

SARAH WINCHESTER'S HOUSE

Stéphanie Sauget, historienne

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OPENING REMARKS

I am a historian, and before anything else, I would like to start with a paradox: what good can history be when it comes to thinking domestic space and happiness? ForGaston Bachelard, history, and the human sciences in general, cannot be of much use. When writing on the "intimate house," he thought of the house as an a-historical "being" that is, not an object but something "immemorial" whose essence we can only grasp by daydreaming. And for him, more than an object, the house is a "tool for analysis of the human soul." Therefore, it would be pointless to study a given house, in a determined space, by thinking it, or worse, by describing it following its transformations over the course of a linear time—time as the social sciences, and historians in particular see it. The relationship we have with the house is inscribed in human nature and even in living beings: it is of the same nature as a sort of animal instinct.

My approach is, of course, different. I start from the following premise: there are historical conditions necessary to the establishment of appreciation criteria of spaces—material and sensible appreciation—and this includes interior, domestic, intimate spaces. By sensible appreciation criteria, I mean what a given society at a given

time judges to be desirable or undesirable, preferable or not, tolerable or not. These criteria are expressed in different kinds of discourses, and can also be read in practices or rituals; they are more or less socially shared. In a given era, for a given society, they indicate what is thought to be a quality life at home, what is thought to be a good domestic life. However, this discourse depends on the social imaginary of domestic space, and my hypothesis is that, from the 19th century on, this discourse becomes strongly dependent on two images of domestic space: the image of the "home, sweet home" on the one hand, and the image of the "haunted house" on the other hand. And Sarah Winchester's house finds itself at the intersection of these two figures.

To simplify my point, let's say that the discourse praising the home is linked to the emergence of a new, bourgeois, family morality grounded in evangelical religion in England, and on the naturalization of the difference between a feminine private sphere and a masculine public sphere. On a practical level, this was reflected by "a change in the material living conditions, which only exacerbated a clearer division of labor between the two sexes." In the 19th century, in the upper classes of society, the domestic space becomes radically distinct from the workspace. According to a very masculine definition, it becomes a cozy nest, the ultimate place for the warrior's refuge and rest—rest prepared by a feminine labor that must remain invisible. The expression "home, sweet home" first appeared in England in 1823 in the title of a song created by John Howard Payne for an opera called Clari, Maid of Milan which premiered on May 8 1823 on the stage of Covent Garden in London. This home's main features are the following: it must be stable, it must be the place where a happy, loving family lives, the family must be able to appropriate it, to incorporate it, to be one with it. We can define it as Octave Uzanne does: "The nest we create for ourselves, the home furnished with love, the nook marked with the seal of fantasy— in a word, the

interior in which the blandness of the outside world cannot reach us. The home is and always will be a fresh oasis where we like to rest from the hassle of the crowd." 3)

From the beginning of the 18th century, the historian of architecture Richard A. Etlin notices important changes in the architectural conceptions of domestic space in France, and speaks of the invention of a new architectural language which he calls "system of home." This new architectural reflection had to meet the aspirations of an aristocratic society weary of court life in Versailles, which was entirely turned towards appearances, made to be a public performance, and devoid of comfort for the courtiers. The latter were demanding new dwellings harboring many private spaces, with small recesses, away from sight and from the need for ostentation. The interior arrangement, or the physical layout of the rooms becomes a priority for the architects charged with responding to this new social demand. They then design a new model for homes, structured by a double system: on the one hand, several adjoining rooms open to the public, for the sake of appearances; they are solemn, and pierced with numerous windows; on the other hand, private rooms that are smaller, have a lower ceiling, are plainer and remote from the most frequented spaces to offer a retreat and a "convenience" space. To this set, a third system of service spaces was added—small stairs, narrow corridors and clearance spaces—intended for domestic service or for the good pleasure of the masters; these spaces were to remain unnoticed.

In the 19th century British world, the country cottage grows to be the ideal home—located in a charming old village, untouched by rampant industrialization. The notion of comfort becomes a value. More generally, the house has to be a reflection of inner life, of mores and tastes; it must inspire respect and

lists anecdotes and is still available in the shop of the house now turned into an attraction. - Burton Klose (1915-1979) also took interest in Sarah Winchester's story. He gave away the results of his investigation and collection of testimonies, articles, etc. to the San Mateo County History Museum's archives. See also: http://historysanjose.org/wp/research-collection/research-library/sarah-winchester-at-history-san-jose/ - Diane E. Goldstein, Sylvia Ann Grider, Jeannie Banks Thomas, Haunting Experiences. Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore, Logan (Utah, USA), Utah State University Press, 2007. - Best Winchester Specialist: Laura Trevelyan, author of The Winchester, Legend of the West, IB Tauris, 2016. - Another very serious investigative work is that of Mary Jo Ignoffo, Captive of the Labyrinth: Sarah L. Winchester, Heiress to the Rifle Fortune, University of Missouri Press, 2010.

While Sarah Winchester was alive, her house was presented as a peculiar phenomenon; in the end of the 1920's and in the early 1930's, just a few years after her death (which occurred in September 1922), it was transformed into a tourist attraction. In the 1970's, private investors completely renovated the house. It is nowadays often described as "America's most haunted house." It can only be visited in groups and with a guide who tells you the story of the house, now in a spatial environment and in a configuration that has nothing to do with its initial construction. More than a haunted house, the tour presents a curious house, and mostly tells the story of a mad or deviant woman. I visited it after writing my Histoire des maisons hantées (History of Haunted Houses) in the summer of 2013. The tour lasts about one hour and allows you to discover 110 of the 160 remaining rooms..

What do we know of this house and of Sarah Winchester? The actual history of the house is very difficult to determine with certainty. The existing works on the subject show that most of the stories told about Sarah Winchester and her house are false. Her nephews and nieces, her employees who knew her well timidly tried to correct what was being said about her, but they failed to make themselves heard, and this point is very interesting.

What we know about Sarah Winchester

She was born in September 1839 in a very wealthy family from New Haven, the Pardees. She married William Wirt Winchester in 1862. He was then the sole heir of Oliver Winchester, the founder of the rifles of the same name. A beautiful, smart, sensitive woman, she was also quite secretive and sank into depression after the birth and very sudden death of her daughter, Annie Pardee Winchester (in 1866). Her suffering and her restrained nature were not understood. Within 15 years, she lost her husband (who was an only child) and her stepfather.

At that time, she became one of the richest women in the United States (with an annual income of \$ 20 million, thanks to the shares in the Winchester firm). She bought the house in San José in 1886 (not in 1884).

What are the reliable sources

- Her notary: Samuel Franklin Leib. Sarah Winchester wrote 4 different wills during her lifetime. Her first concern was to ensure that her perpetual grave alongside her husband and daughter in Evergreen Cemetery in New Haven was being taken care of. - Her friend, who was her lady's companion and secretary, Miss Henrietta Severs, has always dismissed the idea that Sarah might have had a taste for spiritualism. - Her employees, Carl and Ted Hansen, tried to dispel the stories that were being told about her long before she died, and were perpetuated afterward. - Her nieces haven't spoken. The house was handed on to Daisy Marriott (daughter of Isabelle, known as "Belle" Pardee Merriman) and Sarah Winchester bequeathed her all of the furniture, photos and jewelry. - In 1951, for his master's thesis, Bruce Spoon, a student in San José, set out to deconstruct most of the stories surrounding Sarah Winchester. His work was based on an oral investigation led among Sarah Winchester's acquaintances, and also based on newspaper and magazine clippings. According to him, Sarah Winchester bought the house to give free rein to her artistic visions. She should in fact be seen as an artist practicing art brut.

- Ralph Rambo, the nephew of Edward Rambo who was the West Coast Agent for Winchester Co and also Sarah Winchester's financial advisor, published a book titled Lady of Mystery in 1967. According to him, her doctors and friends were the ones who advised her to leave the East Coast to seek a milder climate in the West. She reportedly met Mary Baker Eddy (Founder of the Christian Science movement), but did not have a settled belief: she did not attend any specific church. The fifteen-page book mainly

consideration—including among the working classes. In fact, the "home" becomes so identified with the person that it ends up revealing their personality, sometimes betraying the little quirks or secrets of its owner. Walter Benjamin made the 19th century the century of dwelling. He thought contemporaries had gone very far in turning the house into a box or a case in which "the traces of the inhabitant are imprinted." Because the house is not only inhabited; it is also visited

Therefore, we understand how Sarah Winchester's house could induce a strong sense of unease—during her lifetime, and very early on—which increased and resulted in turning the house into the opposite, or almost, of a home, that is, a mysterious if not "haunted" dwelling. Because it had become so different from the ideal embodied by the cottage.

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SARAH WINCHESTER'S HOUSE (1886-1922)

We have many photographs of the house, but most date from the 1920s, when the house became an attraction. The San José Museum of History presents a photo taken around 1885 as probably representing the farm originally purchased by Sarah Winchester. A woman in black on a white horse poses in front of the house.

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THE PLACE OF ENCOUNTER

Ann Guillaume, artiste

What if the dead were not only symbolic objects? What if I had already been given good advice by ghosts? If I assume that I don't know, and that the dead do know, then we might eventually start having a balanced relationship, one of reciprocity. I can't remember exactly if I was the one to seek them out, or if they came to me? In any case, I remember precisely the day we first connected. Since then, what is certain is that one can only tame ghosts at the cost of sharing experiences with them. Telling the stories of those who remain— that is to say our stories, and those of these new companions—allows us, as of now, to reinvest and renew the stories that live with us.

To think that ghosts try to hide, to escape, that they are dangerous, that they flow through time, that they release a gas, that they are covered with a blanket, that they live in a crack in time, helps us to collect them within the frame of a specific collective imagery, but what do we do with the others, with those who do not flee, with those who make us do things, with those who live through us? Each of them is different and the kind of proximity they offer us is very particular. Like our friends, they are mindful of our personality, of our needs, even of our desires. Of course, sometimes their messages (visual, aural, sensory) seem a little complicated to interpret because they do not immediately find the route to reality. Nevertheless, what matters at this point is that the desire to be remembered and the desire to remember hold together and that they cause effective metamorphoses in us on a daily basis.

The Gradiva tells the story of an archeologist, Norbert Hanold who was haunted by the discovery, at the Archaeological Museum in Rome, of a bas-relief on which the feet of a walking woman were carved. The archaeologist then decides to go off on the search of the "survival" of this woman's way of walking. It appears to him 2000 years later, in the ruins of Pompeii. The Gradiva appeared to him just like that, under the midday sun. It is certainly in the temporal, psychic and symbolic state of apparition, each one becoming the symbol of creation, that desire and its quest are rooted. She said to him that things "must die to become alive again; but for archaeologists that is, of course, necessary."

If we leave room for possible renewals, the question then arises of the representation of the current state of things, of their realities, of the way they affect us. Could this new, very specific temporality, which links us to them, give us access to what

the most topical things? Other powers, devoid of our habits, are active—the power of sound, of the imagination, of space, for instance. In this case, the ghost can no longer be thought of as a figure of beauty, or of value; it is to be experienced as part of a network of relationships, in which very peculiar, very new experiences are rooted. Ghosts bind us by the experiences they induce.

By definition, the archaeologist's work is based on beginnings and ends. The archaeologist is a detective who spies on the culture behind what survives over time. The archaeologist travels upstream in history, he digs the ground to explain what is invisible, he sinks in time in a vertical manner. In a vertical stratigraphy, several periods can be represented, and sometimes even overlap and contradict each other. When inverted stratigraphies indicate a completely different chronology, they open up a field of possibilities, in which what has survived allows us to experience time in plural ways. Therefore, it is through the various modes of representation of time that new configurations of space allow heterogeneous things, sometimes contrary to one another, to coexist; here is the place for new encounters.

The Gradiva, the walking one, could therefore be pluri-real and "ubiquist." A symptom of the metaphor of research and of creation in general, she is the object of desire, a goal to reach, because ineverymoment she becomes loaded with new stories, stories that can be renewed. By definition, she embodies the changing nature of things. She becomes a vector, she becomes an event. We then, here and there, share our most whimsical desires with our ghosts, from them—the desire to detect what is happening or what can happen. Interspersed with disruptions, with discontinuities, with regularities too, time becomes charged with the joyful epiphanies we encounter. As of now, a thing can have multiple points of origin and appear as new in every moment. We can then say that we no longer make a difference or create a hierarchy between imaginary productions and productions of reality. Isn't it exactly there, in that location, that the privileged place we are looking for is to be found—the place of encounter?

These individuals constantly under the grip of illusion, these waking dreams, this reality buried in memories then begin to flow, in order to better reveal a different "us." If it is possible, together, to become a place, then maybe we can help this place invent itself? If we imagine this "place" as being part of an essentially geographical idea, of an environment capable of keeping together heterogeneous beings who coexist, and where it is possible to experience a certain form of plurality of worlds, and

UNKNOWN WOMAN FROM THE SEINE

Marie Cantos, autrice

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where all kind of fluxes, whichever they may be, favor the appearance of a common territory, then we should give ourselves the means to make it appear more often. This place is therefore not just a mere geographical or symbolic space, because its identity, acquired through history and imagination, writes itself progressively, depending on our needs and on our respective capacity to welcome each other.

What do we inherit, what can we bequeath? That place then becomes the medium, a material allowing to create new interactions, new, unprecedented signs; and where the ability to appropriate depends on customs, on well-being, on making decisions, on actions, on forward-looking visions. This place is then preparing to undertake and experience everything that is on its way, even new forms of social life! We can then ask the following question: who affects what? These multiple and plural connections within this new environment then become the site of the transformation and mutation of our forms of relationships.

The effects of the encounter cannot be planned beforehand; they can, however, be shared thanks to the loop effect they cause, and which allows us to reexamine what seemed normal and which must absolutely be questioned. Because the ghost forces us to understand that nothing can be taken for granted! We can then say that within the different layers of perception, the ghosts sow seeds that allow us to open a passage to others, to recharge our stories and our imagination, and to help us to feel well alive.

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ON OCCULT PHONOGRAPHY NOTES ON THE POSSIBILITY OF A SONIC BEYOND

Philippe Baudouin, philosophe

“What our radio machines are able to capture, compared with what they do not capture—sounds, images, emotions, thoughts, events, whispering of worlds, orders, transformations, the universe’s will etc., is only a glass of water taken from the sea. But what has not been captured, where does it go, what does it become, where is it lost?”

Maurice Maeterlinck,
L’Ombre des ailes (1936)

The Spectra Ex Machina anthology (Sub Rosa, 2019) intends to answer a question: could it be that sound recordings are permeable to wonders? Camille Flammarion relates that in its beginnings, phonography was assimilated to a magical act, drawing its resources from the ancient tradition of occultism in particular. In one of his juicy anecdotes, the astronomer recounts the rather unique reaction of the Academy of Sciences, when introduced to Edison’s invention during a memorable session. And for good reason. When Théodose Du Moncel organized one of the first public demonstrations of the phonograph there on March 11, 1878, he had no idea that its presentation would provoke a deep sense of dread among those who had come to listen to it. This physicist would never have imagined that the action of tiny mechanical cogs would produce such effects within the assembly of learned people. Never would he have believed that the reproduction of the human voice, made possible by scientific progress, would, in some of his colleagues, awaken the old demons of irrationality, with their share of superstitions and “crazy beliefs.” Because of the innocent act Du Moncel was about to perform, and without him knowing it, the history of speaking machines would forever be marked with the seal of occultist imagination: “When the device obediently began to recite the sentence recorded on its scroll, Flammarion writes, we saw an academicien of a mature age whose mind was penetrated, even saturated with the traditions of his classical culture, rush on the representative of Edison and seize him by the throat, crying out: “You miserable! We will not be fooled by a ventriloquist”

Distraught by the device’s prowess, the old academicien—a certain Jean-Baptiste Bouillaud, trained as a doctor—found himself unable to discern, in what

he had perceived, the mere chain of purely mechanical procedures. Loaded with secular references, and probably blinded by the lessons of Ancient philosophy by virtue of which the voice is exclusively reserved for “animate beings,” Bouillaud could not admit that a “vile metal could replace the noble apparatus of human phonation.” For his rational mind the idea that voices could arise through the medium of some technical device was not conceivable. Faced with these “unreal” sounds, Bouillaud was suddenly confronted with a void in meaning, combined with a linguistic dead end. Everything (or almost everything) seemed to fail him. The ghostly doubles that had resounded within the auditorium, distracting some, frightening others, could not fit in with his system of thought. He, for whom voice was the reflection of the soul before being a sound vibration, saw in this only a skillful ventriloquist trick, an “acoustic illusion” as he had then declared in a long note subsequently addressed to his peers—in which he went so far as to doubt the good faith of the experimenter: “When witnessing the repetition of words uttered in the opening of the phonograph, I have in both cases noticed slight movements of the lips of the persons by whom these words had been spoken. I have become convinced experimentally that one can, without opening and significantly moving one’s mouth, utter certain words, even make certain speeches, which then pass only through the nasal passages, giving them a very specific sound.”

Bouillaud’s attitude is indicative of a certain scientific conception of the world, suddenly shaken by the invention of sound recording technology. Because Edison’s machine has, it seems, opened a breach by releasing those “invisible voices” which the academicien considered to be unthinkable. With them, doubles began to fill living rooms, breaking the silence that characterized them. In doing so, they wrestled away from reality those who were living in it, thinking they knew it well. These avatars that the machine made possible—sorts of modern times doppelgängers—thus contributed to the collapse of an old world and to the advent of a new civilization, in which the domestication of electricity allowed by technical advances came to overturn traditional modes of perception. The phonograph revealed a disturbance. With it, the modern world froze for a moment, becoming unintelligible. As if the machinery and the swarm of creatures that came with it had gradually given way to machinations. In the early days of the phonograph, a sort of aura surrounds the voice of speakers, similar to the halo surrounding David Octavius Hill’s portraits, of which Walter Benjamin says in his Small History of Photography that these images withhold the supernatural aspect of an apparition. Every technological invention thus holds a magical dimension in its

early stages, which allows the strangest interpretations to arise, and that some, like Bouillaud, try in vain to ward off.

Sound recording techniques could therefore be listed alongside the “ghost machines” Deleuze speaks about—the very ones, he said, that generate phantoms on our way and divert us towards “affects that are uncoordinated, beyond coordinates.” Bouillaud’s experience proves, once again, to be rich in lessons—starting with how it points to the fact that every sound reproduction device has, at its heart, a mighty hallucinogenic structure. Every talking machine literally makes us hear voices. And facing it, the listener finds himself in a position to experience delusions, as if the mechanically reproduced voices indicated the presence of doubles invisible to those listening. Ernst Bloch, for whom the electrification of the voice was partly an actual black magic ritual, said of Edison that he was “to be compared to Doctor Faust more than to Herbert Spencer.” Malevolent machines, deceitful devices. Some aspects of this can be found in the first instruments made to record the voice. A spell, made possible by the secret alliance of mesmerism and electromagnetism—similar in a way to the nightmares caused by the “electricians”, those small invisible demons persecuting Strindberg during his Inferno crisis.

The recordings of occult phenomena are in line with the earliest experiences of technologically equipped listening. In a sometimes theatrical form, they recall the extent to which modern sound reproduction techniques have made it possible to constitute what historian Jonathan Sterne calls a “resonant tomb,” speaking of this peculiar dimension revealed by technique, in which the living foster the spectral presence of the dead. It is no coincidence that the efforts of the pioneers of occult phonography initially focused on mediumship phenomena. Let’s recall Erik Davis’s saying: “Spiritism was the first popular religion of the information age.” This doctrine, which first emerged in Hydesville (United States) in 1848, after the Fox Sisters observed a phenomenon of knocking sounds, gives pride of place to the acoustic and mechanical dimensions. Its theorist Allan Kardec thus described mediums as actual “electrical machines” who transmit “telegraphic dispatches from one distant point of the earth to another.” “When we dictate a message,” he added, “we act on the medium just as the telegraph clerk acts on his device.”

We know, since Pierre Schaeffer’s work, that sound recording techniques have contributed to shape an unprecedented experience: that of a phenomenon wrestled away from its natural environment, cut off from the context in which it originally appeared. It is then easy to understand that, because we usually feel it is impossible



to identify the origin of a recorded sound, it becomes the source of innumerable mythologies for us. The singular nature of the events of which these documents claim to keep trail of confers them with a special status. They are added to the category of “ghost-sounds,” of which François Bonnet says that they “falsify our listening experience, in the sense that they do not meet it, or allow us to understand through listening.” They are part of a strange hearing system, on the border between cognition and aural hallucination—a sphere ruled by “the uncanny”. Similar to those “natural but on the edge of nature” noises—an expression used by Maurice Blanchot to describe the siren song—they are a meeting point between two worlds foreign to each other. In this sense, they fall under the category of “sounds from elsewhere” which Lovecraft speaks about in his novels; listening to them is always associated with a sense of uneasiness. If they are, for several individuals, linked to what is known as certain people’s exceptional vocal performances, these recordings reconnect with the Ancients’ sacred pneuma—a principle dear to academicien Bouillaud, and which the Greeks considered to be a vital principle encompassing speech, breath and the soul. Such is the case of these mediums’ voices engraved in the wax records: in their own way, they perpetuate the craft of the “exclusive art of breathing” which Roland Barthes described as “secretly mystical”.

ELECTRIC TERRORS

Alice Laguarda, architecte et philosophe

For cinema—a spectral art form par excellence—, the haunted house and electric energy are founding motives. They have a twofold function: they allow us to reflect on the materiality and ontology of images, and on the ways in which the invisible can be represented (with its myriad of specters and ghosts). Contemporary with the rise of spiritualism and the birth of psychoanalysis, cinema, in particular through fantastique and horror movies, is a companion of modernity, of its dreams as of its nightmares.

By offering countless representations of haunted houses, cinema incorporates a major shift in the history of architecture. Indeed, the 20th century saw the acceleration of the transition from a house that contains and protects (a totality closed in itself) to a house that becomes porous, a “machine to live in” saturated with technology (electricity, fluids, waves, television...). This evolution is also related to the ambivalences of modern science. Who better than Thomas Edison can embody those? The inventor of the phonograph, the kinetograph (predecessor of the camera) and the incandescent lamp, also invented the electric chair. In 1903, he has the killing by electrocution of an elephant filmed in Luna Park on Coney Island, in an effort to promote his theory of direct current. He also imagines a machine that records the voices of the dead, the “necrophone”—an invention which has remained hidden and unfinished. Edison the “thanatotechnician,” as Philippe Baudouin calls him, thus inaugurates a new moment in the history of modernity, building a bridge between science and occultism. These ambivalences, these tensions between, on the one hand a fascination with technical progress and, on the other hand, the mystery of death, are in particular found in films where the pattern of haunting plays with

the codes of the fantastic imagination, or keeps them at a distance, thereby modifying the materiality of images. From Shocker (Wes Craven) to Twin Peaks: The Return (David Lynch), and The Entity (Sidney J. Furie) and its “reinterpretations” by artist Peter Tscherkassky, electricity in cinematographic images also acts as a power that is both an instrument of control, of violence, and a medium which opens to a poetic and metaphysical knowledge of the world.

INVASIONS

Wes Craven is known to have a taste for haunted houses. By exploring the various forms of family disruption (from Deadly Blessing to Cursed, from A Nightmare on Elm Street to The People Under the Stairs), the filmmaker—often savagely—criticizes Northern American social structures (capitalism, religion, family). Shocker (1989), a movie often neglected in the studies on the director’s filmography, nevertheless offers a renewed version of this criticism. Horace Pinker (Mitch Pileggi), a television repairman and serial killer, is executed on the electric chair. Returning from the dead, he terrorizes his son, possessing other people’s bodies. As electricity has regenerated him, Pinker is both a source of life and death. His corporeality is a primitive, powerful one. He is a clumsy ogre, whose presence is grotesque. The character thus reminds us in some way of the monster imagined by Mary Shelley in Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus (1818), created by a scientist by assembling corpses, and animated thanks to the electric current contained in lightning. Craven’s vision is part of a nineteenth-century imagery of ghosts, of monsters, depicting the confrontation between a father and his son who refuses the truth and rejects his lineage. But the filmmaker adds another dimension to his story, which allows him to draw an analogy between the virality of crime, of evil, and the deleterious power of television. Pinker, circulating from one world to another, contaminates the world of the living like a parasitic image. This manifests itself through the character’s texture,

similar to film grain, which disrupts the diegetic space; its imperfection (the body image being striated and trembling) paradoxically marks its power. The way the filmmaker plays with the hypnotic and decerebrating functions of television culminates in the film’s famous sequence in which the father is chased by his son after diving into the screen. The way they travel across the images is similar to a long zapping sequence (atomic explosions, war scenes, an evangelical program, an excerpt of James Whale’s Frankenstein...) which induces a trans-like state, supported by the thunderous sound of a thrash metal track.

Sidney J. Fury’s Entity (1982) offers another representation of the phantom’s power. The film breaks with the nineteenth-century imagination to confront us with the issues of twentieth century modernity. The story, inspired by a 1970s news item, features Carla Moran (Barbara Hershey), a young independent mother living in a suburb of Los Angeles, who suffers the repeated attacks and rapes of an invisible entity, whose apparitions are accompanied by electricity related phenomena (a lamp that lights up, electric arcs). Here, the entity’s corporeality (which is clearly assimilated to that of a man) does not exist: the entity is non-embodied, bodiless. The grueling sequences of assault, the numerous oblique framings of the house, of its interior and of the main character induce terror, as does the idea of an unhealthy energy that seems to control everything. A new form of influence appears: the entity seeks to control Carla Moran’s body and living space, but also her daily life outside the house (some of the aggressions take place in a car and at a friend’s house). Not only does Sidney J. Fury suggest that the entity is a condensed version of the negative male figures of the main character’s past (her father, her former fiancé), but the entity also expresses an abstract and diffuse form of power: that of society, of the state which controls and monitors individuals. In

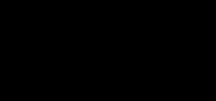
thissense, the film is particularly rich, drawing upon elements of the Gothic tradition (with a conflict between sexuality and religion, and a critique of male domination) and the history of female mediums, in their psychoanalytical and societal dimensions. One thinks for example of Sarah Winchester, as well as the Fox sisters, the sources of modern spiritualism in the United States.

In the long final scene, the film unites the political with the ontological. Academic parapsychologists, who have convinced Carla Moran to take part in an experiment in order prove that her assaults are caused by a supernatural entity, are reconstructing her home true to scale in a gymnasium. Inside the house, which is equipped with a glass protection cage and surrounded by large wire grid walls, the main character serves as a bait for the entity. The mechanism, which involves technological tools (such as CCTV cameras and liquid helium), is symbolic of the control held by the scientific community (and society) over the young woman, and of the cinematic apparatus (how can the invisible be filmed, represented?). The entity attacks the character, forcing the helium to explode, forming a sort of mountain of ice in the gymnasium. From this sculptural monstrous mass, the entity manages to escape, remaining elusive.

SPASMS

Artist Peter Tscherkassky directed two films based on The Entity: Outer Space (1999) and Dream Work (2001). By working with parts of the movie’s film, which he manipulates by hand, using a laser pointer pen, reassembling and superimposing the images, the artist embraces and intensifies Clara Moran’s sufferings. He merges worlds that should not be able to coexist: that of the young woman, her psyche and her dreams (Dream Work, which is more abstract than Outer Space, favors the dreamlike dimension while retaining scenes of violence) and that of the entity. He works with their conflictuality, with the energies

creation and destruction.



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NOTES

- ↑ "Spectral memory, cinema is a magnificent mourning, a magnified work of mourning." (« Miroirs spectrales, le cinéma est un deuil magnifié, un travail du deuil magnifié. » Jacques Darrida, "Cinema and Its Ghosts: An Interview by Antoine de Baecque and Thierry Jousse" in Thinking Out of Sight. Writings on the Arts of the Visible. Chicago University Press, 2020.)
- ↑ Philippe Baudouin, « Machine néocéphalique » (« Necrophone Machines » in Thomas Aïta Edson, Le Royaume de (l'a-dé) (Thomas Aïta Edson, The Realm of (l'a Beyond), Grenoble, Jérôme Milon, 2014.)
- ↑ The Shocker is a character in the Spider-Man comic who first appears in 1997. He has gloves that increase his strength by giving off electric shocks. The term is used to refer to "sensational films" that rely on horror and fascination.
- ↑ The Doris Bitney case, in California, in 1974. The young mother of three kids claims that her house is haunted and that she has been beaten up and raped by three invisible entities.
- ↑ Cl. Brad Stevens, "The Haunted House of Panarchy: How The Entity Subverts Mainstream Horror Films", in Sight & Sound, 12 June 2010, www.bfi.org.uk.
- ↑ The flicker is caused by a variation in the electric current reaching a light source (screen, lamp, etc.). The term is used in experimental cinema (especially during the 1980s, with artists such as Paul Sharits and Tony Conrad), and refers to an alternation of photographs, which creates flashes as well as a sensation of vibrations in the images, thereby recalling the stroboscopic effect.
- ↑ Mathieu Potte-Bonneville et Pierre Zaoui, « David Lynch, corps et âme », (David Lynch, Body and Soul), catalogue for the exhibition David Lynch, Man Waking from Dream, Clermont-Ferrand, Frac Auvergne, 2012, available on mathieupottebonneville.fr.
- ↑ ibid. "Nothing can reach the body in the image without, inseparably, threatening the body of the image at the same time." (« Rien n'atteint le corps dans l'image qui ne menace en même temps, inévitablement, le corps de l'image. » Emmanuel Siety, Figures d'images. Essai sur l'attribution de propriétés factives aux images de films. Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009, coll. « Le Spectaculaire », p. 66.



Electricity, which haunts and disrupts homes and spirits, occupies a central place here, being both a vector of the vagrancies of modernity, of identity quests—which either soothe the diegetic souls, or unleash their anger or repression—and an element modifying the materiality of the images (all in turn altered, parasitized, dreamlike and "augmented"), leaving us spectators fascinated by the incessant struggle between

JÉRÔME PORET, L'INVITATION JÉRÔME PORET, THE INVITATION TO GHOSTS

Guillaume Lasserre, critique et commissaire d'exposition

In San Jose, California, stands the Winchester House, known in the American popular imagination as one of the most famous haunted houses in its history. What lies at the origin of its erection is the peculiar protocol set up by Sarah Winchester in 1884, which can only be understood in the light of her personal history. In 1862 Sarah Lockwood Pardee (1839 - 1922) marries William Wirt Williamson, son of Oliver Winchester, the owner of the Winchester Repeating Arms Company which markets the very first repeating rifle. In 1866, she gives birth to a daughter, Annie, who passes away a few weeks later. Sarah sinks into a state of persistent depression. In 1880, her father-in-law passes away in turn, followed by her husband the year thereafter. Alone, childless, she inherits half of the colossal family empire, becoming the first female billionaire in history. The legend says that she then begins to consult myriads of mediums. One of them tells her that her family is being chased by the spirits of the victims of the automatic firearm. The medium orders her to go to the West Coast of the United States to build a house for her and her ghosts, also predicting that once the building is completed, she will die. In what is to become the dwelling, a room is immediately assigned for the hypnosis sessions that will allow her to imagine the plans that the ghosts themselves will dictate to her. Every night, she locks herself in the room to communicate with the spirits of the victims of the rifle. What is striking, at first glance, is how similar all the rooms look—at the exception of one detail, however. The repressed gives meaning to the construction. During thirty-eight years, the house is built

and deconstructed, going so far as to extend over a gigantic area of 6,600 m2 which the earthquake of 1906 reduced by half. When Sarah Winchester dies in 1922, the house, which then had 160 rooms, is bought by promoters who transformed it into an amusement park. It can still be visited today. The history of the Winchester house, which quickly became America’s nightmare, is engraved in the collective unconscious, as is the house of Alfred Hitchcock’s famous movie “Psychois”: the ghosts of those who fell, shot during World War I, are joined by the memory of the Indian genocides. Building, destroying and rebuilding was ultimately Sarah Winchester’s therapy, her own treatment, her cure. It is by drawing inspiration from this legendary tale that Jérôme Poret imagined the “hosts”, an exhibition for which he turned La Maréchalerie, the contemporary art center of the National School of Architecture of Versailles (ENSA-V) into a welcoming home for ghosts.

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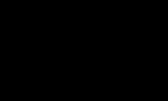
THE HOUSE OF SPIRITS

The installation was set up in collaboration with some of his students—Jérôme Poret (born in 1969, lives and works in Paris) has taught a sound and architecture class at ENSA-V—who were the main actors, literally the “hosts” of this adventure. During hypnosis sessions, they were to give birth to an architectural tale through stories, all of which were recorded and engraved in the grooves of a thick record. This experience followed a protocol implemented by Marie Lisel, a master practitioner in hypnosis, based on a short text by Gaston Bachelard, “The Corners”, which is Chapter VI in his *Poetics of Space*. “Six students of the ENSA-V visited their inner house with me, in hypnosis”, the practitioner tells on her website. Following the established protocol, questions were asked to the six willing participants from one of the corners of the room in which they stand. Some manifested in the house itself; one of them became its structure, another met his great-grandmother, yet

another, refusing to enter the house, turned into a deer in the nearby forest. As an example, here is a short extract from Benjamin’s experience: “(...) *I’m observing the room. The level opens up to space on the left; on the floor there is parquet, and on the wall, a fairly important rhythm of windows. That’s impossible, I think to myself... This floor itself was already impossible, but how is it possible to have so many windows? I feel discomfort there because my mind does not show me the whole room, a triangle remains blurred, as with a vision problem (...)*”. From these strange journeys, a recording is created on an outdated 78 RPM; it will be played on a phonograph or, more exactly, on its predecessor, a His Master’s Voice gramophone, Lumière Model 460, dated from 1924-1925; a magic machine lent by the Paris PHONO Museum, recognizable thanks to its splendid gold colored paper disc which, once deployed, evokes a peacock’s open feathers, the sun’s sphere. It is the needle which transmits sound directly to the paper membrane, following a principle which foreruns that of the loudspeaker. These machines as a whole are called talking machines because they were initially used for administrative tasks.

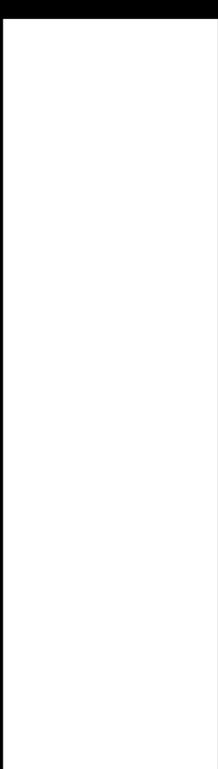
CRISIS FURNITURE FOR WHISPER ROOM

In order to recreate this particular immersive atmosphere, this strange and somewhat disturbing aspect of the place, Jérôme Poret uses low-pressure sodium lamps emitting monochromatic yellow-orange light, lamps often seen in Eastern European countries—Jérôme Poret has lived in Berlin for a long time. These lamps, doomed to disappear due to the ban on their sale, add a certain nostalgia to the unreal, bronze colored landscape they create—the nostalgia of a world one has to leave, inexorably; a world that has not entirely disappeared but which, we however know, will never return. As the hours go by, the light changes, goes from yellow-orange to a black lighting which slowly becomes black and



NOTES

- ↑ For more details on this barely believable story, see Bill Thomas, “Ghosts are clever—so I baffle them”, New York Times, May 31, 1970, https://www.nytimes.com/1970/05/31/archives/ghosts-are- clever-so-i-baffle-them.html (consulted on December 10, 2018).
- ↑ 2019) (2) See Marie Lisel’s account of the experience., « Les champs hypnotiques », on her website, https://maestrolist.wordpress.com/2019/12/17/les-champs-hypnotiques-repost/ consulted on March 31, 2020.)
- ↑ Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, Program Classics, 2014 (translated by Maria Jolas).
- ↑ Managed by an association, the PHONO Museum, or Museum of recorded sound, is located at 53 boulevard de Rochechouart in Paris since its opening in 2014; its mission is to promote knowledge about the history of recorded sound and related devices, to ensure the heritage aspect of conservation of talking machines and to train people to safeguard knowledge related to these techniques and their sound carriers.
- ↑ Sophie Maisonneuve, « De la « machine parlante » à l’auditeur », Terrain (online), 37 | September 2007, published on August 18, 2014, consulted on December 11, 2018. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/terrain/1289 - DOI : 10.4000/terrain.1289
- ↑ This harder material allows the gramophone needle to read the medium.
- ↑ Hilaine Pinot, « Leau, la femme, la mort. Le mythe de l’ocomee de la Seine », Portraits / Visages. Virtual exhibition by the Bibliothèque nationale de France : http://expositions.bnf.fr/portraits/index.htm
- ↑ On this subject, see « Imponderable – The Archives of Tony Oursler », Edited by Tom Eccles, Mago Hoffmann, Beatriz Ruf.



white. It is the kind of light that emphasizes things, that unveils them, and allows the Center for art to open to the outside, beyond the imposing walls that give it its solemn status. On one of them hangs a large plan of the Winchester House; we don’t know what level of the house it represents, or when it was drawn.

No doubt that, in order for the myth to be recaptured in a completely effective way, it must first be deconstructed, become an abstraction. The adjoining room is transformed into a “whisper room”, a recording studio, which is insulated solely with household remains, salvaged cabinets. The artist purposely uses material that has already lived; he chooses to create an upholstery that already contains pre-existing stories. Those told earlier under hypnosis are engraved on PVC records; the voices disappear a bit more each time we listen to them. While the three 78 rpm copies are hard enough to allow listening, they are also reasonably flexible so that the needle, while reading the grooves, inevitably damages them, gently erasing the stories written therein. On gramophones, the sound comes from the paper diaphragm from which it is emitted—it is not amplified yet, there is no electricity. The object itself, once opened, echoes the talking tables used by the practitioners of spiritualism in order to come into contact with spirits. As a response to the six stories told by the six different people (three boys and three girls), three sculptures form the shutters allowing to control the volume of sound, made of air gap and insulating material. By diffracting the stories, they act as sound traps, in a striking parallel to the Winchester House which served, by attracting them by its hospitality, as a ghost trap. The sculptural forms of the shutters take up the shape of the voices of the reciters (amplitude, frequency and pitch), materializing their vocal frequencies in three dimensions. Not far from there, a small curiosity cabinet set in the trunk of an old gramophone, turned into a relic case for the occasion, contains the imprint

THE UNCONSCIOUS OF THE HOUSE: THE HAUNTED HOME

Renaud Evrard, psychologue

The experience of hauntings is classically associated with a place which, in the collective imagination, takes the appearance of an old house whose history transcends that of its current inhabitants. This image does not match the data gathered by parapsychological research, a field that—in its best versions—focuses on “haunted persons” (Evrard, 2018). These persons suffer a haunting, which presents itself as an interindividual problem centered around a focal person (Evrard, 2016). However, it is very interesting to combine a psychological approach with that of the sciences of the collective, in order to integrate the historical, sociological and mythological dimensions in order to grasp the full resonance of these cases (Evrard & Ouellet, 2019). Our chapter is a mere visit to the borders of the experience of haunting, in which we don't know what we are about to find each time we open a door.

SPEAKING OF GHOSTS ACCURATELY

According to a 2015 survey published by Science et vie, 14% of French women and the same proportion of French men aged 25-34 have already seen a ghost. Of all the paranormal experiences listed here, this is the one that is most often reported. The problem with this type of survey is its imprecision, as everyone can assume anything and everything when responding. Psychologists Harvey Irwin and Caroline Watt (2007) define a broad category of “entity encounter experiences” which are “perceptual-like” and relate “to a person or an animal that is not physically present, with physical means of communication being ruled out.” This type of thematic definition gives an important place to socio-cultural interpretation; it can therefore at the same time correspond to appearances, mediumship and obsessions. This makes it difficult to find one's way around, since these experiences do not cover the same processes.

If one follows a phenomenological approach, remaining as close as possible to the witness's account, experiencing a haunting means experiencing phenomena unusual in the environment, which are as many anomalies in the model the individual has of ordinary reality (Fach, 2011). At the center of the experience are many external anomalies, such as acoustic, kinesthetic and optical phenomena, observed in the environment, mainly in a normal state of consciousness. They are also displacements, modifications, appearances or disappearances of objects

al., 2003). This was the first time that the experience of haunting was successfully quantified. Statistics thus show that we have the ability to experience feelings of dread in the same place. But how should this be interpreted? Scientists have suggested that many factors may be responsible for these results. Some have said that these places are truly haunted, and that people feel the actual presence of a disembodied entity. Others have argued that clues in the scenery may have fostered an experience of haunting. In reality, the dominant model is that of context-induced experiences (Lange & Houran, 2015), which also includes physical and psychological aspects. This parapsychological experience thus opened a new field for research: the field study of indirectly induced haunting experiences. Instead of being afraid of these experiences, the aim was to give oneself the means to collect these experiences under controlled but “valid” conditions, that is to say to bring the rigor of the laboratory as close as possible to a real situation. The study of hauntings potentially contributes to our theoretical understanding of the way certain phenomena, such as hallucinations, suggestions, and the influence of our environment, operate under natural conditions. This avenue for research is currently being explored by a handful of researchers. Some studies rely on natural environments or on videos to induce the experience of haunting, by manipulating various variables in order to bring about the most favorable context for this type of experience. In this spirit, the psychologist Chris French and his team created a “haunted room” in a laboratory (2009). The 79 participants had to enter it, one by one, staying 50 minutes in it. This empty, silent room with white walls was placed in a rather cool temperature. Depending on the groups, the room would be bathed in either infra-sound or complex electro-magnetic fields, or both at the same time, or neither. In total, 80% of the participants had strange feelings, including 9% who were truly terrified! However, these sensations arose under all of these conditions without actually appearing to be the consequence of any of the physical effects. The authors concluded that suggestion remained the most influential variable, in this artificial context of sensory deprivation known to enable hallucinations. It is still difficult to draw a conclusion: even though this study was published in a leading neuroscience journal in 2009, it has still not been replicated.

THINKING BIGGER

This avenue of research was a source of inspiration for design researchers. Designer Fabrizio Cocchiarella and psychologist Ken Drinkwater (2019) of the University of Manchester worked together on “para-design”, which examines the influences of paranormal beliefs on the perception of a designed environment and, more

without a known natural cause; unexplained noises such as raps, footsteps, voices and exceptional visual impressions such as lights or silhouettes appearing, etc. Tactile and olfactory phenomena are sometimes described. The whole is often reduced to the intervention of entities and of the deceased, even though this is not always the preferred interpretation.

HOW GHOSTS ARE GREETED

Haunting is present in all cultures and always has been. This is demonstrated by texts of the Antiquity, and even earlier ones, which refer to it (Schneider, 2012). There is an imbalance, as is the case for the entire field of the paranormal, between its cultural use and its scientific understanding. Ghosts are regularly at the heart of literary intrigues, plays, and, nowadays, of audio-visual fictions (D'Antonio, Schneider, Sempere, 2018). The YouTube platform is now “haunted” by immersive programs placing us in the footsteps of “ghost hunters” (Evrard & Abrassart, 2018). On a scientific level, a paradoxical attitude can be observed; it is cleverly summarized by the Marquise du Deffand, an 18th century woman of letters: “I do not believe in ghosts, but I am afraid of them.” However rational this unbelief may be, talking about ghosts, poltergeists, haunted houses, ghosts, still induces shivers. Hearing three small knocks coming, apparently, from the wall for no noticeable reason would then suffice for emotions to pervade us. For Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, the haunted house is the most striking example of what he calls the uncanny (unheimlich), that is to say the doubt aroused when a familiar object suddenly comes to life. But Freud will not, however, study stories of haunted houses, “because the uncanny in it is too much mingled with and in part covered by what is purely gruesome.” (Freud, 1919, p. 13). The fear of ghosts, shared even by skeptics, could be the explanation for the lack of studies on these issues. However, from the end of the 19th century on, psychological research societies have taken up this subject and carried out field investigations. They established a connection between hauntings and “adolescent crisis”, based on these numerous ambiguities: they studied both the mystifying adolescent, the anomalies of adolescence and the supposedly related supernormal abilities. To the point that researchers persisted for decades in having these young people, who were caught up in tumultuous events, undergo numerous tests (Evrard, 2012). The data emerging from these tests is copious and somewhat contradictory, as Pascale Catala summarizes in Apparitions et maisons hantées (Apparitions and Haunted Houses) (2019). If we ask the public, we find that the myth of the “haunted teenager”—and specifically the “naughty little girl” theory—still lives on

generally, on the perception of space. Several field investigations examine the fears, fascinations and imagination of the persons who visit reportedly haunted spaces, measuring the psychological and parapsychological perceptions and cognitions. Drawing upon the results of their studies, they elaborate concepts and parameters allowing them to identify the factors influencing the occurrence of exceptional experiences (see also Annett et al., 2016). Research on haunting questions the way we inhabit spaces. While it involves shivers and breaks with everyday comfort, haunting is nevertheless a part of our human experience. “Escape games” are currently in fashion and the world of entertainment exploits this trend, sometimes using “escape rooms”—places whose mysterious history is configured in such a way that the group of individuals are only able to get out by recomposing their tortuous secrets. But according to some anthropologists, what is at play is also a geography of rites of passage, with the necessary liminal period in which the individual must leave the secure comfort of his or her community. Folklorists and anthropologists have coined the expression “legend tripping” to speak of a supposedly adolescent practice of stealthy and usually nocturnal pilgrimage to a place where a tragic, horrific scene, possibly even a supernatural event, is said to have taken place (Ellis, 1983). This practice is now widespread, although it has not been studied much, and does not solely involve adolescents and “rites of passage.” It is a type of Urban exploration (Urbex). It can even be experienced vicariously by watching YouTube videos of the many “ghost hunters”, via a form of intense psychic participation on the part of the Internet user (Evrard & Abrassart, 2018). On a larger scale, this refers to what is called “dark tourism” (see for instance Millán, Rojas and García, 2019), that is to say a more or less organized form of tourism that targets places where battles or disasters have taken place, such as the Chernobyl exclusion zone and its 50,000 annual visitors for example. This type of fascination, sometimes developed at the expense of local inhabitants, can also teach us something about the ways in which humans connect or reconnect with the negative dimensions of existence (cf. the proceedings of the conference The Thrill of the Dark: Heritages of Fear, Fascination and Fantasy, which took place in Birmingham, in April 2019).

In order to end on a global perspective, I will conclude by mentioning the concept of “tiers-paysage” (third-landscape) which was developed in France by Gilles Clément (2003), and refers to the interstitial space between the natural landscape not exploited by humans and the space characterized by human activities. In this space, elements of otherness are able to emerge—preternatural,

(Evrard, 2016). Everyone has taken up this simplistic explanation. How can we think further than that?

HALLUCINOGENIC SPATIAL AREAS

The psychiatrist Henri Faure (1966, p. 199-200) visited these reputedly haunted places on several occasions, and concluded that psychopathology was rare in these areas... Because he mostly suspected fraud—namely as a way to favor property speculation. Henri Faure nevertheless proposed some hypotheses to try and understand why apparently “healthy” and trustworthy people started to believe they were being haunted. He was in particular interested in the role of place, and in the fact that these “imaginary perceptions” as he called them, tended to cling to specific sites. His primary idea was that the observed sites have a visible content—this wall, this piece of furniture—and a latent content which duplicates it (cf. Eiguer, 2006). And this latent content is, according to him, “personalized”; this creates “hallucinogenic spatial zones” specific to each individual (Faure, 1965, p. 111). This idea is generalized in a new description of what a hallucination is. Instead of being a perception without an object to perceive, a projection of a fantasy outside of the field of consciousness, the hallucination involves a rearrangement of the real contents of the space that accompanies the creation of the imaginary object and allows it to “exist” (Faure, 1965, p. 112). That is to say that the hallucinated ghost draws upon the actual scenery of a place. Faure says that, in circumstances where the hallucinatory consciousness field and the spatial field are in adequacy, the simultaneous analysis of the contents of both of these fields allows a dynamic understanding of what is happening. According to him, this illustrates “the shortfalls” of an interpretation of hallucination in terms of psychic evanescence “which, by nature, is not engaged in the stability of sensitive perceptions” (Faure, 1965, p. 113). Faure never gave himself the means to test his hypothesis. It was parapsychologists who first developed an original protocol to test whether different individuals would have the same unusual experiences in the same rooms of a supposedly haunted house (Moss & Schneider, 1968; Maher & Schneider, 1975). The results showed that the descriptions of the visitors resembled those of the haunted family more often than expected by chance, whether they identified the place in which the phenomena were occurring, or portrayed the supposed ghost (Evrard, 2018). Unfortunately, the number of subjects in the early studies was dramatically low. Comparatively, a recent and improved replication found similar results by bringing together 678 participants in a supposedly haunted castle (Wiseman et

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