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Reality TV, Ghosts, and the Index

‘If we find nothing, then you’ll see nothing.’ Uttered to the camera by presenter Yvette Fielding in the very first episode of *Most Haunted* (Living TV, 2002–2010; online 2013–2014; Really TV, 2014–), these words assert the factual nature of the paranormal reality series and the promise not to use cameras and other ghost hunting devices to artificially fabricate images or events. Though apparently straightforward, this statement actually raises a number of fundamental questions about the way audio-visual technology at once reveals and distorts material reality. The show’s premise is that this technology expands the viewer’s senses by unveiling hidden aspects of the physical world while further suggesting it can take them beyond the material sphere. If the investigators ‘do manage to catch anything at all,’ Fielding continues, they will ‘leave it up to you to make up your own mind.’ Her unstated assumption is that no matter how technical and scientific the methods used by the programme makers, the nature of the visual and aural evidence gathered is inevitably disputable. This ambivalence over the status of the evidence is therefore not effaced or hidden but is conceived as an essential part of the series’s appeal. Typically for reality TV, where ‘real’ and ‘fake’ are enmeshed, uncertainty is not something to be removed—on the contrary, it is part of the attraction.

How could it be otherwise, when ghost hunting reality shows combine the documentary and the horror genres with the aim to entertain, thrill and scare? Despite the technical paraphernalia deployed in the investigations, the dramatic reactions of both the presenters and the supposedly haunted subjects feature heavily in these programmes, as Annette Hill and Karen Williams have noted.¹ Performance and the sense of artificiality it carries is evidently central to reality television, where participants may find themselves in a popularity contest, as

in *Big Brother* (Channel 4, 2000–2010; Channel 5, 2011–2018) and, most recently, *Love Island* (ITV, 2015–)—with contestants being voted out by co-participants and viewers—or share their private lives, as the families at the centre of *The Osbournes* (MTV, 2002–2005) and *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (E!, 2007–). In the ghost hunting shows performance is largely the reaction to a presumably supernatural experience—which in turn is meant to generate suspense and scares in settings and situations typical of horror.

These reality programmes bear similarities with fictional horror tales presented in documentary mode, such as BBC’s Halloween special *Ghostwatch* (Lesley Manning, 1992), which aired the seemingly journalistic investigation of a haunting as a live broadcast, revealing its fictionality only at the rolling of end credits.² They also evoke the *faux* documentary mode of found-footage horror, with their shaky camerawork and grainy images. Unlike these mockumentary works, however, the ghost hunting reality show is factual in nature. They surely beg the question of what is fake in reality television, but they also instigate thinking about the place reality occupies in scary tales, expanding the repertoire of horror beyond the fiction mode. The shows’ documentary elements call for critics to reconceptualise the place and function of reality in supernatural stories, for in these programmes ghosts and demons are presented as real occurrences, and not as symbolic articulations of traumatic experiences or allegories of a feared ‘other,’ as is traditionally the case. The monster’s presumed reality, therefore, raises questions about the very reality of what we see in the televisual image. Furthermore, the ghost hunting series presupposes the belief that technology may open a channel of communication with the supernatural world. But rather than address this at the level of representation, in fictional stories about haunted TV sets or VHS tapes (as in Tobe Hopper’s *Poltergeist*, 1982, and Hideo Nakata’s *Ringu*, 1998), these series are the very product of a highly technological investigation into the

supernatural, which they purport to document. The ghost hunting reality TV thus calls for considerations about what non-cinematic and non-fictional formats contribute to the horror genre: in this case, the peculiar treatment of the relationship between the audio-visual image and the material world. Such programmes also pose a number of important questions about the very ontology of the image, which date back to earlier attempts to ‘document’ ghosts in the spirit photography of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. Can images which have photography at their basis apparently give access to other temporal dimensions, if ghosts are understood to be a trace of the past, or to things immaterial? Or is the image’s ability to record a spirit an indicator of the spirit’s materiality? Can the image be used as evidence? Most importantly, for the remit of this article, how does the use of technology for the purposes of entertainment raise our awareness about the ways in which photographic, filmic and televisual images relate to physical reality, and has this perception changed with the advent of digital technologies?

The process of digital image capturing generated some anxiety among scholars about a presumed dissolution of the photographic and filmic image’s direct connection with the material world. This position is made clear in David N. Rodowick’s observation that ‘the indexical link to physical reality is weakened’ in digital capture, ‘because light must be converted into an abstract symbolic structure independent of and discontinuous with physical space and time.’³ The accessibility of cameras and editing software has democratised the manipulation of images, further putting into question the evidential power that André Bazin, Roland Barthes, and Stanley Cavell, among others, famously attributed to photographs—seeing them as proof of the material existence of the photographed object.⁴ But in spite of an increased scepticism in relation to the digital image we also find an obsessive documentation of events, from political demonstrations, abusive behaviour, weddings, and graduations, to

what one has for breakfast and even the cute things cats do. It is thus unsurprising that the web is also rich in photos and videos registering presumably supernatural phenomena.

While new technologies of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century validated investigations into the occult, as Jeffrey Sconce has shown in *Haunted Media*, the digital age has brought about a renewed interest in paranormal phenomena. This argument is at the basis of Annette Hill's *Paranormal Media*, in which she claims that the number of ghost hunting groups in the U.K. rose from 150 in the late nineties to 2,500 in 2009.⁵ Members of the ghost hunting industry actively promote a revival of the occult. In their book *In Search of the Supernatural, Most Haunted* presenter Yvette Fielding and parapsychologist Ciarán O'Keeffe state that a 2005 poll for the *Sun* newspaper 'revealed that forty-three per cent of 1,000 people surveyed believed that they had either been contacted by the dead or contacted the dead themselves. Thirty-four per cent said they believed in ghosts, and thirty-seven per cent believed in restless spirits.'⁶ Even if we take these assertions with a pinch of salt, it seems unquestionable that the digital age has made the practice of ghost hunting more visible. YouTube features, according to Hill, tens of thousands of home movies capturing paranormal phenomena.⁷ A web search for only the best sites devoted to investigations of hauntings, demonic possessions and UFOs at Topparanormalsites.com on 22 April 2019 pointed to 272 addresses—many of which display amateur footage, photographs, blogs and live chats about individual experiences of the supernatural. The Ghostvillage.com website, by their own account, 'averages more than three million hits per month.'⁸ In the media, newspaper articles report on a growing interest in the supernatural, from a special dossier devoted to the paranormal by the Canadian *Métro*⁹ to individual articles questioning the phenomenon in *The Independent* ('What Are the Top Three Scientific Explanations for Ghost Sightings?')¹⁰ and *The New York Times* ('Norway Has a New Passion: Ghost Hunting').¹¹ 'Ghosts,' Andrew Higgins suggests in the *Times*

article, ‘or at least belief in them, have been around for centuries but they have now found a particularly strong following in highly secular modern countries like Norway, places that are otherwise in the vanguard of what was once seen as Europe’s inexorable, science-led march away from superstition and religion.’¹²

The presence of the supernatural on the internet and in the media points to the appropriation of occult matters that Christopher Partridge has termed ‘occulture’: a combination of ‘the hidden, the exotic and the elite’ suggested in the notion of the ‘occult’ with ‘that which is shared and everyday,’ which is part of ‘culture.’ Partridge explains that,

It is this latter cultural dimension that is the key to understanding contemporary occulture and the persistence of paranormal belief. This is, again, not to deny that there is within occulture that which is occult, esoteric, oppositional and countercultural, but rather that occulture *per se*, and particularly the latent subscription to paranormal ideas, is largely ordinary and everyday.¹³

The entertainment industry capitalises on this trend of searching for and documenting the supernatural, and amplifies the everyday quality that Partridge attributes to it. Further ‘normalising’ supernatural matters are the vast number of reality television shows dedicated to ghost hunting. *Most Haunted*, Britain’s longest standing series, launched its twenty-fourth season in January 2019, and has expanded its reach into the publishing industry, with three books co-authored by Fielding, the programme’s main host, on the topic of paranormal investigations.¹⁴ The American *Ghost Hunters* (Syfy, 2004–2016), which follows the activities of The Atlantic Paranormal Society (TAPS), is equally prolific, with two television spin-offs, *Ghost Hunters International* (Syfy, 2008–2012) and *Ghost Hunters Academy*

(Syfy, 2009–2010), a magazine (*TAPS ParaMagazine*, 2006–), a podcast featuring the show’s presenters on a sporadic basis (*TAPS Para-Radio*, 2006–), a radio talk show co-hosted by TAPS co-founder Jason Hawes (*Beyond Reality Radio*, 2007–), and videogames with Star Mountain Studios (*Apparitions: Red Riff Inn*, 2007, and *Apparitions: Kotsmine Hills*, 2010). Both reality shows have also featured live episodes on special occasions such as Halloween. The Living channel in the U.K., rebranded as Sky Living in 2011, launched a number of shows about paranormal investigations from 2001, including *Sixth Sense* with medium Colin Fry (2002–2003), *Scream Team* (2001), and *Dead Famous* (2004–2006), among others. In the U.S., *MTV’s Fear* (2000–2002), *Paranormal State* (A&E, 2007–2011) and *Paranormal Cops* (A&E, 2010) follow the same trend. The ghost hunting reality show is a global phenomenon, with examples from countries like Norway (*Åndenes Makt*, TVNorge, 2005–), Denmark (*Spøgelsesjægerne*, Kanal 5, 2013–), India (*Mystery Hunters India*, Discovery Kids, 2012–2014, and *India’s Most Haunted*, NDTV Good Times, 2011), New Zealand (*Ghost Hunt*, TV2, 2005–2006), and Canada (*Ghost Tracker*, Discovery Kids Canada and YTV, 2005–2008, and *Knock Knock Ghost*, OutTV, 2015–).

The ghost hunting reality programme features hauntings and demonic possessions. It includes séances, exorcisms, and long investigations of dark, mysterious and potentially dangerous spaces, showing mediums, priests and parapsychologists. These shows deploy the themes, iconography, and narrative strategies to create suspense and to scare that are common to the horror genre, investing heavily on their entertainment value, which, conveniently, legally shields them against accusations of forgery. The ghost hunting shows here examined are therefore explicitly classified as entertainment. *Most Haunted’s* episodes open with the disclaimer ‘for entertainment purposes only,’ following a 2001 regulation by the former

Independent Television Commission in the U.K. allowing the treatment of the paranormal on TV ‘as long as it was either presented as entertainment, or part of a serious factual investigation,’ as Hill relays in *Paranormal Media*.¹⁵ Mikel J. Koven notes that the show’s entertainment status protects *Most Haunted* from being in breach of the Broadcasting Code—although the media watchdog Ofcom has actually received numerous viewers’ complaints about the show’s truth claims.¹⁶ In what constitutes a similarly protective clause, every episode of *Paranormal State* is introduced by a disclaimer differentiating between the American A&E channel and the show’s investigators, noting that ‘The views on the occult and the supernatural documented in this show are not necessarily those of A&E Television Network.’ NDTV Good Times is more explicit, opening *India’s Most Haunted* with a statement saying, ‘The channel neither endorses nor refuses the existence of ghosts and paranormal phenomena.’ This type of disclaimer is a common feature in cultural products presenting real testimonies, such as interviews with actors and directors that come as part of a DVD or Blu-ray’s extras. But in the case of the supernatural television show, it offers the networks protection against accusations of fraud. The most interesting aspect of these disclaimers is their contribution to the ambiguity about the factual quality of the ghost hunt, which is central to most programmes, as both Hill and Williams have argued.¹⁷

This ambiguity results largely from the processes of capturing the image; in other words, the nature of the televisual medium and its affinities with photography and film. For some authors (Williams, 2010, Hill, 2011, Lauro and Paul, 2013)¹⁸ these paranormal reality shows are the digital age’s response to spirit photography, as they use technology to seek a world believed to lie beyond material reality. Unsurprisingly, writings on spirit photography stress the question of authenticity that, as Tom Gunning points out, has always been at the centre of photography and film.¹⁹ After all, these media have been put to the use of science (Eadweard

Muybridge capturing the movements of horses), magic (Georges Méliès's substitution tricks), and spiritualism (spirit photography)—all of which raise questions about what images can reveal, omit, and forge. When discussing these shows' relationship to material reality, it is worth remembering that audio-visual images have been used both to unveil unseen aspects of the physical world and to extract some magic from it; to denounce and unmask, but also to distort, trick and fabricate. This is of particular importance when examining reality television—where the question of authenticity is always at stake.

The possibility of forgery notwithstanding, these reality shows present elements that can be unambiguously deemed real, such as the locations, which include existing private homes and public spaces like castles, museums, theatres, pubs, theme parks, and underground stations. Additionally, the people claiming to be afflicted by, and to be witness to, supernatural phenomena. In *Ghost Hunters*, *Paranormal State* and *Paranormal Cops*, they are families and workers requesting the services of the investigators in order to achieve some peace. These shows attribute an element of social work to the investigators' job, not unlike programmes such as *Dog Whisperer* (National Geographic Channel, 2004–2011, National Geographic Wild, 2011–2012) and *Supernanny* (Channel 4/E4, 2004–2012), which help individuals cope with anti-social and disruptive behaviour in dogs and children, respectively. *Most Haunted* is less focused on the people affected by supposed hauntings and more on the show's investigators and the locations, even though witnesses do contribute with testimonies given in talking head interviews.

Finally, the investigators, who appear as themselves, are also real. *Paranormal State* features university students working for Penn State's Paranormal Research Society, led by Ryan Buell. Until 2012, the lead investigators in *Ghost Hunters* were Roto Rooter plumbers Jason

Hawes and Grant Wilson, who created The Atlantic Paranormal Society (TAPS), moonlighting as the ghost hunters that give name to the show—until Wilson left the programme that year.²⁰ The short-lived *Paranormal Cops* (only one season) follows real life police officers investigating paranormal activity in their spare time. *Most Haunted* features television presenter Yvette Fielding leading a team including a historian, who provides relevant information about the location and the haunting legends around it; a medium, who channels spirits and is sometimes possessed by them; and a parapsychologist giving ‘scientific’ validity to the exploration and bringing to the show an element of scepticism meant to legitimise claims to factuality. The team members of *Most Haunted* may change over the years, as do their roles—a demonologist features in later seasons, for example. The TV crew are also included as characters in this series. From producer to camera operators, sound engineers and make-up artists, they all appear as themselves and become active actors in the investigation, blurring the separation between the diegesis and the extra-filmic, as the individuals, equipment and strategies that usually stay off-screen are actually placed before the camera. This permeability of the diegesis by the extra-filmic dramatises and exaggerates the understanding, central to this article, that there is a perceived immediacy and directness between televisual images (which have photography at their basis) and material reality.²¹

The cameras and the whole technological apparatus are also central characters in these programmes, as they provide access to the supernatural. In *Ghost Hunters*, they are the principal means by which the team identify the presence of ghosts, often not visible on site but accessible after the investigation, and only upon watching the recorded material. *Most Haunted* differs in that it tends to show the crew’s reactions to what is believed to be ghostly presence during the investigation itself, but the show also replays events at different speeds to expose evidence to viewers. The recorded images thus offer proof of supernatural events in

the space framed by a camera, considered capable of registering what the viewers' senses alone cannot perceive. In a world afflicted by a supposedly 'post-truth' scenario, these impalpable, elusive ghosts urge us to rethink the photographic and filmic images' relationship to reality.

In his discussion of spirit photography, Gunning notes that the photograph has a dual identity, working 'as an icon, a bearer of resemblance, and as an index, a trace left by a past event.'²² The index presupposes a direct relationship of causation of the picture by the photographed object. As Rodowick explains, analogical photography proceeds by 'a literal sculpting by light' in a film 'whose variable density produces a visible image.'²³ Gunning points out that digital image capturing works in much the same way, involving the recording of 'light reflecting off' the subject, but 'instead of light sensitive emulsion affected by the luminous object, the image is formed through data about light that is encoded in a matrix of numbers.'²⁴ Discussions about the difference between analogue and digital images frequently evolve around their degree of indexicality and these debates have long been central to theories about the essence of photography and film. Writing on the analogue image, Barthes argued for the photograph's capacity to attest to the fact that the depicted subject was once before the camera. Cavell, along the same lines, claimed that a photograph is best defined as a transcription of an object onto a light sensitive surface, rather than a representation.²⁵ Theorists have also noted that iconicity and indexicality do not necessarily go hand in hand.²⁶ Photography and film can transform the subject before the camera: they can blur, zoom in or out, distort the subject to the point of making it unrecognisable. Representation, which presupposes resemblance, would therefore be less relevant than indexicality in attempts to define the specificity of these media.

It is through indexical processes such as the measurement of cold spots (through thermal cameras) and of movement (through motion detectors) that these reality shows identify ghostly presence. Additional aural and visual evidence is similarly indexical, existing in the form of Electronic Voice Phenomena—available only through the specialist EVP recorder, and not to human ears—or seen as orbs, allegedly indicators of a ghost’s presence, even if these floating light spots may in fact result from the reflection of something as ordinary as dust. The fascination with, and emphasis on the deployment of such devices within the programmes suggest a certain fetishisation of the technology’s reach and the audio-visual image’s capacity to serve as evidence. Yet, as documentary theory teaches us, seeing is not necessarily the same thing as understanding. Any movement, noise, lights and drops in temperature may be a trace of a change in the environment, but the cause of this change cannot necessarily be identified (supposing it is not being forged). Fielding and O’Keeffe explain, for example, that a negative-ion detector (NID) indicates when the amounts of negative air ions exceed normal levels, which supposedly points to the presence of a ghost. In reality, the connection between the quantity of negative air ions and ghosts is purely anecdotal: it is based on reports of excessive amounts of negative ions during alleged experiences of paranormal activity,²⁷ which cannot be proven. The scientific vocabulary used by the presenters masks the fact that what the technological device registers cannot alone attest to the existence of ghosts. All that is recorded is an environmental anomaly that may very well have natural causes.

Although its source is not always ascertainable, as a trace the index would in theory prove the existence of whatever object or event leaves it behind. It is natural to assume that this object or event has a material quality. In spirit photography, the image’s indexical nature appears to support the belief in the materiality of spirits, which was central to spiritualists, who,

according to Sconce, relied on scientific principles of electricity, for example, to legitimise the activities of spiritualist mediums.²⁸ One of spiritualism's inaugural events in 1848 was the apparent ability of the sisters Kate and Margaret Fox to communicate with spirits through raps that were believed to have opened a "telegraph line" to another world,' establishing the concept of a 'spiritual telegraph.'²⁹ Thus, a few years after Samuel B. Morse's electromagnetic telegraph line allowed for communication to elide geographical distance, the Fox sisters seemed to have transposed both time and the physical world. Their communication with spirits was further associated with technology as they employed the Morse code to move 'beyond simple yes-no answers' to begin to "speak" in sentences by rapping in response to a recited alphabet.³⁰ From its earliest emergence, therefore, electrical science grounded spiritualist claims about communicating with the dead. In Sconce's words, 'Talking with the dead through raps and knocks, after all, was only slightly more miraculous than talking with the living yet absent through dots and dashes; both involved subjects reconstituted through technology as an entity at once interstitial and uncanny.'³¹

The scientific element of this technology endowed the practice of reaching for the dead with a material, and therefore plausible, quality. Spirit photography's explanation for the image of what they called 'extras' (as they lacked proof about the identity of the ghostly figures) was grounded on a similarly material principle. The concreteness of the spirits featuring in the photograph, but not visible in the space where it was taken, is evident in Martin Jolly's account of the court case against William Mumler in 1869. The American spirit photographer's defence 'explained to the court ... that [ghost-like] images ... which came to be known as "extras," could only be spirits because everything had some form of materiality, even spirits, so there was no reason why they could not be photographed.'³² However, in spite of the iconic resemblance between the extra and a particular dead person, the origin of

even the distinguishable features of the latter was nonetheless questioned, not unlike the reality show's querying on the origin or cause for the EVP or the change in temperature registered by their equipment.

The trace of the event captured in spirit photography, likewise, does not point to a clearly identifiable source—all it tells us is that this source is material. Historian Fred Gettings would complicate matters further, challenging the very claims to the materiality of spirits. Gettings saw in the 'spiritual materialism' that appeared in the nineteenth-century 'one of the most dangerous ideas that mankind has held, in that it denies the important difference between the spiritual and material planes of existence.'³³ Gettings's concerns were not so much about human forgery, where photographers would fake images and profit from it; rather, he questioned the intentions of the very supernatural entities, arguing that 'certain spiritual forces, presumably for advantages best known to themselves, have attempted to inject into human consciousness a particular form of "spiritual materialism."³⁴ Spirit photography is to be blamed, however, as it 'succeeds in portraying the spiritual world and its inhabitants in grossly material forms.'³⁵ Gunning, on the other hand, argues that the extra does not simply give material form to a spirit; the presumed ghost has an ambivalent nature—it is human-like, but transparent. The extra is a 'phantasmatic body' that is 'visible, yet seen through.'³⁶ In spirit photographs, Gunning goes on to say, 'the term *phantasmatic* denotes images that oscillate between visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, materiality and immateriality.'³⁷ Appearing next to "'normal" figures,' the 'ghost' is 'oddly superimposed' or 'illogically juxtaposed' to the elements that less questionably correspond to material reality: the human sitter in a familiar space.³⁸

Beyond the materiality of spirits, Gettings also worried about the iconic resemblance between an extra and a dead person, which he believed could be deceptive. Referring to early historian of spirit photography James Coates, Gettings claimed that, ‘though admitting that it was possible to photograph entities purported to be spirits of the departed,’ Coates would be ‘careful to point out that *as to the characters of these extras especially where they are pictures of departed persons, it is difficult in our present limited knowledge to say.*’³⁹ Coates states that, ‘*To assume that they are portraits of spirits in disincarnate states is as absurd as the vacuous conclusion that they are fraudulently produced.*’⁴⁰ Gunning’s account concurs, as it tells us that commentators ‘claimed that the photographs were the product of *some* supernatural force, with many avowed Spiritualists supposing that the spirits of the dead may actually have had little to do with them.’⁴¹ It follows that if we leave aside the issue of fraud and try to follow the logic of believers in photography’s ability to capture some sort of spiritual entity (and in the existence of spirits to begin with), the iconic resemblance of a ghostly image to a dead person is not necessarily proof of the presence of that person’s spirit before the camera—even though it seems to prove the presence of something. Gettings may warn against the belief in the material nature of spirits, but if we are to assume the spirit photographs are not tampered with, that they in fact may capture something (even if not the dead person we see), this something must have a material quality if indexicality is to remain a basic principle of how analogue images are formed—however uncertain the identity of the registered ghostly image. Otherwise the implication would be that the trace does not corroborate the materiality of the entity producing it, which does not proceed. Gunning again illuminates this issue when he states that believers in spirit photographs saw them ‘less as photographs conveying what spirits “looked like” than as media of communication with the other world, a token of recognition, a *symbolum* passed between realms of existence.’⁴² For

him, the spirit photograph ‘yields an eerie image of the encounter of two ontologically separate worlds.’⁴³

The photographic image thus has the capacity at one and the same time to produce an illusion and to corroborate the material existence of something. For Gunning, this ability that photography has to offer ‘a double of its subject’ is as central to the medium’s ‘unique ontology’⁴⁴ as its indexical quality. This is why ‘photography emerged as the material support for a new positivism,’ but ‘was also experienced as an uncanny phenomenon.’⁴⁵ Speaking specifically about Sir David Brewster’s stereoscope, Gunning proposes that the fact ‘that such images could display the iconic accuracy and recognizability of photographic likeness and at the same time the transparency and insubstantiality of ghosts seemed to demonstrate the fundamentally uncanny quality of photography, its capture of a specter-like double.’⁴⁶

The positivist and uncanny qualities that Gunning claims to coexist in photographs also describe the ghost hunting reality show’s use of technology. The scientific vocabulary deployed in these programmes is at once counterbalanced by the spectacular and offered as an explanation for its manifestation. In the ‘Casa Madrid’ episode of *Paranormal Cops* (Season 1, Episode 1), the rationality associated with technology’s mechanical nature becomes the vehicle for raw, organic and outlandish grunts as the audience hears EVP recordings of an aggressive ghost telling the investigators to ‘get out’ and ‘go fuck’ themselves. In the ‘Altoona Tantrum’ case in *Ghost Hunters* (Season 1, Episode 1) there is a much friendlier EVP of a little girl apparently asking, ‘Can I come in?’. The thrills promised by these shows come both from the uncanniness that arises from these recordings and the

possibilities afforded by technology. These examples encapsulate the enmeshment of science and mystery that, for Gunning, is centuries old.⁴⁷

The ghost hunting reality show certainly accounts for the ambivalent audience response to the apparently supernatural or magical. Williams rightly suggests that these programmes' use of scientific methods in the context of entertainment places them in the tradition of eighteenth-century phantasmagoria: public performances that deployed "'proto-cinematic" devices like the magic lantern' to generate spectral images with the purpose to at once display modern optical technologies and unsettle the audience, confronted with what looked like the visual manifestation of ghosts.⁴⁸ 'While the visual marvels achieved were always declared an illusion,' Williams says, 'the fear they provoked was meant to be quite real.'⁴⁹ Like phantasmagoria and the spirit photograph, the paranormal reality show, in Williams's words, 'harbors two intentions: one of earnest authenticating and the other of spectacle and effect,'⁵⁰ for photography and TV are each 'at once a medium for the revelation of an unseen real and a sensational form of entertainment.'⁵¹ Challenging the notion of photographic evidence, and consequently the centrality of the index to this medium's ontology, Williams suggests that images of spirits were 'poking holes in photography's claims to the real' rather than 'serving as proof of a "real" not otherwise visible to the naked eye.'⁵²

The acknowledgment of ambiguity and ambivalence in the ghost hunting reality show takes the form of constant and self-reflexive references to technology. Computer monitors, thermal cameras and parabolic microphones are frequently seen on screen.⁵³ These technologies' automatic, mechanical quality underpin the investigation's 'scientific' element: irrespective of the causes for drops in temperature, the orbs and the whispers better discerned upon examination of the recorded material, the shows intend to make us believe that a change was

indeed registered. The centrality of the recording puts emphasis in the *process* of searching the supernatural; the process is actually the only concrete element in this search, as its object—the supernatural—remains elusive.

The ghost hunting reality show therefore emphasises the uncertainty about the supernatural quality of the experienced events and even extracts pleasure from it. As an article in the Live Science website pertinently states,

Ultimately, ghost hunting is not about the evidence (if it was, the search would have been abandoned long ago). Instead, it's about having fun with friends, telling ghost stories, and the enjoyment of pretending you are searching the edge of the unknown. (It's also about making money selling 'Ghost Hunters' T-shirts, books, and videos.) Ghost hunters may be spinning their wheels, but at least they are enjoying the ride.⁵⁴

Precisely because they aim to entertain, some of these shows allow for staged events. The earlier series of *Most Haunted* were introduced by talking-head interviews with witnesses to the hauntings and historian Richard Felix, and included the equivalent of documentary re-enactments to illustrate these testimonies. The 'Leith Hall' episode (Season 3, Episode 4), for example, features the brief shot of an actor in the guise of the ghost of a soldier with a bandaged head, clearly marked as 'Reconstruction' by a title that flashes briefly on the screen's top left corner (figure 1). Equally theatrical are the evidently fabricated shadows passing through a corridor during the prologue in which Fielding informs us of sightings of a hooded monk figure when the crew revisits Woodchester Mansion (Season 7, Episode 3). Just as documentaries use music to cue emotions and organise story events to support a specific standpoint, achieve clarity and emotionally engage spectators, these reality shows

resort to eerie soundtracks, visual effects, suspense and scares to add mystery and thrills to their ghost hunt. The more artificial, spectacular sequences are nevertheless often relegated to the prologues and introductory sequences, as if to clearly differentiate between staging and reality. The openings of the ghost hunting programmes give free reign to the tropes of horror: images of cemeteries and ghostly figures (*Most Haunted*), old scriptures and an eyeless, uncanny doll (*Paranormal State*), and even the jerking foot of a dead person (*Paranormal Cops*) flicker in the fast-paced montage sequences introducing these shows. Preparing the viewer for what they hope will be a scary ride, these images play to creepy sound effects and simulated glitches in the image, suggesting electromagnetic interferences from the beyond. In *Most Haunted* the spectacle of its opening scenes is counterbalanced by the inclusion of sequences where not much happens, which seemingly attest to the ‘plausibility’ of the ghost hunt’s findings. Koven reports that Sky Living proposed that its creators actually staged ghostly appearances, even if only to unmask the fakery at the end, for fear that the scarcity or the absence of supernatural manifestations in some episodes would result in a disappointing, even boring, show—something that the show’s makers claim having refused to do.⁵⁵ Still, most of the thrills that feature in these shows (startling sounds, a ghost’s voice or a demon’s grunts) do take place within the ‘realism’ of the extended and, in the particular case of *Most Haunted*, often uneventful investigation scenes.

In spite of the eerie images that open the programmes and the technological apparatus promising the revelation of events our senses alone cannot perceive, little evidence of the supernatural is given to us. What we ultimately see and hear in these sequences are the effects that a supposedly supernatural occurrence has on the investigators: Fielding and other crew members screaming in terror, startling at noises and having their bodies scratched in *Most Haunted*, *Paranormal State*’s Ryan Buell claiming to be tormented by dreams about a

demon's name that ought not to be pronounced (Season 1, Episodes 2 and 3), or Heather (team documentarian) and Katrina (trainee) deciding not to get involved in what Buell defines as 'a battle of good versus evil,' consequently stepping down from the investigation taking place in 'The Devil in Syracuse' segment (Season 1, Episode 3). Indeed, *MTV's Fear*, a preceding yet short-lived reality show of this kind, focused more on the reactions by the members of the team than on the events triggering them. The marks on the investigators' bodies and their emotional responses in these programmes invite analogies between the human and the audio-visual mediums: we identify the manifestation of the supernatural through their behaviour (an investigator's emotional outburst; a camera's glitch), and on the surface of both the human body and the electronic image. Structured as a dare show, *MTV's Fear* attached cameras to the bodies of six teenage contestants with a mission: to spend time at a haunted location, where they would perform specific tasks such as a séance ('St. Agnes Hospital,' Season 1, Episode 2).⁵⁶ Some such tasks extended the dare beyond making contact with the world of ghosts—contestants had to stay among rats, hold a spider, tie a noose around their neck in a way that could cause strangling ('Duggan Bros. Cement Factory,' Season 1, Episode 3), or risk electrocution by holding an electric cable ('Hopkins Military Academy,' Season 1, Episode 4). Though actions are also seen in CCTV camera-like images, the visual fabric of *MTV's Fear* is largely formed by the close-up shots of contestants captured by the cameras they carried, which amplified the sounds of their heavy breathing, sighs and crying, thereby putting viewers in intimate contact with them and strongly encouraging identification.⁵⁷ Williams tells us that *Ghost Tracker* would take this further, measuring the investigators' heart rates.⁵⁸ Contestants and investigators alike become the equivalent of characters in a horror film. Speaking of *Most Haunted*, Koven rightly claims that the thrill audiences experience comes mainly from the suspense and tension the ghost hunt engenders on the team.⁵⁹

In spite of the thrills, or perhaps to further integrate them in everyday life, shows like *Ghost Hunters*, *Paranormal State* and *Paranormal Cops* perform a type of social work, which by no means downplays their entertainment value. On the contrary, the fact that participants find their experience so distressing adds to the disturbing quality of the events depicted. In the ‘Dark Man’ episode of *Paranormal State* (Season 1, Episode 3), Buell and his team seemingly help a mother make sure her dead son is not entrapped and can rest in peace: their role is to bring solace to the young man’s family. The episode ‘The Name’ in the same series (Season 1, Episode 2) tackles domestic abuse through exorcism, as a man’s violence is attributed to demonic possession. In ‘Altoona Tantrum’ (*Ghost Hunters*), Hawes and Wilson apparently bring relief to a family tormented by ghosts, confirming that what has been haunting them are indeed dead entities, with the reassurance that these spirits are nonetheless kind, harmless souls. The shows thus combine the fantastic with real-life problems audiences are familiar with—for the investigators and the victims, events such as suicide, drug use, abuse, and mental health can be understood as the result of supernatural forces. What the aforementioned episodes of *Paranormal State* and *Ghost Hunters* therefore document is, largely, the distress of real human beings. Centre stage, however, is occupied by the supernatural occurrences, and the programmes are devoted to séances, exorcism, blessings by priests, and, predominantly, the investigations by the team and crew, often captured in extended sequences shot through night-vision cameras and displaying low resolution images.

These shows also acknowledge that the supernatural may not be the cause of the phenomena reported by those who claim to experience a haunting or possession. *Ghost Hunters*, *Paranormal Cops* and *Paranormal State* always raise the possibility that the causes for what may appear supernatural may, on the contrary, be natural. The fruitless investigations of the

Mishler Theatre and a railroad museum in *Ghost Hunters* (Series 1, Episode 2) stand as examples where the apparent absence of supernatural activity validates supernatural claims in other situations. References to fraud and fakery permeate all of these shows, creating the ambiguity that is central to their appreciation, all the while adding ‘seriousness’ to the investigators’ intentions. An ‘open mind’ about the spiritual nature of events witnessed is key to the programmes’ truth claims. All that is asked of viewers, as Koven notes about *Most Haunted*, ‘is that they “do not *disbelieve*”,’⁶⁰ and this certainly applies to all shows discussed here. Only by not dismissing the supernatural can the audience engage in the scrutiny of the evidence gathered, which is largely a scrutiny of the audio-visual image.

This scrutiny, however, no longer requires a high degree of expertise. If challenges to the materialisation of ghosts in spiritualist séances and in photographs once required the specialism of masters such as magician John Nevil Maskelyne (1839-1917), illusionist and stunt artist Harry Houdini (1874-1926), and professional photographers—who could themselves forge such apparitions—amateur filmmakers who can likewise forge and post images of supernatural phenomena online are equally capable to expose tricks and make this exposure public. These shows’ main contribution to the tradition that dates back to the nineteenth-century is to place considerations about the legitimacy of the claims to the supernatural in the hands of the audience. Audio-visual evidence can be easily dismissed when audiences doubt an investigator’s ‘performance’ at the level of the profilmic (i.e. Derek Acorah’s trances in *Most Haunted*), or unmasked, when viewers closely examine aural and visual records in internet forums or channels such as YouTube.

Alisa Burger notes that the fans of *Ghost Hunters* ‘do not passively watch’ the show, ‘but instead actively engage with the footage from each investigation, being invited to watch for

video evidence and listen for electronic voice phenomena (EVPs)’—even if, for her, while audiences are ‘always situated within the present discourse of the featured investigation, fan participation remains mostly virtual.’⁶¹ For the most part participation is ‘simulated’ via the illusion that viewers partake in each step of the investigation, their positioning alongside the team, and the direct address in interviews and interactions with camera operators—all of which, Burger believes, include the fans in the hunt.⁶²

Shows like *Most Haunted* and *Ghost Hunters* take this interaction further in live episodes, where audiences remotely participate in an investigation (to varying degrees) in the course of several hours or nights—giving material form to what is traditionally an implied audience. A 2007 six-hour long *Ghost Hunters* Halloween special on Kentucky’s Waverly Hills Sanatorium (Season 3, Episode 18), the second live event in the series, opened with host Josh Gates (of Syfy’s *Destination Truth*) promising viewers they ‘are a part of the investigation.’ The episode featured ‘live video feeds’ and ‘an interactive technology center’ for ‘fans to send messages to TAPS investigators about potential paranormal activity heard and seen onscreen, as well as on raw video running live online.’⁶³ Chat rooms were also set up, so viewers could catch up with the team, and the programme’s website featured a panic button spectators should press if they saw something that went unnoticed—again, suggesting that images might reveal what the senses cannot perceive without the mediation of technology. This live episode included a competition for a TAPS membership—offering the opportunity for the contestant to join the team of investigators, thus making concrete, for that one viewer, what for others is, according to Burger, ‘simulated’ participation. The audience was invited to vote by texting their opinion on the finalists. On the live episode on the Buffalo Central Terminal (Season 6, Episode 21), spectators could vote to choose a location for a TAPS investigation in the near future.

Live online video feeds and text messages from fans are also integral to the live episodes of *Most Haunted*, where the audience sits in an auditorium nearby or inside an investigated location. The live special of January 2009 ('The Search for Evil') was broadcast over seven nights and had the crew perform a séance amidst the audience, in the middle of an auditorium improvised in Liverpool's St. George's Hall. During the séance, Fielding checked with individual members that they could also hear or feel something, which was invariably confirmed; and a fan was allegedly so distressed that they had to leave the building. In the same live series, a member of the audience joins the team in their quest (though she is barely acknowledged during the investigation), and viewers send text messages to the crew and, as in *Ghost Hunters*, report on what they see in the webcam footage (for instance, shadows behind team members). Fans of *Most Haunted*'s 'Search for Evil' also reported strange phenomena they apparently experienced in their homes while watching the episode: from names that would mysteriously come to them (Owen, Abigail, Jake) to reports of a dog shaking while staring at the TV set (figure 2). Participation thus also takes the form of the imprint of viewers' personal experiences on the television screen, in the form of text messages that expand these programmes' collection of responses to the supernatural.

The interactivity characteristic of these shows goes beyond individual episodes. Internet sites devoted to the various series abound with scene analyses resorting to manipulation of speed, pauses and replays to debunk specific moments, which are then commented upon by fans. Some analyses betray a strong investment in the shows and in the apparatus they put to the service of 'scientific' evidence. In their deployment of the same technology used in the programmes, however, the fans not only endorse its power to register supernatural activity, but also its ability to denounce the forgery of evidence. An example is the deconstruction of

the alleged pulling of *Ghost Hunters*' Grant Wilson's collar on YouTube by a viewer identified (tellingly) as FORMERGHFAN, who devotes three videos to this scene, calling them 'Jacket Pull Debunk' and concluding with the words 'May common sense prevail.' This call for rational thinking echoes the programmes' own use of technology and scientific discourse. In the first video we read, 'Make note that the only part of Grant's Jacket [sic.] that moves is the collar compressing downwards. This would not cause his body to react in this way' (figure 3). This is followed by comments conveying disappointment. TheHaratashi, for example, states, 'I thought Ghost Hunters as the only legit ghost hunting show, but it looks like they are just a bunch of scumbags like everyone else in this business.' But some comments also reassert their faith in the series: 'This is so unfair on Grant,' says a fan identified as Michael Hunt.⁶⁴ Technology, in this case a thermal camera showing a warmer temperature next to the collar of the investigator's jacket, is supposed to support the claim that some supernatural entity was pulling it—presuming this action would produce heat. But the viewer's analysis suggests that the reason for the indication of warmth near the bit being allegedly pulled is the proximity of the collar to Grant's neck—his body heat (figure 4). Technology is not only analysed, but also employed by the fan, whose investment is so strong as to make them bother to reconstitute the same scene with the simulation of a 3D avatar further deconstructing the movements of Wilson's collar and body (figure 5).

The fan analysis of audio-visual evidence, however, relies on details which, in themselves, can neither prove or disprove the manifestation of the supernatural. The very technology whose revealing capabilities are celebrated by both producers and fans proves insufficient—all it can do is provide them with a 'scientific' vocabulary to articulate what they believe to be supernatural experiences in terms of temperature measurements or negative air ions.⁶⁵ The 'Fake Rope' controversy in a 2015 *Most Haunted Live* Halloween episode, the first of season

17 ('30 East Drive'), is a case in point.⁶⁶ On a video that, in Karl Beattie's words, was intended 'not for the loonies,' but for 'fans who asked a very sensible question,' the producer defends himself against accusations of fraud. The controversy is around a cord looped through Beattie's belt. In the original sequence, Beattie is apparently pulled down to the floor by a supernatural force, but viewers suggest that what causes his fall is, instead, a white cord around his waist area. Beattie's defence consists of showing that what is around his body is an electric black cable, not a white cord meant to be disguised, and that having it attached to his body was standard procedure to keep cameras stable, rather than a strategy to pull him down. Beattie says the black cable appears white because the sequence was shot in night vision mode. The producer's defence video, in turn, generated another fan video analysis claiming that an electric cable indeed shows in other night vision sequences, but contradicting Beattie's claim, it always appears black—and is different to the one attached to Beattie's body.⁶⁷ Beattie's fall, however, could have just as easily been simulated by the producer without the pulling of a cord. The focus on details distracts us from the larger question—for in itself the tumble offers no evidence of supernatural activity, even if one firmly believes in ghosts.

The digital age has reignited the discussion about photography and film's ability to both document and forge a reality. If what Rodowick believes to be the digital image's weakened link to the physical world generates greater suspicion about audio-visual records, the difficulty in tracing an image or a sound to a palpable source in these series further complicates the evidential value of indexical media. What remains unquestionable is that digital technology has widened access to the production and manipulation of images. The serial modes of presentation provided by ghost hunting reality shows; their invitation to scrutinise the image; and their online availability encourage a very active type of

participation, often promoting a significant investment on the part of fans, who themselves produce videos to either legitimate the presence of the supernatural phenomena or reveal it as fake.

This interaction with images of ghosts further integrates them into our realities. The aforementioned live episode of *Ghost Hunters* at Buffalo Central promotes an iPhone app that connects with the mobile's GPS and alerts users to the proximity of supposedly haunted locations investigated by TAPS, literally bringing the show and the supernatural into the individual lives of viewers. This supplementation of the material world we live in with spaces (and maybe ghosts) featured in TV shows is probably symptomatic of the merging of reality and fiction obsessed about in the 'post-truth' scenario, but most importantly, it instigates a feeling of instability and uncertainty, and furthermore extracts pleasure from it.

The factual and interactive treatment of themes and strategies that feature in horror stories brings a development to the traditional literature on the genre. The symbolic articulation of reality that usually describes horror's allegorical representation creates a distance between the supernatural image and reality—a safe separation. These reality shows promote, instead, a sense of integration. The supernatural is no longer better explained as an allegorical translation of a historical or lived reality; it can be experienced as real, bringing the image and the physical world to the same level—irrespective of one's beliefs in the authenticity of what is shown.⁶⁸ Beyond horror, these programmes and their predecessors disturb conceptions of the audio-visual record's documentary value. They may perpetuate spirit photography's converging of different worlds, but where the analogue photographs of the dead brought together the realms of the natural and the supernatural, their counterparts in the digital age integrate artifice and reality in ways that may speak of a more complex state of

affairs. The debate about the reliability or unreliability of photographic and audio-visual evidence is as old as these media, but the idea that the images they produce may register supernatural phenomena puts into question not only the indexical attributes so central to their essence, but the materiality or immateriality of the world they can potentially record. The documentation of the supernatural raises these issues in ways that are playful and unsettling..

¹ Annette Hill, *Paranormal Media: Audiences, Spirits and Magic in Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2011), 78–79; Karen Willias, ‘The Liveness of Ghosts: Haunting and Reality TV,’ in María del Pilar and Esther Peeren (eds), *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Spaces of Everyday Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 155–156.

² Like Orson Welles’s infamous *War of the Worlds* (1938), *Ghostwatch* is reported to have generated panic among viewers. Aired on Halloween night, this programme featured BBC celebrities familiar to British audiences broadcasting what was presented as a journalistic investigation of a haunting afflicting a single mother and her two daughters (inspired by the Enfield poltergeist). Many spectators allegedly believed in the show’s documentary status. There have been reports of unsurmountable amounts of distress, with the suicide of a young man being controversially blamed on the show. See Murray Leeder, ‘*Ghostwatch* and the Haunting of Media’. *Horror Studies* vol. 4, no. 2 (2013), pp. 178–179. For more on this show also see Hill, 67–68.

³ David Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 117.

⁴ André Bazin, ‘The Ontology of the Photographic Image,’ in *What Is Cinema? Vol. 1*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 9–16; Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang,

1982); Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

⁵ Rachel Dixon, 'How Britain Became a Nation of Ghost Hunters,' *Guardian*, 30 October 2009, accessed 24 April 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/oct/30/ghost-hunters-halloween>. See also Hill, 92.

⁶ Yvette Fielding and Ciarán O'Keeffe, *In Search of the Supernatural* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008), 248.

⁷ Hill, 9.

⁸ See 'About Ghostvillage.com,' accessed 24 April 2019, <http://ghostvillage.com/about/>.

⁹ See Rachele McDuff, Marie-Eve Shaffer et al., 'Dossier spécial paranormal: Des chasseurs de fantômes aux cryptides,' *Métro*, 3 January 2015, accessed 24 April 2019, <http://journalmetro.com/actualites/national/586192/dossier-special-paranormal-des-chasseurs-de-fantomes-aux-cryptides/>.

¹⁰ Neil Dagnall, 'What Are the Top Three Scientific Explanations for Ghost Sightings?,' *The Independent*, 27 October 2016, accessed on 24 April 2019, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/what-are-the-top-three-scientific-explanations-for-ghost-sightings-a7383716.html>.

¹¹ Andrew Higgins, 'Norway Has a New Passion: Ghost Hunting,' *New York Times*, 24 October 2015, accessed 24 April 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/25/world/europe/for-many-norwegians-ghosts-fill-a-void.html?_r=0.

¹² Higgins, par. 5.

¹³ Christopher Partridge, 'Haunted Culture: The Persistence of Belief in the Paranormal,' in Olu Jenzen and Sally R. Munt (eds), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Paranormal Cultures* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), 45–46.

¹⁴ See Yvette Fielding, Derek Acorah, and Gill Paul, *Most Haunted: The Official Behind-the-Scenes Guide* (London: Michael Joseph, 2005); Yvette Fielding and Ciarán O’Keeffe, *Ghost Hunters: A Guide to Investigating the Paranormal* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2006); and Yvette Fielding and Ciarán O’Keeffe, *In Search of the Supernatural*, *ibid.*

¹⁵ Hill, 70. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶ Mikel J. Koven, ‘*Most Haunted* and the Convergence of Traditional Belief and Popular Television.’ *Folklore* vol. 118, no. 2 (2007), p. 196. For example, there were questions about Derek Acorah’s mediumistic insights and acts—which the show’s parapsychologist Ciarán O’Keeffe suggested were faked in an interview to *The Daily Mirror* on 28 October 2005, soon after Acorah left the show in season 7 to host his own programme. Acorah was temporarily replaced by David Wells, whose performance is less flamboyant (he avoids allowing himself to be possessed, for example). See Koven, 193. The show has included a number of mediums, among which are Gordon Smith, Brian Shepherd and Chris Conway.

¹⁷ Hill, *ibid.*, and Williams, 149–161.

¹⁸ Sarah Juliet Lauro and Catherine Paul, ‘“Make Me Believe”: Ghost-Hunting Technology and the Postmodern Fantastic.’ *Horror Studies* vol. 4, no. 2 (2013): 221–239.

¹⁹ For Tom Gunning’s discussion of authenticity in photographs, see ‘Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography’s Uncanny,’ in Patrice Petro (ed), *Fugitive Images from Photography to Video* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 42–71, and ‘What’s the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs.’ *Nordicom Review* vol. 1, no. 2 (2004), pp. 39–49. For his discussion about the same issue in the cinema, see, for example, ‘An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator,’ in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, fifth edition, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 818–832.

²⁰ Wilson returned for a special appearance in the 200th episode of the show, aired in October 2014.

²¹ I discuss the sense of a permeable frame connecting the diegesis with the surrounding extrafilmic in an article on found-footage horror movies. See Cecilia Sayad, 'Found-Footage Horror and the Frame's Undoing,' *Cinema Journal* vol. 55, no. 2 (2016), pp. 43–66.

²² Gunning, 'Phantom Images,' 42.

²³ Rodowick, 9.

²⁴ Gunning, 'What's the Point,' 40.

²⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*; Stanley Cavell, 'What Photography Calls Thinking,' reprinted in William Rothman (ed), *Cavell on Film* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 118, qtd. in Rodowick, 57–58.

²⁶ See, for example, Noël Carroll, 'Concerning Uniqueness Claims for Photographic and Cinematographic Representation,' in *Dialectics and Humanism* vol. 14, no. 2 (1987), pp. 29–43; Gunning, 'What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs'; Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*.

²⁷ Fielding and O'Keefe, *In Search of the Supernatural*, 18.

²⁸ Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 28.

²⁹ Sconce, 22–23.

³⁰ Sconce, 23.

³¹ Sconce, 28.

³² Martyn Jolly, *Faces of the Living Dead: The Belief in Spirit Photography* (London: British Library, 2006), 14. For the question about the materiality of spirits in these photographs, see also Karl Schoonover, 'Ectoplasms, Evanescence, and Photography,' *Art Journal* vol. 62, no. 3 (2003), pp. 30–43.

³³ Fred Gettings, *Ghosts in Photographs: The Extraordinary Story of Spirit Photography* (New York: Harmony, 1978), 17.

³⁴ Gettings, 143.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Gunning, 'To Scan a Ghost,' 98.

³⁷ Ibid., 99.

³⁸ Ibid., 99.

³⁹ Gettings, 15. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁰ James Coates, *Photographing the Invisible* (London: L. N. Fowler & Co., 1912), pp. 21–22, quoted in Gettings, 15. Emphasis in original.

⁴¹ Gunning, 'Phantom Images,' 51.

⁴² Gunning, 'To Scan a Ghost,' 122.

⁴³ Ibid., 99.

⁴⁴ Gunning, 'Phantom Images,' 43.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 42–43.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁷ Gunning, 'To Scan a Ghost,' 101.

⁴⁸ Williams, 149.

⁴⁹ Williams, 149.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Williams, 150.

⁵³ The centrality of technology characterizes also Gunning's notion of the cinema of attractions, as Buse reminds us, where the thrill was as much about the technology itself as about the projected moving images. Buse, 137.

⁵⁴ Benjamin Radford, ‘The Shady Science of Ghost Hunting’, Live Science, 27 October 2006, par. 28, accessed 24 April 2019, <http://www.livescience.com/4261-shady-science-ghost-hunting.html>.

⁵⁵ Koven, 189.

⁵⁶ Williams argues that *MTV’s Fear* was ‘more a legend trip than a investigation of paranormal phenomena.’ Williams, 152.

⁵⁷ Williams rightly notes that *Blair Witch Project* (Eduardo Sánchez, Daniel Myrick, 1999), a fiction horror film presented as a documentary made of the found footage shot by student filmmakers who disappear during an investigation of the Blair Witch legend, has influenced the aesthetics of reality shows such as *MTV’s Fear*. Williams, 151.

⁵⁸ Williams, 153.

⁵⁹ Koven, 188–189.

⁶⁰ Koven, 200.

⁶¹ Alissa Burger, ‘*Ghost Hunters: Simulated Participation in Televisual Hauntings*,’ in *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Spaces of Everyday Culture*, 162.

⁶² Burger, 164.

⁶³ Burger, 164.

⁶⁴ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZIM-Uy8ODYQ>. Accessed 23 April 2019.

⁶⁵ The belief that film had the potential to enhance our perception of physical reality dates back to classical film theory, as Malcolm Turvey explains in his identification of a ‘revelationist’ tradition. See Malcom Turvey, *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁶⁶ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQ-yLUIeRMM>, Accessed 24 April 2019.

⁶⁷ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15W9kMv6110>, accessed 24 April 2019.

⁶⁸ Richard Rushton and Shane Denson, among others, contend that the memory of film images can be as powerful (and as real) as that of lived experience. See Richard Rushton, *The Reality of Film: Theories of Filmic Reality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), and Shane Denson and Julia Leyda, 'Perspectives on Post-Cinema,' in Denson and Leyda (eds.), *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st Century Film* (Falmer: REFRAME Books, 2016).