollywood cinema has been within a paradigm shift. The struggle to fully exploit digital—and more recently 3D—technology in mega-budget Hollywood cinema has brought cinema interestingly, if falteringly, back to the

attractions aesthetic that Tom Gunning in "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," identifies in the early cinema's non-distinction between actuality and magic (2004b). Before Hollywood cinema turned fully to remediating literature for its substance, its dominant aesthetic might have been called revelatory actuality, a combination of what Lesley Stern calls the cinema's "two fundamental but paradoxical propensities": the "*quotidian* and *histrionic*" (2001: 324, original emphasis). Its status as both document and transformative technology was collapsed in both its use by Georges Mèliès in service of straightforward illusion that demonstrated its possibility to manipulate time and space, and by the Lumiére Brothers in service of rendering the everyday magically reanimated. The narrative failings of films like *The Phantom Menace* and, more recently, films like the *Transformers* series (2007, 2009, 2011, 2014, Michael Bay) and *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (2016, James Bobin), may be their most revealing feature as recent mainstream cinema struggles with the immense potentialities of spectacle. If anything marks the cultural moment in 2016, it is the potential for a realism of spectacle, excess and affect to speak to a global reality that comes overwhelmingly through visual media. In this sense, Gothic realism may be a critical manifestation of a more general struggle in mainstream cinema to recover spectacle and sensation as equally integral to the telling of experience as narrative.

Gothic realism is the drama of a crisis of witnessing. Its negative hermeneutics become part of the attraction itself, where narrative, exposition and documentation fail to encapsulate lived experience. It confronts a hypermediated reality that calls for a cinema of attractions, not to present didactic social-realist messages, but to reach out to the audience through the viscera, where both thinking and feeling occur. Here, we find the epistemological paradigms of horror and documentary colliding in productive ways, where fear and desire, dread and pleasure, meditation and sensation collapse into a fully sensorial reality. It is in this context that we find the 1940s horror film tracing the widening circles of trauma and anxiety that leave subjects lost, amnesiac, puppeted by ubiquitous institutional forces. Here we also find the gothumentary's focus on tormented and sinister ciphers; faltering, monolithic institutions; and moral degeneration—and the fake found-footage and mockumentary horror film's millennial skepticism and paranoia of a shift to a multimedia reality that makes specters of its subjects. Reduced to a Gothic-realist equation, *Leviathan*'s vast and violent ocean and industrial machinery; film noir's shadowy and morally murky, labyrinthine cities and mansions; *General Orders No. 9*'s

palimpsestic South; *Blair Witch*'s ubiquitous titular terror; and *Unfriended*'s spectrally-stranded subjects—to name only a few of the works discussed in this study—all share a common genealogy, traceable back to the Gothic's reflexive dramatization of the role of the witness, the compulsion to chronicle, and the fear that the record will be lost in the telling.

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[1] Castaing-Taylor and Paravel, as well as sound designer, Ernst Karel, are associated with Harvard University's Sensory Ethnography Lab.

[2] Catastrophic because it is less apocalyptic in the sense of endings and outcomes, than treating its dire subject matter through a sense of an ongoing "storm" of "progress" that "unceasingly piles rubble upon rubble," blocking access to the future (Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 1940: Thesis IX).

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