Nothing to Fear: Learning to Live With (Digital) Ghosts

Abstract:

This writing sample consists of a revised and condensed version of my M.Phil. dissertation, which uses the 1999 horror film *The Blair Witch Project* to think through the "specters" of the digital age and the anxieties that they provoke. To do so, it examines the ways that the development of digital photography was unsettling the media landscape into which the film emerged, tracing the relationship between two concepts – the "spectral logic" discussed by Derrida in several later works and the "double logic of remediation" theorized by Bolter and Grusin – and exploring the implications of the idea that to digitize a given medium is, in effect, to deconstruct it.

After a brief introduction, the paper opens by considering the contemporaneous reception of the film. It subsequently focuses on the titular Witch, and poses the problematic of ascertaining the nature of her operation within the film's text. The paper then begins to approach this problematic by surveying the media-theoretical context in which the film appeared, introducing and constelling its own theoretical underpinnings in the process.

The paper next draws on the literature concerning a similar work, Mark Z. Danielewski's novel *House of Leaves*, to establish the Witch as symbolic of the unrepresentable force of digitalization, and shows that *The Blair Witch Project* can be read as offering a performance of the demise of the Bazinian-Barthesian understanding of photography at the hands of digital media that is in keeping with the zeitgeist of its cultural moment. It claims, however, that this reading is incomplete, insofar as the film in fact evinces a subtle but pervasive skepticism about the concept of photo-objectivity from its first shot. By thus suggesting that the indeterminacy of the undeniably spectral marks of the digital age is actually nothing new, it argues, *The Blair Witch Project* ultimately posits the digital as a new iteration of the nothing/not-thing that Derrida identifies at the center of all signification.

The paper therefore takes up Mark Hansen's claim that digital media enforce a "hermeneutics of embodiment," and argues that this foregrounding of the interpretive function of the human body necessarily also elicits an awareness of the body's finitude that undermines the metaphysical claims bound up in the classical theorizations of photo-objectivity. Through a close reading of the film's two scenes set in cemeteries, it suggests that *The Blair Witch Project* reveals that what we truly fear about digital media is that they make these comforting (but fraudulent) conceptions of representational permanence and certainty untenable.

Although being disabused of such myths by digital media is anxiety-provoking, the paper concludes, it is also conducive to a more honest appraisal of the human condition, one that understands that the fullness of meaning exists in a delicate relation with meaning's essential contingency. While interacting with digital media does bring one into an uncomfortably close confrontation with nothing, it is the nothing eternally bound up in being – a nothing that can and must be *read*, and therefore nothing to fear.

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In lieu of an epigraph, *The Blair Witch Project* opens with an epitaph: "In October of 1994, three student filmmakers disappeared in the woods near Burkittsville, Maryland while shooting a documentary. A year later their footage was found." In other words: Here lies something real. It is easy to assume that only horrors could proceed from such a sepulchral marker, and *The Blair Witch Project* is universally categorized as a tale of terror. This classification, however, is woefully incomplete; just as the inscription which opens the film is itself a lie, so too are its implications – including the suggestion that the specters which purportedly haunt its text can do us any harm. While *The Blair Witch Project* is indeed animated by the deepest anxieties of the digital age, its ultimate message is redemptive: In the forest of the digital, there is nothing – or at least, nothing new – to fear.

Like all ghost stories, *The Blair Witch Project* proceeds from a corpse: here, the corpse of a corpus. The body in question belonged to documentary film, as a synecdoche for the traditional idea of "photography." At the time of the film's release, the deceased had apparently already been carted off to the morgue, but the chalk outlining where the body had fallen had yet to fade away. Although it is difficult to detect, the film presents two theories of the case. The first is of murder most foul: photography slain by something lurking in the shadows, just out of sight. This narrative is investigated thoroughly – indeed, it occupies the majority of the film's text – but the film ultimately (and conspicuously) fails to apprehend a suspect. In the course of this investigation, however, *The Blair Witch Project* turns up a series of clues that point toward what actually took place, although these are easily overlooked due to the fact that their testimony is almost beyond belief. They suggest that despite all appearances to the contrary, no crime has taken place, because the deceased was never more than a figment of our collective imaginations.

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While this conclusion apparently (dis)solves the mystery of who killed photography, it would seem to replace it with an unsettling paradox: a ghost without an originating body, specters all the way down. This paradox, however, points toward a transcendental structure that remains unmoved beneath the tectonic shifts in human experience set in motion by the advent of digital technology – and a greater understanding of Jacques Derrida's insistences, at opposite ends of *Specters of Marx*, "the 'scholar' of the future, the 'intellectual' of tomorrow" (2006: 221), and indeed anyone who wonders "what will come in the future-to-come" (2006:xix), must "learn to live with ghosts" (2006: xvii-iii).

Co-written, co-edited, and co-directed by Dan Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, *The Blair Witch Project* tells the story of three student filmmakers – Heather, Michael, and Josh – who vanish in the woods near Burkittsville, Maryland (formerly known as Blair) in the process of trying to make a documentary. The trio's uncompleted film, entitled "The Blair Witch Project," was meant to be an investigation of a witch who, according to legend, has haunted the area for centuries, and been associated with a series of strange and horrific events throughout the town's history. Instead, selections from the material they shot wound up as *The Blair Witch Project*, which with its stark title card posits itself as a documentary record of their final days.

More than anything else, the film is associated with the confusion surrounding the provenance of its images that resulted from the then-radical way that its text – and a wide array of paratexts, including a website and a special on the Sci-Fi Channel – presented the movie as a documentary comprised of "found footage," rather than a work of fiction. While this device had been used in earlier works (such as *Cannibal Holocaust, Man Bites Dog*, *The Last Broadcast*, and *Forgotten Silver*), 'found footage' had never before made up the entire text of a widely-released film that did not intend for its fictionality to be obvious by the time its final credits

rolled. As a result, when the film was released, audiences were deeply unsure what to make of it. One study found that, among a large sample of emails discussing the film exchanged in the first six months following its release, fully 38.6 percent discuss its "reality status" (Schreier 2004: 325); moreover, fully 39 percent of the "discussants" in these conversations "were at least temporarily somewhat uncertain" as to whether the events depicted in the film really happened.

Since its release in 1999, however, *The Blair Witch Project* has also been discussed as a significant cultural artifact in the history of digital technology. "'Blair Witch' Proclaimed First Internet Movie" announced a headline in the Chicago Tribune, a month and a day after the film's debut; "[b]y all accounts what has made the film so successful is the Internet … The reaction to the Web site has been powerful; there have been nearly 80 million 'hits' on it" (Weinraub 1999) explained the article beneath. Less than a year later, a piece in *Variety* pointed out that "calmer heads are realizing that the 'Blair Witch' site was not an added-on marketing tool but was designed as part of the film experience" (Graser & Hayes 2000). Building from this observation, J.P. Telotte has astutely examined the way that the vast trove of faux-archival materials on the site – which include photographs, 'historical' footage, and interviews with characters who do not appear in the film – constitute "the film's *backstory"* (2001: 35), and "elaborately propagate the notion of authenticity, attesting to the film as … a 'found footage' type of documentary rather than a fictional work."

At the same time, the film was also attracting attention for the fact that the images that comprised its text appeared to be entirely analog,[1] during a period when CGI was increasingly prevalent (and seemingly ubiquitous within the genre of horror). For example, in his

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1   Although it was shot on 16mm film and Hi-8 video, the film was transferred to a digital format for editing, before being transferred again onto to 35mm film for theatrical exhibition – a process which resulted in its being formatted in an aspect ratio closer to that of television than traditional cinema, as the sides of the image had to be masked in order to preserve the top and bottom of each shot (Goldman 1999).

contemporaneous review of the movie, Roger Ebert suggested that *The Blair Witch Project* is

"an extraordinarily effective horror film" (1999) in large part because of the fact that "it has no

fancy special effects or digital monsters." Ebert concluded his review by returning to this theme,

noting that "[a]t a time when digital techniques can show us almost anything, 'The Blair Witch

Project' is a reminder that what really scares us is the stuff we can't see." These sentiments are

echoed by the filmmakers themselves in a 1999 interview with *The Onion*, published to coincide

with the film's release; there, the directors claim that they "came up with the idea in 1993 …

before CGI got out of control. We … wanted to see if we can scare people now in the

'90s…When we shot it, that was the only thing: Just keep it real so we can scare people" (Myrick

and Sanchez 1999).

    The Blair Witch Project is thus dually-situated at the threshold of the digital age: at once

the "first Internet movie" and among the last horror films to eschew detectable digital effects.

Despite this, the film has not received particular attention as a work with something to say *about*

the rapidly-shifting media landscape into which it emerged. It is unfortunate that this framing has

been neglected, for *The Blair Witch Project* offers a nuanced engagement with the questions

raised and anxieties activated by the dawning of the digital age.

    One way to pose the question of what a horror movie is about is to ask what fears it taps

into, for as S.S. Prawer persuasively argues in *Caligari's Children*, the genre's primary function

is *cathartic*; scary movies unleash deep "terrors" (1980: 60) that are often "connected with our

social concerns" into a controlled environment in which they can be exercised until they are

exorcized.[2] To understand *The Blair Witch Project*, then, one might begin by asking what,

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2   Prawer's contention that works of horror provide a space for the working-out of pervasive cultural anxieties
    dovetails neatly with Ian Conrich's observation that "the horror film has been seen to peak at times of war, and
    during periods of economic, political, and moral exigency" (2010: 3).

precisely, those who view the film are afraid of. The obvious answer, the Blair Witch, is not

especially illuminating; the Witch is not only a fictional construct, but a particularly elusive one

– to the viewers who never get a glimpse of her no less than to the would-be filmmakers whose

vain struggle to capture her on tape both motivates and comprises the text of the film.

It is this very elusiveness that leads David Banash to begin his insightful review of the

film with the claim that it is "famous for what it does not show" (1999). Banash is not referring

to the absence of CGI from the film – indeed, his review makes no mention of digital media

other than the DAT recorder used by the characters – but to the crucial fact that the Witch herself,

despite being the center around which the film is structured, nevertheless does not appear within

its text. This conspicuous absence causes Banash, who notes that "the classic horror narrative is

based on the return of the repressed" (1999), to identify two candidates for the uncanny

"something repressed which *recurs*" (Freud 1959: 394) in the film. The first is the Witch herself,

"who, presumably, is responsible for the disappearance of the filmmakers" (Banash 1999). But

Banash also draws attention to the fact that "at every turn in the narrative … the technological

apparatus and its inability to represent the witch are underscored," and concludes that "[t]he fact

that the witch cannot be captured on film is the horror of the film … because it dramatizes

(shows!) our total reliance on technologies that, if pushed, break, rupture, and give over to chaos,"

thus performing what Banash calls a "horrifying and literal evisceration of mimesis." He

therefore identifies "the film's central plot: the failure of a documentary project," and argues that

the recurrence of the Witch precipitates a more troubling return: as the failure of representation

"is shown in agonizing detail as the mimetic technologies (maps, compass, DAT, video, film)"

used by the menaced filmmakers "break down," we are confronted with our theretofore-

repressed "knowledge of our powerlessness in a world saturated with, but immune to, a

technological mimesis we can neither trust nor escape."

What is missing from Banash's account, however, is any sense of *why* these mimetic technologies are suddenly failing – or any consideration of the relationship between the return of the Witch and the return of our repressed knowledge of the limits of mimesis. This omission is particularly glaring when one considers Banash's inclusion of the filmmakers' map and compass in his inventory of the representational technologies that fail over the course of the film, despite the fact that their nature, and the nature of their failure, is categorically different from that of the other "mimetic technologies" that Banash claims "break down." The failure of the filmmakers' audiovisual recording equipment is not pervasive; Banash himself acknowledges that this failure "**is shown** in chilling detail" by the very technologies whose fundamental ability to represent anything he claims the film is calling into question. Rather, the "failure" of the audiovisual equipment is limited to their inability to capture the Witch and present her to the viewer. The map and compass, on the other hand, are not intended to produce representations – indeed, Banash's categorization of a compass as a "mimetic technology" is suspect – and their failure is total: insofar as they fail to direct the filmmakers to their destination, they fail to operate *as* a map and compass – even as the cameras and DAT recorder continue to adequately record everything in the film that isn't the Witch.

More importantly, Banash overlooks the crucial fact that the map and compass *do not actually fail.* The claim that they do is most directly premised on a scene in which the filmmakers find themselves back where they started, despite the fact that they have walked south all day. When one considers the fact that materials on the film's website explain that the cabin explored by Heather and Josh in the film's final scene burned down years before that footage was ostensibly shot, however, subtly suggesting that the filmmakers' inability to find the end of the

woods is a consequence of their having traveled back in time, it becomes clear that the most

likely explanation for the "failure" of the map and compass is not that the technologies have

ceased to operate correctly, but rather that the filmmakers are confronting a changed landscape –

an environment that has literally shifted beneath their feet.

This reading is perhaps less shocking when one realizes that in 1999, the ground was

shifting beneath the feet of *all* documentarians in ways that threatened the very foundation of *the*

documentary project, as the mass availability of digital "cameras" abruptly undermined the

commonly-held and deeply-ingrained understanding of what a photographic image was. In *The*

Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era, William J. Mitchell argues that

until the advent of digital photography, people generally understood the photograph as an

objective and heightened form of human vision:

> The camera has commonly been seen as an ideal Cartesian instrument — a device for use by
> observing subjects to record supremely accurate traces of the objects before them. It is supereye –
> a perceptual prosthesis that can stop action better than the human eye, resolve finer detail,
> remorselessly attend to the subtlest distinctions of intensity, and not leave unregistered anything in
> the field of its gaze …   The photographic procedure … seems to provide a guaranteed way of
> overcoming subjectivity and getting at the real truth. (1992: 27-29)

André Bazin expresses similar sentiments in his landmark essay "The Ontology of the

Photographic Image." For Bazin, the key factor that differentiates photography from the other

"plastic arts" derives from the fact that with the invention of the photograph "[f]or the first time,

between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a

nonliving agent" (1960: 7). This "objective nature of photography," (1960: 8) Bazin argues,

"confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making. In spite of any

objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object

reproduced, actually re-presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space." In *Camera*

Lucida, Roland Barthes likewise claims that the photograph is a "weightless, transparent

envelope" (1981: 4) around its subject, and "literally an emanation of the referent" (1981: 80).

He therefore concludes that photography's "essence is to ratify what it represents" (1981: 89),

and claims that

> the Photograph is indifferent to all intermediaries: it does not invent; it is authentication itself; the (rare) artifices it permits are not probative; they are, on the contrary, trick pictures … Photography never lies: or rather, it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature tendentious, never as to its existence. (1981: 87)

The general understanding of the analog photograph, then, even among thinkers such as Barthes,

is that it embodied a certain kind of absolute, material assurance – and thus paradoxically

functioned, in effect, as something of an unmediated medium. In other words, the photograph as

traditionally construed was a technology of objective, rather than processual, presence; it offered,

or seemed to offer, representation devoid of the subjectivity of representationalism.

Mitchell claims that with the appearance on the market of consumer-level digital cameras,

however, "photography was dead – or, more precisely, radically and permanently displaced"

(1992: 20) due to a new manipulability of the image. "When we look at photographs we presume,

unless we have some clear indications to the contrary, that they have not been reworked," he

explains, whereas "the essential characteristic of digital information is that it can be manipulated

easily and very rapidly by computer. It is simply a matter of substituting new digits for old.

Digital images are, in fact, much more susceptible to alteration than photographs, drawings,

paintings, or *any* other kinds of images" (1992: 7). As a result, Mitchell argues, "[w]e are

faced … with a new uncertainty about the status and interpretation of the visual signifier" (1992:

17). Bernard Stiegler echoes certain of Mitchell's claims[3] in his essay "The Discrete Image,"

arguing that when "photons become pixels that are in turn reduced to zeros and ones on which

discrete calculations can be performed" (2002: 153), the digital photograph becomes susceptible

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3   In "Seeing With the Body: The Digital Image in Postphotography," Mark B.N. Hansen rightly notes that Mitchell's "conclusions and the binary opposition on which they are based need to be questioned" (2001: 57) – as they are by Stiegler, and shall be at a further point in this paper.

to manipulation, and can be made to testify to events that never occurred. Stiegler notes that

> This possibility, which is *essential* to the digital photographic image, of *not having been*, inspires *fear*, for this image, at the same time that it is infinitely manipulable, *remains* a photo, it preserves something of the *this was* within itself*,* and the possibility of distinguishing the true from the false dwindles in proportion as the possibilities for the digital treatment of photos grow. (2002: 150)

Mitchell also points out that in a post-digital world there is "no way to determine" whether a given image "is a freshly captured, unmanipulated record or a mutation of a mutation that has passed through many unknown hands" (1992: 51-52). Thus, the newfound susceptibility to manipulation of images that remain phenomenologically photographic leads to a loss of faith in the unimpeachability of photographic testimony that ultimately results in a diminution in the authority accorded to *every* photograph.

In other words, digitalization was in the process of killing the photo-objectivity star right around the time that "three student filmmakers disappeared in the woods near Burkittsville, Maryland while shooting a documentary" – thereby setting free what Jacques Derrida would call the ghost of photography. Derrida gestures toward the relationship between digital technology and his theorization of spectrality in *Specters of Marx*, explicitly declaring his intention to provide "a thinking of the spectral … that takes into account an irreducible *virtuality* (virtual space, virtual object, synthetic image, spectral simulacrum, teletechnological differ*a*nce, *idealiterability,* trace beyond presence and absence, and so forth)" (2006: 238).[4] In Derrida's account, "[t]he specter is first and foremost something visible. It is of the visible, but of the invisible visible, it is the visibility of a body which is not present in flesh and blood" (Derrida & Stiegler 2002: 115). In other words, a specter is a present absence, or an absent presence – but crucially, it is an absent presence that is nevertheless *perceived*. In addition to being at once

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4   Lest one dismiss these lines as ambiguous, rather than deliberately punning, it should be noted that "synthetic image" is the literal translation of a French phrase ["image de synthèse"] commonly used to refer to the digital image.

visible-and-invisible (or, perhaps, transparent-and-opaque) and present-and-absent, the ghost is

both material and immaterial; "a matter of the spirit" (2006: 11) that also "gives a tableau of the

becoming-immaterial of matter" (2006: 191). In this lattermost function, the ghost operates as a

memento mori, "a trace that marks the present with its absence in advance" (Derrida & Stiegler

2002: 117).

In order to fully understand both Derrida's thinking about spectrality and its applicability

to digital media, one must also parse the distinction Derrida draws between the "spirit" and the

"specter." Derrida makes clear that "the spirit, the specter are not the same thing" (2006: 5), and

asserts that "[t]he ghost is the phenomenon of the spirit" (2006: 169). This sounds unusually

Hegelian for Derrida, until one pairs it with his repeated references throughout *Specters of Marx*

to "nothing"; he argues, for example, that the specter "is *nothing* visible" (2006: 5),

simultaneously "still nothing that can be seen … [and] no longer anything that can be seen."

However, "unlike the spirit … or the idea," the "singular nothing that a ghost remains … is a

nothing *that takes on a body*" (2006: 176).

The sense in which Derrida uses "nothing" requires some clarification, but it is

impossible to 'think' nothing other than through something that is not nothing – in other words,

through a metaphor. A particularly apt metaphor through which we can approach nothing is

"time." Derrida explains, drawing on Aristotle:

> If one thinks time on the basis of the now, one must conclude that it is not. The now is given simultaneously as that which is *no longer* and as that which is *not yet*. It is what it is not, and is not what it is… 'In one sense it has been and is no longer, and in another sense, it will be and is not yet.' Thereby time is *composed* of nonbeings. Now, that which bears within it a certain *no-thing*, that which accommodates nonbeingness, cannot participate in presence, in substance, in *beingness* itself…" (1982: 39-40).

The spirit, then, is *nothing in itself,* or *nothing other than* that which is embodied by the specter –

which in turn cannot be said to be a thing, because it "bears within it a certain *no*-thing": the

spirit that it embodies; spirit and specter thus exist in what Bernard Stiegler, borrowing from

Gilbert Simondon, calls "a transductive relation (a relation which constitutes its terms, in which

one term cannot precede the other because they exist only in the relation)" (Derrida & Stiegler

2002: 161). When Derrida says that something is nothing, then, he does not mean that it is

simply absent, but rather that one should not accord it the sense of full and self-sufficient

presence that usually attends a claim that something *is*. One would therefore not be wrong to

identify the insubstantial present-absence of the specter as the essential figure of and for the

broader body of Derrida's thought; as Derrida avers, "the spectral logic is de facto a

deconstructive logic" (Derrida & Stiegler 2002: 117).

As it turns out, the "double logic of remediation" (1999: 5) described by Jay David Bolter

and Richard Grusin, which has become so dominant a paradigm for discussing digitalization that

the two words have come to be used interchangeably, bears an uncanny resemblance the

"spectral logic" described by Derrida – an identification which brings to light the essential fact

that the digitalization of a given medium intrinsically and systematically deconstructs it. Bolter

and Grusin define remediation as "the representation of one medium in another" (1999: 45), and

claim that it is "a defining characteristic of the new digital media." Remediation is a double logic

insofar as it depends on a constant and apparently paradoxical play between "the twin

preoccupations of contemporary media: immediacy and hypermediacy… the transparent

presentation of the real and the enjoyment of the opacity of media themselves" (1999: 21). Such

an oscillation between two terms that initially seem to be irreconcilable opposites is reminiscent

of the specter; moreover, like the specter, remediation operates by collapsing the distinction

between them. "If the logic of immediacy leads one to either erase or render automatic the act of

representation, the logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and

makes then visible" (1999: 33), declare Bolter and Grusin, but they are adamant that immediacy both "depends on" (1999:6) and "leads to" (1999: 21) hypermediacy. The interplay between immediacy and hypermediacy is thus also a transductive relation – and this is far from the only commonality between Bolter and Grusin's theorization of digital media and Derrida's work.

Derrida's influence is a spectral presence throughout *Remediation*, and one that does not pass unremarked by its authors. Bolter and Grusin follow their qualified claim that although they "are not claiming this as an a priori truth … at our present moment all mediation is remediation" (1999: 55) by acknowledging "an analogy between our analysis of media and poststructuralist literary theory … for Derrida and other poststructuralists have argued that all interpretation is reinterpretation" (1999: 56). Elsewhere, they cede that "[t]he logic of remediation we describe here is similar to Derrida's (1981) account of mimesis, where mimesis is defined not ontologically or objectively in terms of the resemblance of a representation to its object but rather intersubjectively in terms of the reproduction of the feeling of imitation or resemblance in the perceiving subject" (1999: 53fn1). Finally, they assert that "the process of remediation makes us aware that all media are at one level a 'play of signs,' which is a lesson that we take from poststructuralist literary theory" (1999: 19).

What they do not mention, however, is that "the process of remediation" is eerily similar to "the spectrogenic process" (2006: 157) – that is, the process by which ghosts are created – described by Derrida in *Specters of Marx*. Indeed, the "spectrogenic process" is nothing other than a process of remediation:

> For there to be ghost, there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever … Once ideas or thoughts … are detached from their substratum, one engenders some ghost by *giving them a body.* Not by returning to the living body from which ideas and thoughts have been torn loose, but by incarnating the latter in *another artifactual body, a prosthetic body …* (2006: 157-58)

It would seem, then, that "remediation" is a remediation of spectrality – and that the process of

digitalization also a "de facto deconstructive logic," producing specters of media to go along with what Derrida might (already have) call(ed) specters of marks.

The substantive point made here is worth drawing out, by way of an example: the remediation of photography, according to Bolter and Grusin, does not reproduce photography's essence or ontology, but rather transposes its affective effect – *our* idea (which is not the same as the Idea) of the photograph. After remediation, the photograph takes on the specter's double identity as "the more than one/no more one [le plus d'un]" (Derrida 2006: xx); looking at a digital 'photograph,' what one sees is a trace of a photograph which is at once more than a photograph and a photograph no more. We can follow the steps of "the spectrogenic process": the digital photograph takes our idea of the photograph, separates it from its original "living body" or physical/material support, and re-embodies it in a "prosthetic" body other than its own – compr(om)ising its identity as it does so.

Banash's reading of *The Blair Witch Project* as performing a "horrifying and literal evisceration of mimesis" takes on new depth in this context, if one identifies the Witch as the ghost of photography set loose by the spectrogenic process of remediation. There are ample reasons to make such an identification; most obviously, the diegetic "failure of a documentary project" that Banash identifies as "the film's central plot" is recapitulated on the metadiegetic level as the *Project* itself – through the success of its duplicitous rhetorical pretense to authenticity, and with an enormous assist from the fraudulent archive that makes up its website – calls into question the legitimacy of *the* documentary project in the digital age.

A somewhat unusual move also proves enormously helpful in further establishing this identification: namely, reading *The Blair Witch Project* alongside the secondary criticism of Mark Z. Danielewski's novel *House of Leaves*, which was published the following year and

shares many of the film's thematic concerns and formal strategies. Both film and novel are outliers of a sort, engaging with the questions raised by digitalization while remaining persistently, even proudly, analog. Both are centered around a "documentary" film of profoundly uncertain authenticity, and both of these "films" likewise center around a failed attempt to capture an impossible subject that resists representation, but the presence of which the texts nevertheless manage to make felt; in lieu of *The Blair Witch Project*'s titular Witch, *House of Leaves* has a spectral house whose ever-shifting interior dimensions exceed not only its exterior measurements, but at times those of the world itself.[5] Finally, both works look literally and metaphorically through the lens of photography in the era of Photoshop in order to pose the question which introduces *The Navidson Record*: "*...* whether or not, with the advent of digital technology, image has forsaken its once unimpeachable hold on the truth" (Danielewski 2000: 3).

Such a reading begins with Katherine Hayles's essay "Saving the Subject: Remediation in *House of Leaves*," which explores the novel's preoccupation with and thematization of what Hayles calls "technologies of inscription" (2002: 785), and what Hayles identifies as a persistent representational strategy centered around "the evacuation of the subject and substitution of proliferating mediations" (2002: 786). Hayles pays particular attention to the ways that the novel "creates an absence at the center of the presence manufactured by the multiple layers of interpretation" (2002: 787); most significantly, in the ways that "the impossible House…enters the space of representation…[and] is undeniably present within the text, yet in crucial aspects…remains unrepresentable" (2002: 787). Hayles's discussion of the House applies almost

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[5]   A formal similarity exists as well; just as *The Blair Witch Project* is entirely comprised of the tapes ostensibly shot for "The Blair Witch Project," save for its opening title card and end credits, *House of Leaves* consists of its binding, a page of blurbs, and a text identifying itself as "*House of Leaves* by Zampanò with introduction and notes by Johnny Truant" – which consists in turn of various supplementary materials and an analysis, called *The Navidson Record*, of a film called "The Navidson Record" that does not exist (in this case, even diegetically) outside of the frame-text with which it shares its name.

without modification to the Blair Witch, who is likewise presented as an absent center that

> is not merely nothing … [but an absence that] is so commanding and absolute that it paradoxically becomes an especially intense kind of presence, violent in its impossibility and impossible to ignore … a negation converted into the looming threat of something, although it is impossible to say what unless it be negation itself (2002: 788).

This menace, like the Witch, "inhabits a borderland between the metaphoric and the literal, the imaginary and the real" (2002: 789) as it "manifests itself through physical traces that always remain shy of verifiable presence" (2002: 788) – strange noises, mysterious markings, and more – and threatens to break into "the reality that we as readers inhabit" (2002: 802). Hayles thus reads the novel as an exploration of the relationship between subjectivity and innumerable layers of "inscription surfaces" (2002: 779), at a time when "the cycling through media has been greatly expanded and accelerated by the advent of digital technologies" (2002: 781).

Mark B.N. Hansen's "The Digital Topography of *House of Leaves*" builds off of Hayles's work to convincingly identify the House at the empty center of Danielewski's novel as "a figure for the digital" (2004: 609). Tracing the steps of Hansen's logic, one finds that they too map with remarkable ease onto the Witch and the woods that she haunts. Early in his argument, Hansen notes a disjuncture between the novel's aesthetic sensibility and the essential figure to which it is applied, identifying Danielewski's text as "a realist novel about an object that, for precise technical reasons, cannot belong to the 'reality' we inhabit as embodied beings"(2004: 607) on the basis of the House's defining feature: the fact that its interior dimensions exceed its exterior measurements. *The Blair Witch Project* – with its self-presentation as documentary and precise mimicry of the prevalent lo-fi documentary aesthetic of the 1990s – likewise makes rhetorical and aesthetic claims for the authenticity of its depiction of an impossible figure.

Hansen then argues that the "referential impossibility" that precludes a full representation of the House "stems from an incompatibility between the 'topo-logic' of digital processing and

the phenomenal dimension of human experience," insofar as the House is "a figure for a spatial dimension – a topological figure – that cannot find adequate representation in the forms of orthographic recording exhaustively inventoried by the novel, but that still manages to exert an immense impact as the very motor force driving both the host of recording technologies thematized in the novel and the recording technology that is the text itself" (2004: 608). This analysis also applies easily the woods haunted by the Blair Witch – woods that the film's characters can easily enter but find themselves unable to leave, as their spatiotemporal geography shifts such that one can return to one's initial position by walking unerringly south, or find oneself inside a cabin that burned down decades before. Like the House, then, the forest of the Blair Witch is infinitely larger within than without.

On the basis of this common impossible topology, Hansen identifies the House as "a postvisual figure immune to the laws governing the phenomenology of photography, cinema, and video; a logic of transformation whose output is disproportionate to its input" (2004: 609) – which leads him directly to his conclusion that "[i]n this perspective, the house is nothing if not a figure for the digital: its paradoxical presence as the impossible absence at the core of the novel forms a provocation that, as we shall see, is analogous in its effects to the provocation of the digital." Ultimately, this provocation results in what Hansen terms the novel's a "sustained assault on orthography, the inscription of the past as real and exactly repeatable" (Hansen 2004: 601) – a result not unlike the "literal and horrifying evisceration of mimesis" that Banash claims is performed by the film.

If one leaves Hansen here, one can see *The Blair Witch Project* readily lends itself to a relatively straightforward (but ultimately incorrect) reading as an account of the death of the documentary project at the hands of the digital technologies for which the Witch and her woods

can be taken as a figure. Banash suggests that the breakdown of "mimetic technologies" begins "as the filmmakers enter the woods," and that "the map … is the first technology to be called into question" (Banash: 1991). Were this true – and the film is subtle about the fact that it isn't – the film could be read as drawing a contrast between the possibility of technological mimesis before and after the filmmakers enter the domain of the Witch, and the diegetic failure of technological mimesis described by Banash would be understood to have been caused by the filmmakers' entrance into the woods, thus offering a neat allegory for the demise of the documentary project in a landscape where the supernatural influence of the digital has made its home.

The ending of the film can also be marshaled in support of this allegorical reading. Shortly after Josh disappears, Heather (carrying the crew's 16mm camera) and Mike (carrying both the camcorder and DAT recorder) are awakened in the middle of the night by what sounds like Josh's cries for help. They follow the sound of his voice to the home of the Witch, "the cabin or something she's supposed to haunt" mentioned by a local resident interviewed at the start of the film. Leaving the DAT recorder on the porch, they enter, only to discover that Josh is not there. His voice, like any representation issuing from within the house of the digital, is a representation untethered from any material predication on its originating referent.

Inside the house, as Heather and Mike separate, so too do the components of the film's representations; all of the footage shot by Heather while inside the house – as she moves first upstairs, then into the basement, screaming all the while – is paired with the audio from the camcorder carried by Mike, or digitally captured by the DAT recorder left on the porch. The resultant spatial disalignment of the positioning of the sources of auditory and visual representations relative to the unfolding events results in a jarring disjuncture between the sound

and image tracks of these portions of the film. This can be read as a performance of the ways that digital technologies destroy the camera's ability to claim the images that it produces as anything other than the products of a subjective vantage – as well as the fact that even if digital technology is left outside the threshold of the camera's field of representation, it nonetheless dismantles the camera's claim to objectivity simply by circumscribing it. It is not long before Mike descends into the basement, where his still-running camcorder is knocked to the ground; he is soon followed by Heather, whose 16mm camera catches just a glimpse of the other filmmaker – standing facing the corner like a child being chastened – before it too drops to the ground, landing on its side facing away from the action, shakily capturing an incoherent and strangely depthless tableau of grey, black, and white, before the film cuts to black and the credits roll. The film thus apparently ends with the analog camera's subjectification and subsequent demise in the house, and at the hands, of the digital.

If were all that the film had to say about the status of the photographic image in the digital age, then it would seem that the fear at the heart of *The Blair Witch Project* is none other than that described by Jessica Pressman in her exploration of the horrors of *House of Leaves.* Pressman focuses on one character's claim that, after an encounter with the House "[o]ld shelters—television, magazines, movies—won't protect you anymore" (Danielewski 2000: xxiii) to align the House with the digital on the basis their common destabilizing effects on textuality and disruption of a familiar media ecology:

> *It is not just the man-eating house that haunts House of Leaves*; it is the mutation of 'old shelters,' such as books, induced by digital technology … The real ghost in the film, and the novel that subsumes it, is the 'specter of digital manipulation' — the presence of an invisible network of technologies that infiltrate our existence, our access to information, and our ability to read the world and its narratives … Digital technology remains the 'specter' in the background, behind the hallway door. And as in any good horror film, it is the thing you know is there but can't see that is the most frightening. (Pressman 2004: 111)

But is either work – or their reader – really so afraid of digital technology itself? Danielewski's

novel notes only that "the specter of digital manipulation has been raised in *The Navidson Record*" (2000: 335), and devotes much of the beginning of its crucial ninth chapter to arguing "the impossibility of digital manipulation" (2000: 148) in that film – while simultaneously exploring pre-digital modes of photographic artifice, citing claims such as William Mitchell's assertion that one can view "the emergence of digital imaging as a welcome opportunity to expose the aporias in photography's construction of the visual world, to deconstruct the very ideas of photographic objectivity and closure" (Mitchell 1992: 8). Furthermore, the destabilization of "old shelters" is as much the mandate of poststructuralism, with its exposition of the transductive relation between absence and presence, as it is the consequence of digitalization. This realization is particularly stark in light of the lines immediately preceding the claim about the deconstruction of "old shelters" cited by Pressman:

> ... you'll detect slow and subtle shifts going on all around you … Worse, you'll realize it's always been shifting … But you won't understand why or how. You'll have forgotten what granted you this awareness in the first place. (Danielewski 2000: xxii-xxiii)

When one couples this claim with the novel's assertion that "it would appear the ghost haunting *The Navidson Record* ... is none other than the recurring threat of its own reality" (2000: 149), rather than the "specter of digital manipulation" that has been previously raised and dismissed, one begins to get a sense of the more profound argument of both *House of Leaves* and *The Blair Witch Project*: that while "the advent of digital technology" has bodied forth into our world media that clearly manifest poststructuralist thought,[6] poststucturalism's claims were true even before digital media entered the picture – and what we fear most about the specters of the digital

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6   Cf. George Landow's extensive argument in *Hypertext 3.0* that "hypertext embodies many of the ideas and attitudes proposed by Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, and others" (2006: 127); Mark Poster's claim, in "Derrida and Electronic Writing: The Subject of the Computer," that "[c]omputer writing instantiates the play that deconstruction raises only as a corrective, albeit a fundamental one, against the hubris of logocentrism" (Poster 1990: 128); and Jay David Bolter's characterization, in *Writing Space*, of the relationship between hypertext and poststructuralist theory as one in which "what is unnatural in print becomes natural in the electronic medium" (Bolter 2001: 143).

age is that they are, in essence, nothing new.

In order to see how the film makes this claim, it is necessary to turn to return to Hansen's

account, and particularly his assertion that *House of Leaves* is concerned with

> more than simply the contamination of photographic orthothesis by the fictionalizing power of
> discourse: it is not just that in the age of Photoshop the alleged certainty of the photographic finds
> itself subject to generalized suspicion. In question is the very possibility for accurate recording per
> se […] *House of Leaves* asserts the nongeneralizability (or nonrepeatability) of experience – the
> resistance of the singular to orthography, to technical inscription of any sort. (2004: 605-606)

A close examination reveals that the same is true of *The Blair Witch Project*; the Witch shares

with the House not only the essential feature of what Hansen calls "the provocation of the digital"

– an ontological resistance to perfect capture by recording technologies – but also what Hansen

identifies as this provocation's "effects," as the failure of photographic media to record these

referents fundamentally undermines the foundational assumption that such media are able to

objectively and totally record the Real. Banash's misidentification of the map as the first

technology that the film calls into question thus collapses the crucial aporia through which the

film complicates its claims about the digital, insofar as it entirely neglects the ways that the film

seeks to "deconstruct the very ideas of photographic objectivity and closure" (Mitchell 1992: 8)

even before the documentarians enter the domain of the Witch.

The limitation, partiality, and subjectivity of photographic representation is subtly

underscored in *The Blair Witch Project* from the first moment of the film, which begins with an

out-of-focus Heather being filmed on the Hi-8. The voice of the man holding the camera then

offers the first words of the film: "You look a little blurry. Let me zoom out, okay?" While

Chuck Tryon suggests that this shot "correlates video with subjective vision rather than the

objective, impersonal shots associated with a standard film" (Tryon 2009: 43), and thus "plays

into larger fears that video can be used to distort reality or confuse viewers" (2009: 44) as part of

a broader project of highlighting "the confusion and disorientation aligned with 16mm video"

(2009: 45), the film's critique of technologies of representation is less concerned with their specific properties than with the conflation of the subjective images they produce with an idea of total and objective truth.

This critique can be clearly seen in the sequence surrounding the filmmakers' interview of Mary Brown, the local eccentric who is the only person in the film who claims to have had a direct encounter with the Witch. This sequence is shot in slightly out-of-focus 16mm, and is heavily coded with symbols of a certain kind of uncritical faith. Mary lives in a trailer with an American flag hanging in the window; from the dialogue, it is clear that this flag is the identifying marker that the filmmakers have been told to look for in order to differentiate her home from the other trailers nearby. During the interview, Mary holds a Bible, and later in the film it is revealed that she had quoted scripture to the filmmakers during a portion of the interview not included in the film. As the filmmakers drive away, they discuss Mary, and Heather observes that: "She thinks she is in the film business! … She says she's a historian writing a book on American history … And she says she's a scientist who does research at the Department of Energy." Film production, historiography, and empiricist science are thus conflated, and identified with a woman who is "seen by the community … [as] crazy." This alignment of belief in the Witch with a certain kind of American popular religiosity, historiography, and empiricism could be read as a vindication of the latter categories, in light of what unfolds in the woods, but the scene immediately following suggests rather that the film intends instead to implicate all four kinds of belief as similarly symptomatic of a certain kind of non-interpretive credulity.

The film cuts immediately from Heather's scorn for Mary to an exchange between Heather and Josh, as Josh realizes that he shot the interview with Mary with an incorrect depth-

of-field. "You measured for meters? We're not in Europe," Heather admonishes; when Josh

replies that the lens is marked with meters, Heather insists that "it also has our system … this is

an American camera." This exchange highlights the subjectivity of photographic representation –

gently pointing out that American and European cameras are not identical, while drawing

attention to the fact that the same cameraman would have obtained a different image with

different equipment, and also aligns this subjectivity with the subjectivity of perception. Meters

and feet are equally valid ways of measuring space; the problem arises not from the fact that Josh

chose to "measure for meters," but that he failed to make the proper conversions in the process.

Josh's error is in treating one form of measurement as an objective standard, rather than

understanding it as but one among many subjective modes of description.

The film thus qualifies its depiction of the deconstruction of "old shelters" of

representation by the digital with something like Bernard Stiegler's reminder that "the analog

image is *always already* discrete. Not simply because it is composed of atomic grains, but

because it is subject to framing operations and choices about depth of field, because it has its

reality effect according to the photographic and literal context in which it is inserted" (2002:

155-156). But what is the significance of this qualification? Hansen argues that in *House of*

Leaves

> [w]hat the digital ... signifies is the wholesale substitution of the productive imagination for the
> registration of the real – the triumph of fiction over documentation. It is in this sense that the
> fictional house can and must be understood as a figure for the digital: it challenges techniques of
> orthographic recording and, by evading capture in any form, reveals the digital to be a force
> resistant to orthothesis as such, to be the very force of fiction itself. (2004: 610-611)

It is difficult to think of a more apt description of how the Witch operates in *The Blair Witch*

Project. Hansen's argument, however, leads directly to a more fundamental realization: The

digital is a new *nothing* – and not the nothing of the specter, other than fully present, but the

nothing of the spirit; nothing in itself. It is not a thing that can be represented, because it is a

becoming-ground for thingness – a form of *processing*, rather than any given process – and the post-digital image is merely its trace, inessential and ephemeral; a reminder both of *and* that something has passed (away). The horror of *The Blair Witch Project*, then, and the horror of the digital, has to do with a change not in the structure of representation, but in our understanding of, and relation to, the trace.

Along these lines, Hansen persuasively argues that the undermining of the very idea of orthography that necessarily results from any attempt at "'documenting' the undocumentable impact of the digital" (2004: 612) leads in turn to "a renewed concentration on the embodied, and thus necessarily partial, framing of information by the reader" (2004: 628) – what he elsewhere calls "the shift from the technical image (for example, the photograph or the cinematic frame) to the human framing function" (2001: 67), which is in turn defined by its "creative margin of indetermination" (2001: 77). Hansen is certainly correct, but the human body upon which his "hermeneutics of embodiment" (2004: 629) is predicated is defined by its limitations not only in terms of the partiality of its framing, but also in its impermanence and fragility – and it is the ways that digitalization foregrounds the morbid anxiety bound up in embodiment that *The Blair Witch Project* emphasizes most powerfully.[7]

The proponents – from Bazin to Barthes – of the classical idea of photo-objectivity that digitalization has systematically dismantled persistently characterized the photograph not only as objective, but also as something of a ward against mortality and the passage of time. Bazin argues that a photograph "shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model" (1960: 8); thus, the photograph "helps us

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7   One can observe this anxiety at play in Katherine Hayles's claim that Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler* evinces "a print book's fear that once it has been digitized, the computer will garble its body, breaking it apart and reassembling it into the nonstory of a data matrix rather than an entangled and entangling narrative" (1999: 41), which locates in that text a version of the intimations of mortality provoked in the reader by the "pressure toward dematerialization" (1999: 29) that Hayles argues digital media exert.

to remember the subject and preserve him from a second spiritual death" (1960: 6), giving us images-that-are-more-than-images of "lives … freed from their destiny … [as] it embalms time, freeing it simply from its proper corruption" (1960). Stiegler likewise points out that in *Camera Lucida*, "Barthes himself proposes (but in a sense that subverts every classical phenomenology) that photography constitutes an *ēpokhē* [suspension] in the relation to time, to memory, and to death" (Derrida and Stiegler 2002: 149). But, Stiegler argues, the transmission in a digital photograph "comes from Hades, from the realm of the dead, from underground [… and] *makes phantoms and phantasms indistinct"* (2002: 153). Put differently, digitalization not only transforms photographic objectivity into interpretive flow, but in so doing also complicates the ability of the photograph to preserve its referent despite of the ravages of time.

This shift can be seen by contrasting the film's two scenes set in cemeteries. In the first of these cemeteries – which is, appropriately enough, also the setting of the first official "take" of the film that the filmmakers have set out to make – Heather gestures towards the tombstones, suggesting that they provide "evidence … etched in stone" of the former residents of the town, preserving their names. This sequence is immediately preceded by a videotaped account of the "ceremonial first slate" in their production, drawing a parallel that posits the photograph as a grave-marker. This identification is furthered by Josh's suggestion that they perform some ceremonial "bloodletting on the slate"; although Heather declines, she substitutes instead a lipstick trace. The rhetoric of this scene echoes Katherine Hayles' argument, in *How We Became Posthuman*, that "[l]ike the human body, the book is a form of information transmission and storage, and like the human body, the book incorporates its encodings in a durable material substrate" (Hayles 1999: 28). The symbolic identification of the analog image with a grave-marker is reinscribed by a comment made by Heather once the filmmakers enter the woods, as

they are searching for the film's second cemetery: "Think about how fucking cool the cemetery is going to be when we get there. Think of the joy of being in a really good film."

When the filmmakers reach this second cemetery, deep in the woods, Josh accidentally knocks over one of the crude rock piles which serve as its grave-markers, drawing a contrast between the solidity of the tombstones "etched in stone" outside of the Witch's virtual domain and the fragility and instability of the monuments to the deceased found within. The contrast between this grave in the forest of the digital and the names "etched in stone" in the first cemetery recapitulates Hayles's analysis of the differences between the marks produced by analog and digital writing machines: "The relation between striking a key and producing text with a computer is very different from the relation achieved with a typewriter. Display brightness is unrelated to keystroke pressure, and striking a single key can effect massive changes in the entire text. The computer restores and heightens the sense of word as image — an image drawn in a medium as fluid and changeable as water." (Hayles 1999: 26).

It is only after this encounter with ephemerality that the filmmakers begin to feel the presence of the Witch – who, as a symbol for the digital image as an embodiment of the trace, inevitably also provokes an awareness of mortality.[8] Indeed, Heather's famous direct-to-camera soliloquy, which begins the film's dénouement, grows out of her dawning realization that "I'm going to die out here." Yet it is only this realization of her own finitude that brings Heather into real communication with the other; this scene marks the first time since entering the woods that Heather turns her camera on herself, surrendering control of her image, of framing, of how she

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8   As Derrida states explicitly in *Of Grammatology*, "the master-name of the supplementary series … [is] death. Or rather, for death is nothing, the relationship to death, the anguished anticipation of death. All the possibilities of the supplementary series, which have the relationships of metonymic substitutions among themselves, indirectly name the danger itself, the horizon and source of all determined dangers, the abyss from which all menaces announce themselves" (1967: 183).

might be seen, and lets the camera speak through her rather than trying to "mark" and master every occasion with it. She apologizes ("I just want to apologize to Mike's mom and Josh's mom and my mom and I'm sorry to everyone. I was very naïve"), accepts responsibility ("I shouldn't have put other people in danger for something that was all about me and my selfish motives. I'm so sorry for everything that has happened because in spite of what Mike says now it is my fault. Because it was my project and I insisted on everything."), and, in the only such instance in the film, expresses genuine love and care for another person ("I love you mom and dad. I am so sorry. It was never my intention to hurt any one and I hope that's clear.").

To learn to live with the ghosts of the digital age, then, is come to terms with the ways that they disabuse us of the fantasies of objectivity, certainty, permanence, and self-sufficiency encouraged by the classical understanding of photography; the uncanny return here is that of an honest appraisal of the human condition, including the most basic awareness that all things must pass. The logic of remediation is thus the logic of the specter in more ways than one. Just as the specter is "felt to be a threat" (Derrida 2006: 48) because it calls into question "the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being" (2006: 12), the manifest indeterminacy of the post-digital image forces us to acknowledge that it is not only the specter that is made of nothing and returns to nothing, but also "man, the most 'unheimlich' of all ghosts" (2006: 181). But our mortality is not just a limit; it is also the condition of possibility for connection. As Derrida reminds us, "[f]or an infinite being, there is no meaning" (Derrida and Stiegler 2002: 111), and "only the living who are not living gods can bury the dead. Only mortals can watch over them" (Derrida 2006: 220).[9]

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[9] It is worth recalling Derrida's essay on "The Deaths of Roland Barthes," and his framing the logic of spectrality on the occasion of the passing of his friend. As Derrida discusses "ghosts: the concept of the other in the same … the completely other, dead, living in me" (Derrida 2001: 41-42), he borrows Barthes's account of the photograph – the same account that the specters of the digital have since so thoroughly deconstructed – to

There are as many ways to describe the impact of the apparition of post-digital images on human experience as there are ways to put words together. One might see them precipitating Stiegler's "vast process of the *grammaticalization of the visible*" (2002: 148-49), or feel them enforcing Hansen's "hermeneutics of embodiment." Whichever one chooses, this paper has sought to show that these specters ultimately can do nothing to threaten our humanity – or the essential work of making and making sense of art – but may do much to recall us to ourselves.

In 1945, André Bazin suggested that photography had relieved the plastic arts of their "mummy complex" (1960: 4) by taking on the responsibility of tending to "a basic psychological need in man … the preservation of life by a representation of life" (1960: 4-5). In 1956, Philip Larkin wrote a poem about "An Arundel Tomb" (1988: 110-11), meditating on "the stone fidelity" of a statue lying "helpless in the hollow of / An unarmorial age." The statue represents the inhabitants of the ancient crypt that it adorns, and Larkin dwells on the way its figures have "persisted … through lengths and breadths / Of time" even as visitors "begin / To look, not read" the inscription of their names. With the rise of digital technology perhaps we have finally moved beyond the Bazinian paradigm, and will remember to look less (and read more) as today's media begin with renewed insistence "… to prove / Our almost-instinct almost true: / What will survive of us is love."

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declare that this "concept of a photograph *photographs* every conceptual opposition; it captures a relationship of haunting that is perhaps constitutive of every *logic*" (Derrida 2001: 41-42). Significantly, this is a misreading of Barthes's work, and one which is almost certainly deliberate, playful, and generous. Although there is not room to explore this argument here, there is a strong case to be made that Derrida's essay is structured around a refutation of Barthes's claim in *Camera Lucida* that "... despite its codes, I cannot *read* a photograph: the Photograph – my Photograph – is without culture: when it is painful, nothing in it can transform grief into mourning" (1981: 90). In this reading, Derrida attempts to belie this claim by supplementing *his* photograph for the photograph described by Barthes – performatively asserting the necessity of the attempt to transform (his own) grief into mourning, and enacting his own theorization, *contra* Barthes, by underscoring the inevitability of supplementarity even in the precise instant where Barthes (claims that it) seems furthest away, and by therefore keeping his friend alive in him, as best as he is able, through the act of carrying on a discourse with Barthes's ghost.

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