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**Transparent Interiors: Detective and Mystery Fiction in the Age of Photography**

by

MELISSA D. DUNN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy; The Graduate Center, The City University of New York

2016

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Transparent Interiors: Detective and Mystery Fiction in the Age of Photography

by

Melissa D. Dunn

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English to satisfy the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

TRANSPARENT INTERIORS: DETECTIVE AND MYSTERY FICTION IN THE AGE OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY

By

Melissa D. Dunn

Adviser: Wayne Koestenbaum

This dissertation is a meditation on the mutable boundaries that define interior life in the age of photography. I probe these boundaries through selected readings in two literary genres that share conceptual links with photography—detective fiction and mystery fiction.

Photography plays an important role in a radical reconsideration of the boundaries between public and private, engaging two dominant and often conflicting cultural values that shape American life at the turn of the twentieth century—the mandate to define and protect privacy and the simultaneous call for greater transparency in public and personal life. Photography, through its perceived transgressions against private life, helps initiate a demand to define and protect privacy as well as satisfying the desire for candid exposure of the personal. Likewise, detective and mystery fiction, which I align with photography as cultural vectors, both promote and interrogate the conflicting values of privacy and transparency.

I show that the detective and mystery fiction genres, which enjoyed enormous popularity at the end of the nineteenth century, activate the same cultural fault lines between public and private as photography. These genres confront questions similar to those photography raises about permeability, legibility, and transparency—themes that anchor the three core chapters of this dissertation. Like photography, detective and mystery fiction challenge the unstable relations between interior and exterior, surface and depth, transparency and opacity, conscious and

unconscious, knowable and unknowable. While not an exhaustive study of these genres, I argue that Anglophone detective and mystery fiction of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries engage the conflicting impulses between the values of privacy and transparency—or concealing and revealing—that shape the late Victorian period in the age of photography. Likewise, the conflicts around privacy and transparency that drive the plots of the stories and novels discussed herein frame the concerns and contradictions around privacy in the modern era. While the detective genre most often resolves the conflict between public and private in favor of greater transparency, the mystery genre brings resolution while retaining some opacity.

Focusing on the domestic detective genre, chapter one, “The Permeability of the Interior: Domestic Detective Fiction, Architecture and Surveillance,” examines the permeability of domestic space, drawing comparisons between the photographer and the detective as representatives of a growing surveillance culture. The chapter focuses primarily on the novels of Anna Katherine Green, a best-selling author of detective novels in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and an important innovator in the genre. Complementing my discussion of Green’s novels, I include two other examples of the genre, texts by Mary Roberts Rhinehart and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In these novels, women detectives, frequently spinsters or young women, use their mastery of the domestic sphere as a means to enter homes and gain access to the private lives of others. I argue that the phenomenon of the female sleuth in domestic detective novels should be read in the context of new viewing opportunities for women created by the expansion of photography as a hobby in the snapshot era. Demonstrating the value of surveillance, these women detectives seek to penetrate the facade of the middle class family. They impose transparency, eliminating contradictions between public and private life. In these novels, architecture doesn’t define the boundaries of private life, but rather functions as

permeable membrane; the bourgeois home is realized as a transparent space in which family secrets are exposed.

Focusing on the relationship between the detective genre and forensic photography, in chapter two, “The Legibility of the Interior: Photographic Vision and The Conquest of Incognito in the Detective Stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle and Gertrude Stein,” I place the detective story at the center of a cultural crisis of identity that is hastened by modernity and a growing insecurity around whether it is possible to identify or truly know anyone. I examine how photography was employed to read the surface of the body as a key to identity. The idea that the body could be translated into legible signs corresponding to inner character is rooted in the popular pseudo-sciences of physiognomy (reading facial features and expressions) and phrenology (reading the bumps on the skull). Likewise, photography, often in conjunction with these philosophies, was employed in the nineteenth century as a forensic tool to document criminal and racial types as well as to track recidivists. The detective, applying scientific methodology and employing new technologies like the camera to solve crimes, can be read as an extension of this project of social legibility. While the narrator of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd,” a progenitor of the literary detective, applies physiognomic analysis to the problem of identity, Poe’s C. Auguste Dupin and Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, who share a photographic gaze, function as proxies for the camera. In contrast to Poe’s Dupin trilogy and Conan Doyle’s Holmes stories, which mythologize the detective’s camera-like vision, Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” and Stein’s *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* provide counter-narratives that cast doubt on the notion that the detective’s vision is all-penetrating or infallible, and, more profoundly, on the project of social legibility.

In chapter three, “Transparency and Opacity (or Between Science and the Supernatural): Photography and Mystery Fiction,” I read photography in the context of the cultural history of the last decades of the nineteenth century, exploring the links between the proliferation of photography, the peak in popularity of the mystery genre, the rise of the Spiritualist movement, and the advent of psychoanalysis. The chapter takes shape from my interest in articulating what is haunting about photography. Why is the genre so often linked historically to death, ghosts, the occult, and the uncanny or unconscious? I argue that photography’s spookiness is the result of the medium’s positioning between science and the supernatural. In the nineteenth century photographic technology becomes for scientists “the pencil of nature,” (as Francis Talbot titled his 1844 book on photography). Revolutionizing astronomy, microscopy, and medicine (with the invention of the X-ray), photography reveals the unseen world in astonishing detail—the moon’s craggy surface, a crystal’s complex structure, a body’s hidden skeleton. Given the heady pace of these revelations and the degree of photography’s penetration of the unseen world, some of the more dubious experiments involving photography—attempts to photograph the human soul and thought, or the spirits of the departed—become plausible even for the scientific-minded. Because photography functions at the threshold of what is visible and invisible or knowable and unknowable, the medium seems to hold the dream of transparency—a utopian belief that all will be revealed. Likewise, I argue that photography’s vexed position between science and the supernatural places it, in terms of another significant cultural continuum of the period, between the detective story’s rational transparency and the mystery tale’s unsettling opacity. I will examine the medium’s conceptual links to mystery fiction through readings of both popular and literary works in the genre by period authors E.W. Hornung, Mary Roberts Rinehart, and Henry



James. I will also develop a theoretical discussion of what is haunting about photography through readings of texts by Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes and Sigmund Freud.

## Acknowledgements

Foremost, I would like to thank my dissertation advisor Wayne Koestenbaum, for his inspiration, insight, good humor, generosity, patience, and commitment to myself and my project over the long haul. His belief in my ability to finish when my own flagged made all the difference in seeing me through. Working with him on this project has made me both a better thinker and writer, as well as helped me to imagine a future in which I give myself permission to follow the thinking that will always lead me out of the box to someplace more interesting.

I would also like to thank the two other members of my supervisory committee, Nancy K. Miller and Ann Humphreys, for sticking it out with me. Special thanks to Anne Humphreys, who both helped me to shape my dissertation proposal and who, though retired, graciously and supportively agreed to attend my defense.

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## **Prologue: An Attack of Neurasthenia & the Heightened Sensations of Modern Life**

While researching a paper on amateur photography and Jacob Riis for a seminar, I came across a curious story that became the kernel that germinated this dissertation.<sup>1</sup> In 1899 Rochester teenager Abigail Roberson sued a flour mill for incorporating her image into their trademark (*Roberson v. Rochester Folding Box Co.*). The picture was not pornographic or embarrassing, though it may have been taken surreptitiously. When Roberson was informed of the use of her photograph for this purpose, she is said to have suffered a bout of severe neurasthenia that confined her to bed and required the care of a physician. Roberson did not claim that her character or reputation had been damaged, but rather that she had suffered injury to her feelings.

Judge John M. Davy ruled that the defendants had no right to distribute Roberson's picture, and that her right to privacy had been violated. In addition, he defined the right to control the dissemination of a likeness as a right not only of property, but also of personality (Mensel 36). His decision drew heavily on Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis' influential paper "The Right to Privacy" (1890), in which the authors attribute the individual's increased vulnerability in the modern era to the proliferation of invasive press practices and new technologies such as recording devices, and in particular, photography:

Instantaneous photographs and news paper enterprises have invaded the sacred precincts of private and domestic life; and numerous mechanical devices threaten to make good the prediction that 'what is whispered in the closet shall be proclaimed from the house-tops.' For years there has been a feeling that the law

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<sup>1</sup> I first encountered Roberson's story in Robert E. Mensel's "Kodakers Lying in Wait: Amateur Photography and the Right of Privacy in New York, 1885-1915." *American Quarterly* 43:1 (March 1991) 24-45.

must afford some remedy for the unauthorized circulation of portraits of private persons... (195)

In response Warren and Brandeis argue for a definition of privacy that encompasses intangible forms of possession: “personality,” “feelings,” “intellect,” and the “general right of the individual to be let alone” (193, 205). “The Right to Privacy” identifies that something had changed in the public consciousness, and that the development of a law that recognized “the products and processes of the mind” was both necessary and inevitable given the “heightening of sensations which came with the advance of civilization” (195). Privacy, according to Warren and Brandeis, had in fact become more important given the “intensity and complexity of life” in modern times, making “solitude and privacy...more essential to the individual” (196). The argument for privacy that Warren and Brandeis constructed was radical in the sense that they were not just arguing for an expansion of the concept of privacy, as they say at one point, but really, for “the recognition of new rights,” as they say at another point. They recognized a new concept of privacy altogether, one which had a dynamic relationship with the complex civilization they saw emerging and that protected the newly recognized needs of the individual.

Although Judge Davy’s decision was affirmed upon appeal, it was eventually reversed in July of 1902 by the the New York Court of Appeals. The New York Court of Appeals was the first state high court to answer directly the question whether the right of privacy was protected in the absence of property interests. This judgement articulated the court’s inability to protect feelings: “There is no right, capable of enforcement by process of law, to possess or maintain, without disturbance, any particular condition of feeling” (qtd. in Mensel 38). The Roberson case spawned much criticism in the public press. *The New York Times* ran a series of harsh editorials suggesting that the only recourse left to those whose privacy had been violated was vigilante

justice. *The Times* implied that the courts were egregiously out of step with public opinion and demanded a new law to protect privacy. Public opinion was galvanized in advance of the first legislation on the right to privacy in the state of New York on April 6, 1903 in the very first session of the legislature after the Roberson decision. The law enacted prevented the “unauthorized use of the name or picture of any person for the purposes of trade” (qtd. in Mensel 39). The act was declared constitutional in both Manhattan and Brooklyn, and the state courts showed a willingness to enforce the legislation. The decision was ultimately affirmed by the United States Supreme Court in 1911, in a brief opinion by Justice Holmes. While a constitutional right to privacy, one that recognizes a basis for privacy beyond property, is not explicitly recognized until 1965 (*Griswold v. Connecticut*), its first murmurings can be heard in the late nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

What interests me about Roberson’s story, in addition to the intriguing way gender is so deeply implicated in the unstable boundary between public and private, is the role photography plays in this early articulation of an idea of privacy that is not located in property but in the individual—a body, a mind, a personality.

### **Introduction: From Outer to Inner**

This dissertation is a meditation on the mutable boundaries that define interior life in the age of photography. I probe these boundaries through selected readings in two literary genres that share conceptual links with photography—detective fiction and mystery fiction.

Photography plays an important role in a radical reconsideration of the boundaries between public and private, engaging two dominant and often conflicting cultural values that shape American

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<sup>2</sup> The facts in this paragraph are drawn from Mensel’s article (38-40).

life at the turn of the twentieth century—the mandate to define and protect privacy and the simultaneous call for greater transparency in public and personal life. Photography, through its perceived transgressions against private life, helps initiate a demand to define and protect privacy as well as satisfying the desire for candid exposure of the personal. Likewise, detective and mystery fiction, which I align with photography as cultural vectors, both promote and interrogate the conflicting values of privacy and transparency.

Photography presents new challenges to an idea of privacy that is already undergoing significant transformation over the course of the nineteenth century as a result of social and cultural changes that include urbanization, industrialization, the rise of the middle class, scientific and technological discoveries, and a new understanding of and emphasis on interiority. In addition to these economic and social changes, we can add what Suren Lalvani, in his book *Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies*, calls “a tremendous expansion of the field of vision” (169). In a modern era dominated by vision,<sup>3</sup> Lalvani argues that the introduction of photography in the nineteenth century “signaled an intensification and heightened functioning of the instrumentalities of vision” (169). This transformation, argues Lalvani, gives rise to new “regimes of visibility”:

It meant that a new kind of subject had to function within regimes of visibility structured not just by the introduction of photography, but by changed urban spaces, new modes of perception and special and temporal dislocations initiated by novel forms of mobility. These regimes of visibility involved a transformation in the arrangements of objects, spaces, and bodies, which in turn determined what could and could not be seen (169).

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<sup>3</sup> Lalvani cites Martin Jay (*Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in 20<sup>th</sup> Century French Thought*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), who argues that the modern era has been dominated by the sense of sight.

I locate photography within the nexus of these new “regimes of visibility,” and am interested in the ways the technology revolutionizes what can be seen and not seen, or what is public and what is private.

I read photography as part of a larger cultural reconsideration of the boundary between the public and the private. While photography is one factor that reshapes the discourse around privacy, the response to its encroachments into private life also help create the foundation for a legal right to privacy that moves beyond the terms of property or architecture to include the more abstract concepts of personality and identity. The transformation of the notion of privacy at the end of the nineteenth century can be described as one from *outer*, from the architecture or surface, to the *inner* psychological and personal sub-terrain to which the candid photograph or the X-ray provides access. The boundary for negotiating the terms of privacy is no longer property or architecture, but rather the body or the self.

I argue that photography becomes a central location for the discourse around privacy because it destabilizes the boundaries between public and private and interior and exterior. As Tom Gunning, a historian who has written extensively on film and still photography, observes, “The photograph mediates between public and private” (“Tracing” 19). Photography operates at the threshold of these boundaries because of the technology’s perceived potential, epitomized by the X-ray, to breach the interior—the body, mind, and even the soul. Paradoxically, photography helps to create a need for a new understanding of privacy structured around the body and subjectivity while it simultaneously undermines the notion of an autonomous or impenetrable interior.

I show that the detective and mystery fiction genres, which enjoyed enormous popularity at the end of the nineteenth century, activate the same cultural fault lines between public and private as photography. These genres confront questions similar to those photography raises about



permeability, legibility, and transparency—themes that anchor the three core chapters of this dissertation. By permeability, I mean the porousness or penetrability of a boundary, or how easily it is breached, whether physically or visually. By legibility, I mean the ease with which a text—or a body or person—can be read or understood. By transparency, I mean the quality or state of being easily seen through. I argue throughout that transparency is a dominant cultural value that shapes the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like photography, detective and mystery fiction challenge the unstable relations between interior and exterior, surface and depth, transparency and opacity, conscious and unconscious, knowable and unknowable. While not an exhaustive study of these genres, the following chapters argue that Anglophone<sup>4</sup> detective and mystery fiction of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries engage the conflicting impulses between the values of privacy and transparency—or concealing and revealing—that shape the late Victorian period in the age of photography. Likewise, the conflicts around privacy and transparency that drive the plots of the stories and novels discussed herein frame the concerns and contradictions around privacy in the modern era. While the detective genre most often resolves the conflict between public and private in favor of greater transparency, the mystery genre brings resolution while retaining some opacity.

In each chapter of this dissertation I pair a literary genre (detective or mystery fiction) with a photographic theme such as surveillance (chapter one), crime photography (chapter two) and spirit photography (chapter 3). Each chapter, organized around a boundary (or boundaries) that separate interior from exterior, examines how photography or photographic vision

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<sup>4</sup> While this dissertation focuses on American literature, some British texts are included. Not only is there much transatlantic cross-pollination in both the detective and mystery genres in this period, but the larger issue with which this dissertation is concerned—the impact of photography on the discourse around privacy and interiority—develops along parallel lines in both cultural contexts. However, the dissertation is grounded in the American cultural context because twentieth-century privacy laws originate within the American legal discourse.

challenges or compromises this boundary: architecture (chapter 1); the body's surface (chapter 2); the visible world, (chapter 3). For example, I examine the boundaries between visible and invisible, conscious and unconscious, or this world and the next. I am interested in the way photography tests or alters boundaries, transforming ideas about self and interiority in this period.

The organization of the chapters follows the evolution of privacy in the United States from a concept defined in terms of property to one that, by the end of the nineteenth century, is increasingly understood in terms of identity or consciousness. This trajectory can be described as one from property to consciousness. The movement of these chapters is from surface to depth—from the architecture that forms a protective layer around the self and defines the limits of privacy in the nineteenth century, to the surface of the body, to the body's interior (both physical and psychological). The concept of interior depends on the recognition of a boundary that separates an inside from an outside, but that boundary is not fixed. Exterior is a layer that can always be peeled away to reveal another beneath. Therefore, the interior is something that is always receding and in need of excavation. The pairing exterior/interior always implies a play of surface and depth, of outermost and innermost. Outermost can be identified as facade, whether the exterior of a building or a human face. Innermost implies something that is that is perhaps not visible or accessible—a basement, an attic, a secret compartment, the recessed chambers of the mind. While these chapters follow the evolution of the concept of privacy from surface to depth (or property to consciousness), we will see how photography shapes this trajectory as it moves continuously between surface and depth.

Focusing on the domestic detective genre,<sup>5</sup> chapter one, “The Permeability of the Interior: Domestic Detective Fiction, Architecture and Surveillance,” examines the permeability of domestic space, drawing comparisons between the photographer and the detective as representatives of a growing surveillance culture. The chapter focuses primarily on the novels of Anna Katherine Green, a best-selling author of detective novels in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and an important innovator in the genre. Complementing my discussion of Green’s novels, I include two other examples of the genre, texts by Mary Roberts Rhinehart and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In these novels, women detectives, frequently spinsters or young women, use their mastery of the domestic sphere as a means to enter homes and gain access to the private lives of others. I argue that the phenomenon of the female sleuth in domestic detective novels should be read in the context of new viewing opportunities for women created by the expansion of photography as a hobby in the snapshot era. Demonstrating the value of surveillance, these women detectives seek to penetrate the facade of the middle class family. They impose transparency, eliminating contradictions between public and private life. In these novels, architecture doesn’t define the boundaries of private life, but rather functions as permeable membrane; the bourgeois home is realized as a transparent space in which family secrets are exposed.

Focusing on the relationship between the detective genre and forensic photography, in chapter two, “The Legibility of the Interior: Photographic Vision and The Conquest of Incognito in the Detective Stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle and Gertrude Stein,” I place the detective story at the center of a cultural crisis of identity that is hastened by modernity and a

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<sup>5</sup> Catherine Ross Nickerson, *The Web of Iniquity: Early Detective Fiction by American Women*. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1998). She coins the term “domestic detective” to describe a sub-genre of detective fiction (190). The characteristics of the genre, along with its major themes and concerns, will be discussed in greater detail later in chapter one.

growing insecurity around whether it is possible to identify or truly know anyone. I examine how photography was employed to read the surface of the body as a key to identity. The idea that the body could be translated into legible signs corresponding to inner character is rooted in the popular pseudo-sciences of physiognomy (reading facial features and expressions) and phrenology (reading the bumps on the skull). Likewise, photography, often in conjunction with these philosophies, was employed in the nineteenth century as a forensic tool to document criminal and racial types as well as to track recidivists. The detective, applying scientific methodology and employing new technologies like the camera to solve crimes, can be read as an extension of this project of social legibility. While the narrator of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," a progenitor of the literary detective, applies physiognomic analysis to the problem of identity, Poe's C. Auguste Dupin and Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, who share a photographic gaze, function as proxies for the camera. In contrast to Poe's Dupin trilogy and Conan Doyle's Holmes stories, which mythologize the detective's camera-like vision, Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" and Stein's *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* provide counter-narratives that cast doubt on the notion that the detective's vision is all-penetrating or infallible, and, more profoundly, on the project of social legibility.

In chapter three, "Transparency and Opacity (or Between Science and the Supernatural): Photography and Mystery Fiction," I read photography in the context of the cultural history of the last decades of the nineteenth century, exploring the links between the proliferation of photography, the peak in popularity of the mystery genre, the rise of the Spiritualist movement,<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Spiritualism was a widespread religious movement, most popular in English speaking countries between 1840-1920, that focused on communication with spirits. Though the movement was increasingly associated with fraud it remained popular for decades and attracted the participation of many prominent celebrities. Inspired by the Fox sisters of Hydesville, New York, who claimed that they communicated with spirits via rappings, the movement gained momentum in the U.S. in the years following the Civil War. Spiritualist doctrine evolved from a Christian

and the advent of psychoanalysis. The chapter takes shape from my interest in articulating what is haunting about photography. Why is the genre so often linked historically to death, ghosts, the occult, and the uncanny or unconscious? I argue that photography's spookiness is the result of the medium's positioning between science and the supernatural. In the nineteenth century photographic technology becomes for scientists "the pencil of nature," (as Francis Talbot titled his 1844 book on photography). Revolutionizing astronomy, microscopy, and medicine (with the invention of the X-ray), photography reveals the unseen world in astonishing detail—the moon's craggy surface, a crystal's complex structure, a body's hidden skeleton. Given the heady pace of these revelations and the degree of photography's penetration of the unseen world, some of the more dubious experiments involving photography—attempts to photograph the human soul and thought, or the spirits of the departed—become plausible even for the scientific-minded. Because photography functions at the threshold of what is visible and invisible or knowable and unknowable, the medium seems to hold the dream of transparency—a utopian belief that all will be revealed. Likewise, I argue that photography's vexed position between science and the supernatural places it, in terms of another significant cultural continuum of the period, between the detective story's rational transparency and the mystery tale's unsettling opacity. I will examine the medium's conceptual links to mystery fiction through readings of both popular and literary works in the genre by period authors E.W. Hornung, Mary Roberts Rinehart, and Henry

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context in the years following the Second Great Awakening in the United States and was influenced by Emanuel Swedenborg's (1688-1772) writings on the afterlife and Franz Mesmer's (1734-1815) teachings on the spirit world's structure. Spiritualists did not believe in a heaven and hell or in physical death in Christian terms, but defined life in terms of the presence of consciousness: when the body ceased to function the soul was thought to travel to the Spiritual Plane from which it could continue to communicate and guide those still on the earthly plane. Spiritualist practice involved seeking physical and audible evidence of the spirit world, frequently through séances and with the aid of mediums.

James. I will also develop a theoretical discussion of what is haunting about photography through readings of texts by Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes and Sigmund Freud.

The question I posed to myself, and which both initiated this dissertation and became its central preoccupation, is how and why photography became a catalyst for a emergent notion of privacy defined in terms of identity and personality. Private life was challenged on many fronts by emergent modernity, whether by the growth of cities or new technologies such as the telegraph and telephone. But nothing I read provided an answer to why photography in particular drives so much of the discourse around privacy at the turn of the twentieth century. What is it about the medium of photography that is most threatening or incompatible with the idea of privacy? Why is photography perceived as a greater threat to privacy than other new technologies? What is so *haunting* about photography? I am interested in the anxieties raised by the medium of photography, whether based in paranoia or real threat, and how they shape an emerging concept of privacy and interior life.

I am not a historian, sociologist or art historian, and I recognize the limits of any answers I can provide; but what I can do in this dissertation is to think through these questions relying on tools of literary analysis and cultural criticism. Fiction, and particularly mystery and detective fiction, is an excellent place to look at how ideas about privacy and interiority are reshaped in the era of photography. I identify my project as part of an archeology of modernism, which is for me the secret engine that drove my inquiry and opens up a path for research beyond the scope of this dissertation. I read the privileging of the interior and its realization as a protected space within modernist discourse as a response to social and technological transformations of the late-nineteenth century and the attendant perception that the interior had come under siege by the culture of surveillance. Modernist literature exploits the contradictions between privacy and

publicity that emerge in the the age of photography. These contradictions reveal two strands that extend through modernist literature: the desire to protect the interior and its processes, often through coding details about private life, and the simultaneous impulse to display them.

My methodology is to place photography in the context of a constellation of relations that produce a change in perception—I include discussions of glass architecture, forensic photography, Spiritualism, Freud’s theory of the unconscious, the X-ray, physiognomy, and mugshots (among other topics). I draw from both the highbrow literature (Henry James, Edgar Allan Poe, Gertrude Stein) and popular detective fiction (E.W. Hornung, Anna Katherine Green, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Arthur Conan Doyle); and while this may present a disparity, I argue that the saturation of the themes I explore across the literary spectrum demonstrates their cultural potency. I anchor my discussion around conceptual nodes to which I frequently return and sometimes linger: Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project*, Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*, the photographs of Eugène Atget, Luc Sante’s *Evidence*, Freud’s articulation of the unconscious and the uncanny. I am indebted to Benjamin for pointing the way.

*World of particular secret affinities: palm tree and feather duster, hairdryer and Venus de Milo, champagne bottles, prostheses, and letter-writing manuals...*  
—Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project* (827)

## One—The Permeability of the Interior: Domestic Detective Fiction, Architecture and Surveillance

### Introduction ~ Inside the Victorian Interior

Walter Benjamin observed, “[T]he nineteenth century, like no other, was addicted to dwelling” (*Arcades* 220). The nineteenth-century interior—with its oppressive overabundance of carpets, draperies, furniture and knickknacks—is a major theme of his unfinished work *The Arcades Project* (216). We can imagine a photograph of a Parisian interior circa 1900 taken by Eugène Atget, whose pictures Benjamin compared to crime scenes: the flash illuminates a cramped but neatly-arranged room adorned with gilt clocks and mirrors; a candelabra; a fringe-festooned mantelpiece; sundry but unidentifiable *objets d’arts*; a well-worn upholstered chaise; busy wallpaper and fabric patterns; dark, heavy drapes. A gothic sinisterness permeates Benjamin’s constellation of personal observations and culled quotations on the topic of the interior. As Benjamin quotes Baudelaire, in the bourgeois interior even the furniture has something to hide: “All the furniture is immense, fantastic, strange, armed with locks and secrets like all civilized souls.” Benjamin quotes Le Corbusier, who makes a similar observation: “Under the bourgeoisie, cities as well as furniture retain the character of fortifications” (qtd. in *Arcades* 225, 215). Throughout these passages the interior emerges as a repository for mysteries—a castle, compartment, cabinet, shell, and coffin. Benjamin equates the interior—“the innermost core of bourgeois coziness”—to a web whose gossamer threads form an outer layer that both enshrouds and entraps: “To live in these interiors was to have woven a dense fabric about oneself, to have secluded oneself within a spider’s web...” (*Arcades* 216). Lined in plush, the interior has the connotations of both sanctuary and tomb: “It [the nineteenth century] conceived the residence as a receptacle for the person, and it encased him with all his



appurtenances so deeply in the dwelling's interior that one might be reminded of the inside of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep, usually violet folds of velvet" (*Arcades* 220).

In his essay "One Way Street" Benjamin imagines the tomb-like middle-class dwelling as a sort of set for a detective novel waiting to happen—a scene waiting for a crime and a corpse to materialize: "The bourgeois interior of the 1860s to the 1890s, with its gigantic sideboards distended with carvings, the sunless corners where palms stand, the balcony embattled behind its balustrade, and the long corridors with their singing gas flames, fittingly houses only the corpse" (48-9). Benjamin believes that such interiors can only portend a bad end: even the arrangement of the furniture prescribes the victim's doomed escape path, as the very appearance of the couch confirms: "On this sofa the aunt cannot but be murdered" ("OWS" 49). Benjamin's vision of the interior resembles an odd but not uncommon type of crime scene photograph by French detective Alphonse Bertillon<sup>7</sup> and the Parisian police department, that is to say, not one of the gory images—whose bloodied and mangled bodies display every variety of wound made by every conceivable implement—but rather the mysterious image of an interior in which there is no visible body or trace of a crime. These photographs<sup>8</sup> are all the more chilling for the absence of a corpse, for the unsettling banality of the sumptuous sitting room whose gilt bric-a-brac and piano festooned in plush drapery reveal nothing out of the ordinary, or the horror of the cozy room with the neatly made bed in another photograph whose translated French caption reads, "Room of

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<sup>7</sup> A French detective who invented a system of identifying recidivist criminals based on body measurements; in the 1880s Bertillon also made pioneering contributions to forensic photography, standardizing the mug shot and the crime scene photograph. Bertillon's methods will be discussed in chapter two: "'Who Done It': [Photography and] The Conquest of Incognito in the Detective Stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle and Gertrude Stein."

<sup>8</sup> I make reference to photographs published in Eugenia Parry's *Crime Album Stories* (Zurich: Scalo, n.d.). These photographs—which originated in the Paris police department of Bertillon's era and were pilfered at some point—are now part of an album held in private hands.

Baroness Dellard Where the Drama Unfolded.” What is striking and discordant in these images is that while we know horrible crimes have been committed in the rooms depicted, nothing seems to be amiss—everything *appears* normal on the surface. With a keen eye, the detective will harvest each photograph for latent clues. The detective’s task—not unlike Benjamin’s—is to penetrate the veneer of comfortable domesticity.

Benjamin, an avid reader of detective fiction,<sup>9</sup> asserts that the “horror of apartments” is best “penetrated” by certain detective writers who locate it at the “dynamic center” of their work—in particular American author Anna Katherine Green, whose work comprises the core of this chapter (“OWS” 48-9). Benjamin asserts that Green—as well as authors Arthur Conan Doyle and Gaston Leroux—best capture “[T]his character of the bourgeois apartment, tremulously awaiting the nameless murderer like a lascivious old lady her gallant” (“OWS” 49). He imagines the Victorian interior as a “deadly trap” in which the furnishings, tomblike in their “soulless luxuriance,” conspire together to enshroud hapless victims in the trappings of “bourgeois pandemonium” (49). The “horror” seems to stem from the accumulation of belongings that trap the victims behind barricades within the interiors of their own homes. However, in my own reading of Green’s novels and other works within the domestic detective genre in which architecture and interiors are central motifs, I find another source for this “horror.” In this chapter I argue that for the dwellers of the bourgeois home it is not the fear of enclosure that generates the greatest horror, but rather the fear of revelation or *disclosure*.

Contrary to idealized notions of architecture as a haven, these novels realize the bourgeois home as a highly permeable and ultimately transparent space in which family secrets and private lives

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<sup>9</sup> David Frisby notes Benjamin’s extensive readings in detective fiction through the 1930s, which is corroborated both in his correspondence and in a list Benjamin kept of books he was reading. Benjamin also planned to write a detective novel, and though he did not complete this project, he had made notes and sketches for the chapters. See “The City Detected” (60) and “Walter Benjamin and Detection” (89-90).

are necessarily exposed in the course of detective investigations. Architecture fails to perform its function as a kind of exoskeleton or protective layer, leaving domestic life vulnerable to surveillance. No matter how many obstacles—in the form of fences, walls, locks, doors, or secret chambers—that the characters in these novels erect between themselves and the outside world, they are not able to safeguard their interiors or their secrets from the detective’s penetrating gaze.

In the examples of the genre discussed in this chapter—Anna Katherine Green’s *That Affair Next Door* (1897), *Lost Man’s Lane* (1898), *The Mayor’s Wife* (1907), and *Dark Hollow* (1914); Mary Roberts Rinehart’s *The Circular Staircase* (1908); and Charlotte Perkins Gilman *Unpunished* (written in the late 1920s but unpublished until 1997)—female amateur detectives, frequently spinsters or young women, use their special status as masters of the domestic sphere to enter homes. As neighbors, friends, relatives, or domestics-in-disguise they are able to enter domestic spaces less conspicuously than male police detectives. They infiltrate, pry and spy. They throw open doors, windows and shutters. They expose attics, cellars and secret spaces. Through these actions, domestic detectives allow light to restore opaque interiors to luminous transparency. Challenging the notion that domestic architecture can or should protect privacy, these domestic sleuths demonstrate that architecture is not an unbreachable boundary between public and private or interior and exterior but rather a permeable membrane. Believing in the benefits of surveillance and guided by the value of transparency, they seek to penetrate the facade of upper-middle-class family life and reveal the damaging secrets that fester in the interior. In these novels, domestic detectives restore order by shedding light on these secrets. They impose transparency on people’s private lives, thereby eradicating the contradictions between public and private life. As Gaston Bachelard writes in *The Poetics of Space*, no secret is impervious to discovery: “Chests, especially small caskets, over which we have more complete mastery, are objects *that may be*

*opened*” (85). And once the casket is open, Bachelard concludes, the dialectics of inside and outside no longer have meaning.

### **Anna Katherine Green and the Domestic Detective Novel: The Irresistible Allure of the Barred Door**

In an article entitled “Why Human Beings are Interested in Crime,” published in *The American Magazine* in 1919, best-selling detective novelist Anna Katherine Green recalls that her interest in crime was sparked on a country drive when she observed a house with a plank nailed across the front door. She recounts, “To this day, that barred door appeals to my imagination” (84). “Certain houses,” says Green, “have an atmosphere of mystery,” that is, some houses just look “as if crime had been committed there” (84). Such fortress-like houses are a central feature in Green’s novels, and like the house with the barred door that captures Green’s imagination, they all present seemingly impenetrable barriers to deep knowledge of an interior: steel and iron doors, formidable fences, sealed windows, locked and forbidden rooms, or walls that conceal hidden passageways or private chambers. These barriers are always a sign of destructive secrets that need uncovering within the walls of respectable-seeming middle-class houses. Ultimately, Green’s interest in mysterious architecture reflects a fascination with the complex interior lives that these facades conceal. In architecture, as with people, facades often prove misleading. As Green writes in the article cited above, people read detective novels and follow crimes in the newspapers because they are fascinated by the hidden emotional lives of others: “The thing which interests us most in human beings is their emotions, especially their hidden emotions. We know a good deal about what they do; but we don’t know much about what

they feel. And we are always curious to get below the surface and to find out what is actually going on in their hearts” (39).

Green, who wrote thirty-four detective novels between 1878 and 1923, was a best-selling author in a genre both identified with the masculine figure of the detective and dominated by male authors. She became an internationally known literary celebrity with the publication of *The Leavenworth Case* (1878), which eventually sold over a million copies<sup>10</sup> and which was in print almost continuously until 1937.<sup>11</sup> Though since then largely out of print and overlooked by critics, her work has recently received critical attention from feminist literary critics and historians of the detective genre, and several of her titles—including a volume of collected works—have been reprinted in the last decade. Critically, Green is recognized as the first important American detective author since Edgar Allan Poe and the most celebrated before Dashiell Hammett (Nickerson 60; “Detective Story” 2). However, unlike Poe, whose detective stories are set in Paris, Green grounds her stories on American soil—in Manhattan and the Hudson Valley. Green occupies an important place in detective fiction’s history as a transitional figure who brought together the detective novel’s American roots, as pioneered by Poe, and its international strains, developed by Frenchman Emile Gaboriau and Englishman Wilkie Collins (Nickerson 62). Her popular detective Ebenezer Gryce, of the New York Metropolitan Police, precedes Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes by nearly a decade. Green’s status as an important practitioner of the genre was recognized by Conan Doyle, who corresponded with her and requested to meet her in Buffalo, where she lived, during his American lecture tour in the autumn

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<sup>10</sup> This number is cited by Maida (4), and her source is Green’s obituary: “Anna Katharine Green” [obit.], *Publisher’s Weekly* 127, 20 April 1935: 1599.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Gregory 75. She cites Barrie Hayne, “Anna Katharine Green,” in *Ten Women of Mystery*, ed. Earl F. Bargainnier, 152-78 (Bowling Green, Ohio: University Popular Press, 1981): 153.

of 1894.<sup>12</sup> Paul Woolf argues in his article “When Arthur Met Anna: Arthur Conan Doyle and Anna Katherine Green” that Green’s influence on Doyle’s work is largely overlooked by critics. Green, whose work has influenced generations of detective writers, is credited with providing the first occasions in which a man is murdered while making out his will and an icicle is used as a murder weapon; popularizing the use of maps and diagrams in detective fiction as well as creating the first female detectives in American literature<sup>13</sup>—most notably the series characters Miss Amelia Butterworth, a spinster sleuth who appears in three novels published between 1897 and 1915 and is a model for Agatha Christie’s Jane Marple, and the young debutante Violet Strange, introduced in 1915 (Nickerson 61, Woolf 178).

Green’s novels, in which architecture is a dominant metaphor, employ a vision that penetrates the facade of the upper class home and domestic life. The novels provide interesting case studies for thinking about the interior’s unstable boundaries and the increasing vulnerability

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<sup>12</sup> Woolf quotes Doyle’s letter to Green requesting a meeting; however, since Green’s reply to Doyle is lost, there is no proof that the meeting took place (179).

<sup>13</sup> Nickerson identifies Green as creating the first female detectives in American literature. She notes that there was some precedent for the woman detective in British literature, W. Stephens Hayward’s *The Experiences of a Lady Detective* (c. 1861) [publication date disputed: see also Gregory who cites evidence that this book was first published in 1864 under the title *The Revelations of a Lady Detective*, 30n.2] and Wilkie Collins’s *The Law of the Lady* (1875), with which Green was probably familiar (Nickerson 61). Gregory cites another British precedent, Andrew Forrester’s *The Female Detective* (1864), which, published six months before *The Experiences of a Lady Detective*, she identifies as the first fictional female detective (18, 24). I note that I found two sources that contradict Nickerson’s claim that Miss Butterworth is the first female sleuth in American literature. Craig and Cadogan cite Harry Rockwood with creating the first American female sleuth, Clarice Dyke, in his novel *The Female Detective* (1883) (42), while Gregory identifies Harlan P. Halsey as the creator of the first American woman detective, Kate Goelet, from his dime novel *The Lady Detective* (1892) (36). Green’s Miss Butterworth is first introduced in *That Affair Next Door* (1897). Violet Strange first appears in *The Golden Slipper: And Other Problems for Violet Strange* (1915). Given the lack of critical consensus on this point, it might be more accurate to say that Green was the creator of the first female detective authored by a woman. Ross argues that Miss Butterworth is “the first detective in American literature to challenge the role of women” (78). Ross points out that the male-penned female detectives in American literature that precede Miss Butterworth ultimately find detective work unsuitable for women and are married off by the end of the novels. In this respect, Miss Butterworth is the only legitimate progenitor of Christie’s Jane Marple.

of private life to the enforced transparency of surveillance culture in the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century. While I use Green's work as a focal point for discussing the interior's permeability in domestic detective novels, I will also include novels by Mary Roberts Rinehart and Charlotte Perkins Gilman in order to broaden my discussion of certain repeating patterns and themes within the genre. Like Green, Rinehart was an extremely popular author in the period, credited with more best-selling novels than any other American author between 1895 and 1944.<sup>14</sup> While Gilman's only detective novel, *Unpunished*, was written in the period but not published until the 1970s, it is included here because it shares the same thematic preoccupations with architecture, surveillance, and the exposure of private life.

Defined as "domestic detective fiction" by Katherine Ross Nickerson—in her book *The Web of Inequity: Early Detective Fiction by American Woman*—Green's work is part of a subgenre of detective fiction written by American women between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War II.<sup>15</sup> Domestic detective novels frequently, though not exclusively, feature women detectives<sup>16</sup> who are "sidekicks or rivals of professional or police detectives" and

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<sup>14</sup> Green 119; her source is a study by Irving Harlow Hart, cited in Jan Cohn's *Improbable Fiction* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980): 203.

<sup>15</sup> Nickerson's study focuses on the work of Green, Metta Victoria Fuller Victor (who is credited with writing the first "full-blown" American detective novel, *The Dead Letter*, in 1866), and Mary Roberts Rinehart. She also includes discussion of one novel by Pauline Hopkins, *Hagar's Daughter* (1901) and one by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Unpunished* (written in the 1920s and published posthumously in 1997). She notes that there were other women writing this "general style" of detective novel in the period—such as Mary Hatch, Carolyn Wells, Isabel Ostrander, Leslie Ford, Mignon Eberhart, Dorothy Disney, and Mabel Seeley—whose works are not included in her study (xiii, 219n.3).

<sup>16</sup> The prevalence of the female detective is more common in later domestic detective novels. For example, both Green and Rinehart's early works feature male detectives while their later works feature female detectives. Nickerson qualifies that even in these earlier works featuring male detectives, these novels "are all concerned, in some way, with how suspicion and investigation intersect with ideologies of genteel womanhood" (x). Likewise, Nickerson argues that the genre offers a "new source for understanding the lived experience of the policing and transgressing of gender norms that vexed and energized middle-and-upper-class culture in the decades around the turn of the century (xi).

who investigate murders committed in middle- and upper-class homes (Nickerson ix, x). She argues that we can call these heroines detectives—as we would Agatha Christie’s Jane Marple—“when they compete with, supplant, supplement, or correct a more official, male-headed investigation” (x). Nickerson’s work recovers these once popular books by women authors whose works, though they dominated American detective fiction in what critics often refer to as the “fallow” period between Poe and Hammett, are ignored by standard histories of the genre that pay more attention to the contributions of “classical” or “golden age authors.”<sup>17</sup> Defining the domestic detective genre as a hybrid form, Nickerson links it to “Poe’s tales of ratiocination, the sensational story-paper, popular nonfiction crime and trial narratives, the domestic novel, and the social critical use of the gothic mode”—as well as the British sensation novel (xiii; 19-20). Nickerson also links the genre to the reform culture of the Gilded Age and Progressive eras (xiv). Plots of domestic detective novels always revolve around family secrets—whether concealed identities, hidden marriages, illegitimate births, hushed scandals, or clandestine erotic lives. In focusing on crimes committed in the domestic sphere, domestic detective novels probe the intersection between private life and public interest.

Like the domestic novel, the action in the domestic detective novel always takes place in the interior spaces of private homes and focuses on relationships between members of the household (Nickerson 15). The domestic detective novel adopts the moral worldview of the domestic novel—which centers on the home and the belief that the values associated with the

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<sup>17</sup> See Nickerson: xi, 2, 5, 6, 220n.6. Nickerson uses the terms “classical” and “golden age” together here to refer to the work of Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, G.K. Chesterton and Dorothy Sayers and their American imitators (5), though she later distinguishes that the “classical style” is identified with clever detectives, such as Sherlock Holmes, who solve intricate puzzles. In general usage, the “golden age” of detective fiction refers both to a style of writing and to the period between the world wars (though there is some disagreement among critics as to when the “golden age” begins and when it ends). Both “classical” and “golden age” detective fiction are identified as mostly British, while the more realistic and violent “hard-boiled” style, which emerged in the 1920s, is identified as American.



women's sphere can cure social problems—and brings it to bear on the problem of investigating crime (Nickerson 15, 20). In Nickerson's view, the domestic detective genre emerges “not just in the aftermath of the domestic novel as a general phenomenon, but in answer to the needs of the continuing anxiety over sincerity, self-control, and moral governance in the middle and upper classes” (26). However, Nickerson distinguishes the idealized home of the domestic novel from that of the domestic detective novel, whose interior space is “a realm of high anxiety and deep flaws” in which “the ideal is continually shown to be ruptured” (22-23). While domestic detective novels evoke much of the “framework” of the domestic novel, Nickerson also reads the genre as one of subversion and critique. She observes that these novels “tend to portray the domestic novel's homosocial world as anachronistic and to show moments when women must challenge the sexism of the public sphere and of traditional domestic arrangements” (15, 22). Focusing on investigating crimes within the domestic sphere, Nickerson argues that these novels “express deep ambivalence about the changes in women's roles and opportunities” as well as actively engage “the changing (and sometimes retrenching ideologies) of domesticity in the long transition from the Victorian age to the modern” (xiv). By placing the detective inside the home, the women authors of domestic detective novels assert “a need for a new kind and level of investigation into domestic arrangements of the middle and upper classes” (Nickerson 23). The popularity of these novels in the period, Nickerson concludes, gives credence to a “historical need” for investigation of domestic life and for “a new discourse on crime” (xi). Nickerson credits the domestic genre with introducing “new agents to detect and correct improper behavior in the domestic sphere”—in the form of detectives who replace the domestic novel's all-knowing mother (26). Through the detective's keen eyes, the home's interior—the bastion of middle-class

privacy—is rendered both permeable and transparent, along with its hypocrisies and destructive secrets.

Just as the domestic detective novel answers some of the anxieties expressed in the domestic novel, so too does it respond to the uncertainty and disorder that cloud the gothic. Nickerson cites the work of William Patrick Day, who argues that “the detective story develops because the Gothic’s inner logic demands such a development” (qtd. in Nickerson 7). In Day’s view, the detective emerges as a response to the terror, evil and disorder that reign in the gothic world. He argues that the gothic world’s traumas reemerge in the detective novel as crime while the “monster” is reincarnated as criminal. Nickerson observes that the domestic space of the domestic detective novel is often represented as a haunted house, or at least “a place where fierce emotions and libidinal impulses run just beneath the veneer of gentility” (22). Like the classic gothic, the domestic detective novel often features an architecturally complex house that confronts the detective with a series of barriers to be negotiated. These novels also repeat other gothic conventions, such as the prevalence of veiled women, curtains, or secret rooms and passages, and gothic themes, such as “anxieties surrounding questions of identity” (Nickerson 7). Gothic plots turn on “barriers to knowing and telling” that must be overcome and on repressed secrets that must be told (Nickerson 8). Nickerson observes that the detective story, like the gothic, is forged from the tension of these competing impulses: “The detective story shows its gothic nature in the fact that it is constantly working in two directions at once: toward revelation, but also toward concealment” (68). While magic or violence overcomes the barriers to truth in the gothic mode,<sup>18</sup> Nickerson argues that the detective, whose “speed and thoroughness” in

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<sup>18</sup> Nickerson cites Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s theorizing of the gothic novel (Nickerson 8); Sedgwick writes, in a passage quoted by Nickerson, that the multiple “strange barriers” generated within the gothic narrative—such as crumbling manuscripts, or formal strategies such as the story-within-a-story—are only overcome through “extremes of magic or violence.” See

reading both physical evidence and people enacts a kind of magic, becomes the agent of “understanding and coherence” in the detective novel (8-9).

Nickerson also makes an important distinction between the American domestic detective novel and the British Victorian sensation novel. The subject of the sensation novel—popular in the 1850s and 1860s and including novels by Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braden, and Ellen Price Wood—is the “legal and social crime among the upper classes—bigamy and divorce, assumption of false identity, withholding inheritances, theft” (Nickerson 19-20). Nickerson argues that the gothic tradition, which allowed writers to tell stories about the realm of orderly domesticity that were “more truthful than genteel forms would allow,” is used with different moral purpose in the American domestic detective novel and British sensation novel (19). For example, she notes that the police detective in Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1868), Sergeant Cuff, never solves the mystery. By contrast, the domestic detective novel is more invested in “the efficacy of surveillance by the police and other moral arbiters” (Nickerson 20).

In the detective novel, unlike the mystery, there are no unsettling ambiguities left unresolved—all is ultimately revealed. This tendency toward revelation is visible in other aspects of late nineteenth-century culture. Nickerson cites Williams Leach’s discussion of what he labels “the cult of no secrets,”<sup>19</sup> a social ideology which emerged in the 1870s and which targeted ignorance of the scientific facts of sexuality as the cause of unhappy marriages. This critique of middle- and upper-class mores led to calls for dress reform, birth control and sex education (Nickerson 99). What Milette Shamir calls Freud’s “insistence on exposure” can also be read as part of the culture’s tendency toward or demand for revelation (*Inexpressible* 66). In his book

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Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986) 19-20.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Nickerson: 99. See William Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1989): 39.

*Surface and Depth*, Michael Gilmore argues that America's passion for legibility made the culture more receptive to Freudianism: "The Freud who fascinated Americans was not the dark Freud of the death instinct and untreatable trauma. He was Freud the heroic healer and exposé of secrets, the all-wise physician who regularly likened his decryptions to the crime-solving of the detective" (xiv). Freud writes in his case study of Dora: "He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his finger-tips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore" (qtd. in Gilmore xiv). In the *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud writes that all human actions—even the seemingly inadvertent—are expressions of "incompletely suppressed psychological material" (qtd. in Gilmore 68). The psychopathologist—not unlike the detective—"scours speech, clothing, manners, and other details for the trivial but clamorous clues that establish meaning" (Gilmore 68). The psychoanalyst and the detective, who emerge in the same historical period,<sup>20</sup> do similar culture work as agents of revelation. The photographer, too, is a revelator, who through a kind of magic—a technology and a chemical process—exposes hidden desires, thoughts, emotions or illicit rendezvous.

As Nickerson articulates, the domestic detective narratives hinge on the tensions between public and private morality, and between secrecy and revelation. Similar tensions are visible in the concept of home, for, as Nickerson argues, the domestic detective novel asserts that "the home is a sanctuary from the ravages of competition *and* that the home must be opened to investigation by the state" (Nickerson 67). Within these novels, the middle-class home is repeatedly subjected to "extended scenes of searching" by detectives and police (17). The fact that these "emissaries from the criminal justice system" are "welcomed" both within these texts

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<sup>20</sup> See also Slavoj Žižek, who observes that "[P]sychoanalysis and the logic and deduction story made their appearance at the same time" (432).

and in popular culture, concludes Nickerson, demonstrates both the permeability of the private and public spheres as well as the need for regulation of the private sphere (26). She views these novels as part of the active period dialogue in which the fault lines between public and private are visible: “With its focus on domestic arrangements and its assignment of police agents as investigators of family secrets, the domestic detective novel should be seen as part of the last nineteenth-century struggle to redefine *public* and *private*...” (99). Furthermore, she argues that domestic detective novels “capture the historical moment when surveillance of private life seemed both desirable and possible” (99).

While Nickerson does not elaborate on why and how surveillance is “desirable and possible” at the end of the nineteenth century, political, economic and social changes over the course of the preceding century provide historical context. Green’s novels gained popularity in the 1880s following the expansion and professionalization of surveillance culture in the second half of the nineteenth century. As Ronald R. Thomas observes in *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science*, histories of detective fiction generally note that the emergence of the genre coincides with the creation of the modern police force and the modern bureaucratic state (4). According to Dennis Porter, author of *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction*, political and industrial revolutions—which produced demographic shifts, displaced populations, rapid growth of urban centers and the extension of bureaucracy—were the catalyzing forces that led to the creation of the new police departments and detective departments. In England, for example, Porter argues that the impact of mob violence and “a perceived crime wave” were factors that helped to overcome “a native hostility” to the notion of an organized police force and that paved the way for the creation of the metropolitan police in London in 1829 (150). In New York, the scale of immigration—and the heightened class,

religious and ethnic tensions that came with it—generated social strain (Porter 151). In response to rising crime rates and greater attention given to crime in the expanding popular press, middle and upper class New Yorkers began to demand the type of modern police force that already existed in London and other European metropolises (Porter 152). These modern police departments widely employed forensic science’s new tools, such as mug shots, crime scene photographs, and fingerprints. The establishment of police and detective departments coincided with a burgeoning surveillance culture—manifest in the expansion of details collected by tax assessors and census takers, increasingly aggressive tactics employed by the press, and the introduction of potentially invasive new technologies such as the telegraph, microphone, telephone, and snapshot camera.<sup>21</sup> While social pressures made surveillance desirable, an expanding bureaucracy and growing technological arsenal made it possible to penetrate private life.

Many critics, such as Porter, have read detective fiction’s ideological function as providing “a form of reassurance” that crimes can be solved and order maintained (Porter *Pursuit* 216). In a gloss on this critical perspective, Martin A. Kayman writes in “The Short Story from Poe to Chesterton” that detective fiction can be read as a promotion for and reflection of surveillance culture:

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<sup>21</sup> See David Seipp, *The Right of Privacy in American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University, Program on Information Resources Policy, 1978). Seipp documents the bureaucratic and technological developments of the late nineteenth century that increasingly infringed on private life. He writes that the census began to ask more and more questions—both personal and financial—over the course of the nineteenth century, which culminated in protests against the 1890 census (21-23, 45-46, 50, 53, 54). Between the years 1870 and 1899, the number of newspapers in the U.S. doubled each decade; this growth was made possible by the invention of the rotary press, linotype, and automatic folder, as well as the invention of the telegraph, typewriter, streetcar, bicycle and fountain pen (67). Microphones, invented in 1877, made it possible to listen in on private conversations; in 1881 a New York prison concealed a microphone in a cell in order to listen to a conversation between inmates (102). Early telephones used a party line, allowing users to eavesdrop on the conversations of others (107-8). See also Kern 187 (microphone), and 188 (telegraph).

...detective fiction is seen by many critics as a literary reflection of, if not propaganda for, a new form of social administration and control based on state surveillance.... In this sense, detective stories are open to the charge of being fictional promotions of the values of the modern police discipline, defending bourgeois property values, sexual morality and bureaucratic rationalities (44).

Franco Moretti, in his essay "Clues," asserts that detective fiction is even more effective in promoting discipline than institutional coercion. He reads the detective genre as "a hymn to culture's coercive abilities: which prove more effective than pure and simple institutional repression" (246). Thomas, though, qualifies the notion that the genre promotes a totalizing ideology; he argues that detective narratives "did not simply or consistently reassure" but also "challenged the emerging culture of surveillance and the explanations of individual and collective identity it promulgated" (6). While I concur with Nickerson that the domestic detective novel is "is far more interested in and optimistic about the efficacy of surveillance by the police or other moral arbiters" (20), I also argue that this optimism is not always unqualified in novels that often reveal the fault lines around contested public and private space (20). In these novels the home is idealized as a sanctuary but also made subject to surveillance, and privacy is both fiercely protected and sacrificed for the greater good.

In the domestic detective novel, surveillance is a community effort. It is not solely conducted by those with institutional affiliations, such as police detectives, but also by non-professionals who collaborate or even compete with the police to solve crimes. Green writes in her article "Why Human Beings are Interested in Crime" that during World War I legions of informants among the general public provided tips to the government that helped identify spies and uncover plots; she writes, "In one city alone during the past year fifty thousand 'suspicious'

incidents or persons were reported to the authorities” (39). In many of Green’s novels, her heroines play the role of both partners and rivals of a professional detective—as in the relationship between police detective Ebenezer Gryce and Amelia Butterworth. Detective work in Green’s novels is always a community endeavor that involves “multiple detectives, both official and unofficial” and relies “for help on members of the community” (Woolf 188). Likewise, multiple detectives—both professional and amateur—solve crimes in Mary Roberts Rinehart’s *The Circular Staircase* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Unpunished*. In the novels discussed in this chapter, the sharp-eyed spinster, keen housewife and nosy neighbor are all part of an extended chain of surveillance. They serve both an institutional and ideological imperative for order and a social and moral demand for truth and disclosure, as well as provide voyeuristic pleasure for both the characters in these novels and their readers. Challenging the boundaries that separate public and private life, they extend the chain of surveillance into the deepest recesses of domestic space. The domestic detective does not pause to wonder at the barred door, as Green did in real life, but rather considers it a testimony to the absolute necessity to cross the threshold—to barge into the house and map the uncharted terrain of the domestic interior.

### **Mapping the Interior: Charting Hidden Passages and Secret Lives**

The home embodies the principles of privacy and autonomy. Architecture is a central theme in domestic detective novels, which are filled with distinctive houses and plots that turn on the discovery of a secret rooms or spaces. The novels share a preoccupation with architecture and with interiors, often containing detailed descriptions of floor plans. This section will explore the role of architecture as privacy’s gatekeeper in domestic detective novels. Architecture in these novels operates as a receptacle for secrets, an envelope for private life and individual conscience.



It serves as a barrier between the family and the community, public and private, secret and revelation. Not only do walls function to isolate households from the outside world, but the secrets that they harbor also divide and destroy families. I am particularly interested in the sense of vulnerability and personal exposure that results from the failure of architecture—i.e., the family home—to secure privacy.

Though the characters in these novels expect their homes to function as a kind of fortress or personal armor, they discover instead that it is a permeable membrane that ultimately does not protect them from exposure to the outside world's scrutiny. Conversely, the domestic detective challenges the privacy and autonomy of the family home. They infiltrate domestic space, engage in surveillance, and probe the architecture for points of vulnerability—a window, a peephole, a secret door or panel. The heroines of domestic detective novels are home invaders, but they are also archeologists and sociologists excavating and reinterpreting interiors. Ultimately, these domestic detectives must master architecture, mapping interiors and charting their hidden depths in order to expose the corrosive secrets that destroy families and communities.

Architecture's potential permeability is a source of constant anxiety in domestic detective novels, and home dwellers with something to conceal expend a great deal of effort to secure their premises from surveillance or intrusion. In Green's *Dark Hollow*, a double fence and a mass of tangled overgrowth surround Judge Ostrander's home. Likewise, a thicket of unwelcoming shrubbery surrounds the Knollys's home in Green's *Lost Man's Lane*. Judge Ostrander has isolated himself in his home for over a dozen years, not allowing anyone inside with the exception of a loyal servant. Likewise, William Knollys explains that his sister Lucetta has "a most unreasonable dread of visitors" (290). The Knollys family has shut its doors to all visitors but the intrepid family friend Miss Butterworth, who insinuates herself by virtue of a forced visit.

These characters also take equally extreme precautions to secure the insides of their homes: Judge Ostrander conceals a secret room behind a heavy curtain and an iron door, while the Knollys keep their guest Miss Butterworth under lock and key at night to keep her from wandering the halls. The master of the house in Green's *The Circular Study* (1900) has fitted his home with a technically sophisticated mechanized steel door that seals off a private room; the house is described as a kind of "medieval" fortress, "death-trap," "prison-house" and a "tomb" in which the owner had immured himself (46, 98, 100). The action in these novels revolves around the home dwellers' needs to protect and defend their homes and their secrets, and the detective's mission to infiltrate their dwellings and expose their secrets. The battle for the interior—for access to private thoughts, deeds and emotions—is waged on the home front, on the skirmish lines between public and private.

By virtue of their gender and class, the heroines of domestic detective novels, whether spinsters, widows or debutantes, are able—by invitation or insinuation—to gain entry to upper-class private homes that others, especially male working-class detectives or police officers, may not have access to without drawing undue attention. Using their gender and class as passports to cross the borders into guarded domestic interiors, these women detectives also exploit the logic of "separate sphere" ideology: they are not confined by domestic space but rather are astute readers and masters of it. For example, a common strategy in domestic detective novel for gaining entry into the private home is posing as a domestic. This cover provides women detectives a level of intimate access that is not always available to their male counterparts. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Unpunished*, Bess Hunt, half of a husband-and-wife detective team, poses as a housekeeper to gain access to a crime scene in a house where a murder had recently been committed. In Green's *Dark Hollow*, Deborah Scoville's position as a housekeeper in Judge

Ostrander's home facilitates her discovery of his secret—and its connection to the murder she has returned to her hometown to solve. And in Green's *The Mayor's Wife*, Miss Saunders enters the Packard home as a “companion” to Mrs. Packard, but her real duty, having been hired by Mr. Packard, is to spy on his distraught wife and discover the source of her “secret distress” (32). Besides posing as domestic servants, the heroines of domestic detective novels have many “covers” that allow them access to private homes: they are nosy neighbors, such as Miss Butterworth in Green's *That Affair Next Door*; or houseguests, Miss Butterworth's cover in Green's *Lost Man's Lane*; or a tenant occupying a rented house, as Miss Innes does in Rinehart's *The Circular Staircase*.

Once established inside the home, the domestic sleuth recognizes that mapping its interior—uncovering secret hiding places, or hidden rooms and passages—often holds the key to solving a mystery. In Green's *The Mayor's Wife*, for example, Miss Saunders looks for an opportunity to conduct “a close study and detailed examination” of the Packard house, which has a reputation for being haunted (62). Whatever “secret tragedy” may have taken place in the house, Miss Saunders is certain that the architecture itself holds the key: “...only the four walls and what they held, doors, windows and mantel-piece, remained to speak of those old days” (19). Miss Saunders begins by peeling away the home's historical layers and sets out to make a drawing of the first floor “as it must have looked at the time,” which is included as an illustration in the novel (62). Miss Saunders locates the hallway that had been the location of the creaking floor boards, strange noises and shadowy figures reported by servants and tenants and marks it with an “A.” After studying the exit points from this portion of the hallway, she concludes that the “presence” must be coming and going through a secret passageway. A close examination of the walls leads Miss Saunders to focus on an old vestibule that once served as another entrance

to the hallway. She notes that the floorboards sag perceptibly, leaving a gap at the baseboards. Using a knife to probe between the floor and the baseboards, Miss Saunders discovers that she can push in the knife an inch or more before touching any brick, and she confirms that this gap runs the vestibule's length. This discrepancy provides her with an insight: "The exterior of this vestibule must be considerably larger than the interior would denote" (65). And she poses the following question to herself: "What occupies the space between?" (65). This question frames a problem that confronts many of the heroines in domestic detective novels, which is how to account for such gaps and disparities between exteriors and interiors—and how to divine hidden depths.

Miss Saunders's further explorations, which take her into the cellar's depths, allow her to begin to map the boundaries of the space she has discovered and to understand how things are connected. Miss Saunders delves into the cellar at the behest of a former maid who has asked her to retrieve a small box she had hidden there. Miss Saunders recovers the box, which contains the maid's marriage certificate. This document proves critical to solving the mystery that is troubling Mrs. Packard. While probing for the box behind a loose brick in what appears to be a solid wall, she encounters a cavity "of very sizable dimensions" into which she not only can reach her arm but also can extend a stick three feet. When she returns upstairs, she makes "a hurried calculation" and concludes that the hole in the cellar wall is directly in line with the vestibule's floor. Convinced now that the vestibule hides the entrance to a secret passageway, Miss Saunders searches the room again until she finds a knob in the molding that opens a trap door in the floor and reveals the passageway. Like the heroine of other domestic detective novels, Miss Saunders begins to master the Packard home through a process of mapping. Correlating the anomalies she discovers in the floor plan, Miss Saunders constantly reorients herself. This process of probing

the interior not only allows Miss Saunders to discover the home's hidden spaces or deep interior, but brings her closer to understanding Mrs. Packard and penetrating her secret. Just as Miss Saunders sounds the building, exploring behind its walls, so too does she sound Mrs. Packard, an "enigma" into whose mind and soul she claims to have gained a glimpse (25, 100).

In Green's *Lost Man's Lane*, Miss Butterworth engages in similar acts of mapping and correlating interior and exterior. Upon arriving at the Knollys's house, Miss Butterworth takes her first opportunity to orient herself after emerging from her second floor guest room: "...I stood still and looked up and down the halls, endeavoring to get some idea of their plan and the location of my own room in reference to the rest" (284). After finally being allowed to tour the first floor of the Knollys's house, a sector of the home the family had kept locked up and off limits to their guest, Miss Butterworth does some prowling. She discovers an asymmetry in the floor plan: the lower hall, which is at the rear of the house and is connected to the upper hall by a passage that forms a "T" with the front door, seems larger than upper hall—that is, to the "casual observer." Miss Butterworth notes two imposing doors at either end of the upper hall. The door at the left end of the hall remains open during mealtimes, allowing Miss Butterworth a chance to catch a glimpse of a long dismal corridor similar to the lower hall. Miss Butterworth deduces that the door at the right end of the upper hall leads to another extended corridor. The house's layout is at last clear to her when she peers out a window, which gives her a full view of the other wing. The house's two parallel wings are indeed symmetrical, and separated by a long, narrow court that gives the house a "U" shape.

Miss Butterworth continues to correlate interior and exterior in an attempt to master the layout of the Knollys's house and orient herself inside it. While exploring the first floor apartments, she discovers in a closet a circular staircase. This staircase leads to a trap door in the

ceiling, providing access to the floor above. Miss Butterworth suspects that a prisoner is being held in the room above, but in order to find this prisoner, she must first be able to pinpoint the location of the room she occupies within the house's layout. Devising a strategy to confirm the room's location, Miss Butterworth chips a piece from a wooden shutter covering the window, an alteration that she will be able to see from outside the house. Having formed a theory about which room holds the "prisoner," Miss Butterworth takes a tour of the shrubbery outside the Knollys's house. After locating the window with the chipped shutter, she is able to confirm that it is directly below the room where she believes the prisoner is held, which she has established is the third window from the corner of the house.

The detective's skill in mastering layouts and correlating discrepancies between interiors and exteriors ultimately leads to the discovery of secret spaces. Plots turn on the detective's penetration of these spaces, which harbor destructive secrets that the detective must expose to restore order. Secret spaces are the key to resolution in all the domestic detective novels in this chapter. In Green's *The Mayor's Wife* the contents of a secret hiding place reveal a concealed marriage, allowing Mrs. Parker finally to come to terms with her past. That same hiding place leads to the discovery of a secret passageway that provides a logical explanation for the ghostly apparitions that have been unsettling the household. The revelation of the secret passage also solves an enduring mystery for the home's previous tenants by providing the clue to the location of a missing family fortune. In *Lost Man's Lane*, Miss Butterworth's diligent mapping of the Knollys's house reveals a secret passage that leads to the discovery of concealed burial and the source of a family's shame. In Green's *Dark Hollow*, Mrs. Scoville's discovery of Judge Ostrander's secret chamber is the key to understanding the source of his guilt and solving a decade-old murder.

In Rinehart's *The Circular Staircase*, Miss Innes, another spinster sleuth, learns a disturbing lesson about the permeability of domestic architecture but is later able to exploit this permeability by walking through a wall and into a secret chamber, where she uncovers a family secret. As the occupant of a rented summer house, ironically called "Sunnyside," Miss Innes and her family, a niece and nephew who are under her care, are plagued by strange noises in the night and unwelcome home intrusions of a mysterious nature. After a man is murdered in the house (the son of the owner who snuck into the house one night for reasons that remain inexplicable), detectives are assigned to keep watch over the house. When the disturbances don't stop, Miss Innes has an insight about domestic architecture's permeable and transparent nature: "Here we were, guarded day and night by private detectives, with an extra man to watch the grounds, and yet we might as well have lived in a Japanese paper house, for all the protection we had" (119).

In further evidence of the permeability of domestic architecture, Miss Innes discovers that the nightly intruder is drilling holes into the interior walls of the house. A clue provided by the detective working on the murder leads Miss Innes to believe the intruder is searching for a secret room somewhere in the house. She begins to measure the house, looking between the inner and outer walls for any discrepancy that could conceal a hidden room. As Nickerson observes, when Miss Innes "physically sounds the walls and puzzles out the architecture to locate the secret room," she "is learning to look behind the conventional, ideal appearance of the bourgeois home" (137). She discovers an anomaly around a chimney and a pair of fireplaces in adjacent rooms that leaves eight feet of space unaccounted for.

Miss Innes concludes that the chimney conceals the hidden room, but is unable to find the entrance. Miss Innes ultimately beats Detective Jamison to the discovery of the hidden room, proving she is the one with the more penetrating vision; fittingly, she makes the discovery after

perusing a book titled *Unseen Worlds*. While “unseen hands” continue to dig holes in the plaster walls and the detective focuses his energies in all the wrong places, it is Miss Innes who locates in the elaborate carved wood fireplace mantel a lever that unlocks the entrance to the secret room. Inside she finds a safe that contains a million dollars in embezzled funds hidden there by the house’s owner, Mr. Armstrong, and which various parties had been attempting to recover. The discovery leads to the dispersal of numerous family secrets: embezzlement, a faked death, concealed paternity, and blackmail. Light and transparency are restored to Sunnyside, allowing for removal of suspicion from the wrongly accused, the clarification of a mistaken identity, the restoration of paternity, and two marriages. Miss Innes, and the domestic sleuths discussed in this chapter, seek to locate the secret interior spaces where family secrets are ferreted away. It is only when interior and exterior are mapped and correlated that the depth of the interior is defined and order is restored.

Correlating interiors and exteriors is a recurring theme in the domestic detective novels, as are mapping and orientation. The domestic sleuth must master architecture; she must be able to peel away a structure’s external layers in order to reveal its bones and discover its deep internal logic. Likewise, the act of reading the architecture of a house is inextricably linked with reading people and their hidden interior lives and secrets. In these novels, architectural incongruities always reveal similar incongruities between the lives people lead publicly and those that they lead privately. The remainder of this chapter will focus on architectural details in several domestic detective novels—windows, facades, and cellars—that reveal a complex entanglement between “interior” and “interiority” and disrupt the dialectic between “interior” and “exterior.” Reading the novels through these elements also reveals how architecture both facilitates and frustrates surveillance strategies.



## **The Woman at the Window: The Rise of the Female Spectator-Observer**

Looking through an open window from outside, we never see as much as when we look at a window that is closed. There is nothing more profound, more mysterious, more fecund, more shadowy, more dazzling than a window lighted by a single candle. What we can see in sunlight is always less interesting than what happens behind glass. In that dark or lighted opening, life lives, life dreams, life suffers. (Charles Baudelaire, from “Windows,” *Paris Spleen*)

In the prose poem “Windows,” Charles Baudelaire observes that we can always see more through a closed window than in the bright sunlight of the outdoors, because the window gives us a vantage onto shadowy interiors—the lives, dreams and sufferings of others. Windows are important conceptual focal points in domestic detective novels. Frequently, they are tightly shuttered or heavily curtained in order to block out the light and shield the interior from visual interlopers. They are the most vulnerable and transparent membranes of domestic architecture. These apertures bring light and transparency to domestic life, exposing it to the scrutiny of the outside world. Windows, like cameras, are surveillance technologies. In these novels, they function as two-way lenses, not only providing prying eyes a view into the domestic interior but also providing a strategic vantage from which to look out. Women frequently look out windows in domestic detective novels, and Nickerson notes that the “the strange, unblinking figure of the women in the window” is a “definitive trope” of the genre (xi). Importantly, in the domestic detective novel, windows function to reverse gendered viewing positions predicated on the notion of a male voyeur and a female object. In these novels, women do most of the looking—or the peeping. The transparent nature of windows presents both a risk of exposure as well as an opportunity to exercise the pleasure of looking.

Windows often frame the novels themselves, acting as portals that allow the readers a vantage onto domestic space and the lives of others. For example, the first “book” (comprising the first 15 chapters of the novel) of Green’s *That Affair Next Door* is called “Miss Butterworth’s Window,” a title that emphasizes Miss Butterworth’s viewing position and hints at her voyeuristic tendencies. The novel’s title reinforces the implicit assumption that our neighbors’ lives are a legitimate subject of neighborly surveillance and of the reader’s voyeuristic curiosity. From the very first page of the novel, the reader shares Miss Butterworth’s viewing position at the window. This window operates as the frame or lens through which we observe the curious goings-on at her neighbors’ home. The novel begins with the spinster sleuth Miss Amelia Butterworth rising to peer out her window after being woken by a carriage stopping outside her neighbor’s home. What she sees from her window is the impetus for an investigation that drives the plot of the novel. Miss Butterworth sees “a shadowy glimpse of a young man and woman” entering her neighbor’s house, followed by the man leaving alone ten minutes later. At her window again the following morning, Miss Butterworth “surveyed the neighboring house minutely,” but its closed blinds and shuttered windows deny her visual access to its interior (16). After asking a policeman to investigate the presence of the woman in the vacant house, Miss Butterworth tries to gain entry to the house but is rebuffed: “I don’t see what business it is of the neighbors...” (17). Disregarding this invocation of privacy, Miss Butterworth waits outside for her opportunity and slips in “quicker than lightening” through the crack of an open door when she hears the cry “Murder!” from within (18). Miss Butterworth justifies her presence in the house by insisting on her neighborly interest as a prerogative: “I live next door and my presence here is due to the anxious interest I always take in my neighbors. I had reason to think that all

was not as it should be in the house, and I was right” (23). Miss Butterworth then relates to the police officers at the scene the details of what she had seen out her window.

Green’s *Dark Hollow*, too, begins with a nosy neighbor looking out her window. When a mysterious woman arrives in town and enters Judge Ostrander’s house, who has lived as a recluse and allowed no one except his servant into his home in over a dozen years, curious neighbors appeal to Miss Weeks. They turn to her for the details because, as usual, she had been sitting at her front window sewing, and “Everybody knew that this window faced the end of the lane,” where Judge Ostrander’s house stood (5). For years Miss Weeks had watched Judge Ostrander’s house from the privileged vantage of this window, which allowed her to look without being seen: “The blinds were drawn but not quite, being held in just the desired position by a string. Naturally, she could see out without being very plainly seen herself” (5). Miss Weeks’ viewing position, which has given her access to potential clues, makes her a powerful person in the community.

Through her retelling of what she witnessed, Miss Weeks shares her vantage from her window with the crowd that had gathered—and with the reader. It is Miss Weeks’ view through her window that frames the novel and establishes its subject— Judge Ostrander’s secret interior. For eight years, Miss Weeks “had been sitting in the window making button-holes,” where she had observed Mr. Ostrander’s servant leave the house each morning at the exact same time to go to town and methodically lock the gate behind him. Only this morning, Miss Weeks had observed that the servant had purposely left the gate unlocked. Motivated by what she calls a sense of “neighborly duty,” Miss Weeks abandons her post at the window to investigate. But before Miss Weeks could enter the Judge’s house, she relates that she witnessed a veiled woman slip into the open gate and disappear. Miss Weeks’ tale incited the “demon curiosity” in the

crowd that had gathered outside, and collectively, along with Miss Weeks, the group burst into the Judge's house.

Windows in these novels also serve to bring light into interiors whose darkness shrouds family secrets. In *Dark Hollow*, after the crowd forces its way into Judge Ostrander's darkened house, a woman draws a curtain and lets in "Sunshine! A stream of it, dazzling them almost to blindness and sending them, one and all, pell-mell back upon each other!" (8). The light revealed Judge Ostrander prostrate on the floor, alive but stricken. His years of self-enforced seclusion are brought to an end by his trespassing neighbors, and the bright light now streaming in through the window begins to illuminate his interior life and threaten his long-harbored secret. Similarly, in Green's *Lost Man's Lane*, Miss Butterworth opens long shuttered windows in the Knollys's house: "Tis done, I was able to lift the window, and for the first time in years, perhaps, let a ray of light into this desolated apartment" (326). In both cases, the action of opening windows and bringing in light is described not as an invasion of privacy, but as a necessary step toward transparency—and ultimately, toward the liberation and rehabilitation of people whose happiness is compromised by the darkness of their secrets.

In both the novels cited above—*Dark Hollow* and *That Affair Next Door*—a female observer initially occupies a viewing position at a window and inside her own home: she is inside looking out, a concealed, anonymous voyeur. She relinquishes this position of discreet surveillance when she crosses the threshold in order to get a closer view of her subject. In this respect, the window serves as a threshold or portal that connects her to the world outside and to others' lives. Windows provide her an impetus to leave the secure boundaries of her own domestic space as well as the potential to navigate between public and private spaces. Significantly, when Miss Butterworth and Miss Weeks, in the examples above from *That Affair*

*Next Door* and *Dark Hollow*, enter their neighbors' homes, it is as part of a group or community that seeks to investigate seeming anomalies in domestic interiors and private lives—a kind of neighborhood watch. Through this mutual surveillance, in which the window plays a central role, private spaces, otherwise isolated, are connected and exposed.

For middle-class women like Miss Butterworth and Miss Weeks, who in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were increasingly isolated within the confines of the domestic sphere, the window brings permeability to private life. For many bourgeois women living at the turn of the twentieth century, the window may have offered an escape from isolation within their own homes. However, perhaps because of this isolation, the women in domestic detective novels make strategic use of windows. These heroines reject confinement within their homes by exploiting the window's inherent permeability and expanding the domestic sphere's boundaries into the world outside the window. Miss Butterworth and Miss Weeks, both spinsters, are able to navigate more freely between public and private space. As Nickerson observes in her introduction to *That Affair Next Door*, spinsters make good sleuths, as opposed to wives and mothers, because they have more time "to devote to detective work," and because they can move freely in public without male escorts (3).<sup>22</sup> Green's spinster sleuths are not prisoners of the domestic interior—they are masters of it, as they are masters of negotiating between public and private space.

The window also represents a challenge to the notion that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries women were subjugated within a feminine-coded private sphere (associated

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<sup>22</sup> In 1856, Alan Pinkerton employed the first female detective—Mrs. Kate Warne, a widow. Convinced they could be good detectives, Pinkerton intended to hire women and proposed the creation of an all-female department in Philadelphia in 1876; however, female detectives remained rare because of opposition within the agency. Much like the female sleuths of domestic detective novels whose status as single women or spinsters afforded them greater freedom of mobility, an 1881 directive from Pinkerton stipulated that the ideal female detective would be both older—about 35 years old—and single or widowed. See Frisby, "The City Detected" (70).

with womanhood, privacy and domesticity) while men dominated the masculine-coded public sphere (associated with economic and political life). Finding overlaps, continuities and service toward common ideological goals rather than rigid boundaries between them, recent feminist revisions of separate-spheres ideology<sup>23</sup> “collapse” the private and public spheres (Shamir, *Inexpressible* 25). Offering further revision to the understanding of how space is gendered, Shamir maintains a “separate-spheres focus on difference” but traces the fault lines between a “masculine public and a feminine private to the gendered divisions *within* the home” (Shamir, *Inexpressible* 25).<sup>24</sup>

Shamir’s conception of the gendered zones within domestic space helps us to understand the fluidity of boundaries between public and private, as well as the often contradictory definitions of private and competing impulses toward interiority or sociability that charge the middle-class home in this period:

I intend to show how the middle-class private sphere, far from the fixed, stable space that nineteenth-century architects of domesticity often described it to be, was in fact an overflowing conceptual space, burdened with conflicting and even paradoxical definitions of private, with visions of liberal and domestic interiority, with ideals of solitariness and social and familiar intimacy (*Inexpressible* 25).

I read windows in domestic detective novels, which function as transparent walls that both separate the household from and connect it to the world outside, as manifestations of these “paradoxical definitions of private.” Glass, after all, is paradoxical even in its structure, being an

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<sup>23</sup> Shamir draws on these critiques made in the 1990s by Gillian Brown (*Domestic Individualism*), Amy Kaplan (*Manifest Domesticity*), and Lori Merish (*Sentimental Materialism*).

<sup>24</sup> Shamir rejects the automatic link between the private sphere and femininity; she points out that this sphere belongs to both women and men (14). Instead of a female-coded private sphere, Shamir argues for a more complex model that recognizes gendered zones within the home, such as the parlor as a female space and locus for female power and the study as a male domain (25, 40-47).

“amorphous solid” with a molecular structure that is indistinguishable from liquid. Physicists studying the structure of glass have been unable to agree on whether it is a solid or a very slow-moving liquid.<sup>25</sup> Windows function as transparent, fluid points within a domestic architecture in which fixed elements such as fences, gates, shutters and walls enforce privacy; thus, windows complicate our understanding of the boundaries between public and private.

Women in domestic detective novels exploit the windows’ fluid potential. They go further than simply looking out their windows: they leave the parlor and enter public space as lookers and witnesses, they investigate, and they open up private space to public scrutiny. Shamir points out the irony that “bourgeois women are associated at once with privacy *and* with the threat to privacy” (14). This irony is exploited in domestic detective novels, whose female domestic sleuths use their status as masters of the domestic sphere to transgress private domestic space. Their encroachments ultimately demonstrate the interior’s permeability and contribute to the erosion of the boundaries between public and private. This transgression often begins with a look—the voyeur’s gaze out the window.

The women at the windows in domestic detective novels occupy the positions of active surveyors rather than solely as objects of the male gaze. The legend of “Peeping Tom,” in which a male observer peeks out his window as Lady Godiva takes her infamous naked horseback ride through empty streets, models a gendered dynamic of heterosexual gazing in which the voyeur is male and his object female. The gendered term “Peeping Tom” as it is applied to voyeurism presupposes a male gazer. The idea that looking is a male activity while women are the passive objects of the male gaze is theorized by Laura Mulvey in her influential essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975), in which she uses the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan

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<sup>25</sup> See *Change* and the unsigned article “Is Glass A Solid or An Extremely Slow Moving Liquid.”

to argue that the visual pleasure of classic Hollywood cinema functions by encouraging the viewer to identify with a male spectator.<sup>26</sup> One of the essay's central insights is that "[i]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (750).

However, in domestic detective novels, expected gender roles are also reversed and women are the lookers. While women in domestic detective novels often express an anxiety about being watched, as Miss Butterworth expresses in *Lost Man's Lane* ("Am I watched or am I not watched?")—they are also active watchers (349). This reversal is evident in Rinehart's *The Circular Staircase*. Having seen a figure in the window "peering in," Miss Innes has the uncomfortable realization that she and her niece and nephew are "under surveillance." The experience leaves her somewhat paranoid and with a "creepy feeling" that each of the unshuttered French windows "sheltered a peering face" (9). A few pages later Miss Innes can be found surveying the landscape from a lookout position at an upstairs window; for the rest of the novel Miss Innes holds the high ground as the observer rather than the observed. When a detective arrives to investigate the murder at her rented country house, it is she who surveils, keeping a watchful eye on him: "To me Mr. Jamieson was far less formidable under my eyes where I knew what he was doing..." (75). The novel does not presume a male voyeur and female object, but rather challenges this model through this reversal of viewing positions as well as the

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<sup>26</sup> While Mulvey's argument is about film, and specifically classic Hollywood narrative cinema, her argument does have broader implications beyond cinema. Her argument's "starting point" is "the way that film reflects, even reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle" (746). That is, though the dynamics of the heterosexual gaze are not specific to film, she argues that "it is only in the film form that they can reach a perfect and beautiful contradiction" (756). In her 1981 revision of this essay, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*," Mulvey further argues that "The 'convention' cited by Freud (active/masculine) structures most popular narrative whether film, folk-tale, or myth..." and that "popular cinema inherited traditions of story telling that are common to other forms of folk and mass culture..." (182).



ambiguity of who is watching whom. Likewise, Miss Butterworth has a similar relationship with her ally/rival Detective Gryce (*Lost Man's Lane*, *That Affair Next Door*): each keeps the other under surveillance. Gryce and his staff watch over Miss Butterworth from a concealed location to ensure her safety during the investigation—though Miss Butterworth is often successful at eluding his observation. Trying to stay one step ahead of Detective Gryce, Miss Butterworth tracks his movements. In domestic detective novels the women are always *watching* the detectives.

The model of male observer/female object is further complicated by what Nickerson describes as “a kind of layering of surveillance” (x). In Green’s *The Mayor’s Wife*, the sleuth Miss Saunders, who has been hired to watch Mrs. Packard, not only discovers that the servants are also watching their employer and that the butler is keeping Saunders herself under surveillance, but also that the two old women next door are spying on Saunders through the windows. This complex layering of looking—which often results in chains of lookers of both genders watching each other—disrupts this one-way looking.

A similar disruption of the power dynamic implicit in the model of active male observer and passive female object takes place in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Unpunished*, in which Jacqueline Warner exposes a blackmailer by operating outside this scopic regime. Jacqueline is an invalid, who—along with her son, her niece, and her sister—is virtually the prisoner of her blackmailing brother-in-law, lawyer Wade Vaughn. Vaughn, a man with eyes everywhere, employs a private detective to gather damaging information about people. Jacqueline and her family, too, are constantly subjected to Vaughn’s controlling gaze. But Jacqueline reverses this dynamic—not by *watching* Vaughn but by *listening* to him. She discovers that the telephone has a listening line—once installed by her father—that allows her to eavesdrop on meetings that

Vaughn, ostensibly a lawyer, conducted in his study with “clients.” Jacqueline listens in and takes notes detailing Vaughn’s blackmailing business with the hope that she will uncover enough about his criminal activities to have him brought to justice—and to free herself and her family from his tyranny. While Vaughn is murdered before Jacqueline is able to carry out her plan, the knowledge she gains through eavesdropping proves critical in establishing multiple motives for Vaughn’s murder and exonerating herself and her family from suspicion. Jacqueline may be physically disabled, but she refuses to submit passively to Vaughn’s controlling vision. She rejects the gendered dynamics of the gaze and that of the scopic regime through which Vaughn exerts his power.

Women in domestic detective novels not only look out windows at both male and female subjects, but the activity is also identified as one that provides voyeuristic pleasure. While voyeurism implies that the observer derives sexual gratification from looking, I am emphasizing a secondary meaning of the word “voyeur”—a prying observer of the sordid or scandalous.<sup>27</sup> Voyeurism is closely related to scopophilia (love of looking), which is a translation of Freud’s term “*Schaulust*.”<sup>28</sup> In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” Mulvey defines scopophilia as derived from “circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure.” She relates that in

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<sup>27</sup> *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1987.

<sup>28</sup> In Anglophone literature “scopophilia” is the common translation of Freud’s term “*Schaulust*.” As James Strachey, editor of the *Standard Edition* of Freud’s works, recalled in 1963, “*Schaulust*” was originally translated in the *Collected Papers* as “scoptophilia,” reflecting the Greek terminology popular at the time; but this translation was rejected as derived from the wrong Greek root and changed to scopophilia in the *Standard Edition*. While Strachey translated *Schaulust* as “pleasure in looking”—many contemporary critics translate it as “sexual pleasure in looking.” Though the term scopophilia persists, Bruno Bettelheim (*Freud and Man’s Soul*, 1983) and other scholars have argued that Strachey’s choice of scopophilia is a mistranslation of Freud’s *Schaulust*, which in German has connotations of sexual pleasure not conveyed in the word “scopophilia.” See editor’s note on *Schaulust* in R.A. Paskauskas (ed.), “Letter from Sigmund Freud to Ernest Jones, November 20, 1910” in *The Complete Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones, 1908-1939* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993): 77-88 and Alain de Mijolla, “Scopophilia” in *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis 3 Ps – Z* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson Gale, 2005): 1533.

*Three Essay on Sexuality* Freud first identifies scopophilia as a “component instinct of sexuality” though it exists “independently of the erotogenic zones” (748). At this point, says Mulvey, Freud associated scopophilia with an objectifying, controlling gaze and with the children’s interest in the “private and the forbidden” (748).

The women at the windows in domestic detective novels take pleasure in breaching their subjects’ “private and forbidden” interior lives. In the first line of Green’s *That Affair Next Door*, Miss Butterworth denies that she is an “inquisitive woman,” but nonetheless admits that she “could not resist the temptation of leaving my bed and taking a peep through the curtains of my window” (16). The desire to look is so powerful that it overcomes Miss Butterworth’s respect for privacy and decorum; she is unable to deny herself the pleasure of taking a peep. In Gilman’s *Unpunished*, the elderly Mrs. Todd sits in a bay window of her house with an opera glass “enjoying herself” (33). Her ten years of surveilling the Smith house—the scene of a recent murder—gives the detectives investigating the case an important lead. Mrs. Todd shows one of the detectives that with her opera glass she was able to see into the murder victim’s room; Wade Vaughn, she explains, sometimes forgot to pull down his window blinds. She is also able to give a detailed description of a man who had his own key to the house’s side door and frequently came to see Vaughn. When the detective praises Miss Todd as a “good observer,” her reply reveals that her motive for watching is the pleasure it brings: “I have nothing else to do. I’ve sat here by the hour, day-time or night-time. I’ve had lots of fun watching that house... I love to keep tabs on people” (36). Likewise, Miss Weeks (Gilman’s *Dark Hollow*) ostensibly leaves her post at the window to investigate Judge Ostrander’s house out of her sense of “neighborly duty” to the judge, but she is unable to conceal her desire “the little peep she has promised herself” (5). The language of duty and desire are inextricably entangled in Miss Weeks’ motivations for

looking. Counter to the passive female observers theorized in Mulvey's essay, the women of domestic detective novels do take visual pleasure in the act of peeping. The window functions as the lens through which their pleasure is realized.

In her essay "Corporealized Observers: Visual Pornographies and the 'Carnal Density of Vision,'" Linda Williams challenges the Mulveyan tradition of "the male gaze" that assumes that visual pleasures are only available to an active male observer looking at a female object. She rejects the over-identification with a masculine observer, recognizing women as spectator-observers and asserting that they are not excluded from the diverse realm of visual pleasure. While Williams's argument is focused on erotic and pornographic photography, I take her central insight as a way to think about the female observers in domestic detective novels. Williams argues that the Mulveyan gaze is ahistorical in its over-identification with the male observer. While she agrees that "male viewers as a group historically enjoyed the pleasures of erotic gazing more than women," she is wary of arguments that assume that "all women of all classes have always been excluded as spectator-observers" (5, 25).

Williams recognizes "a wide variety of viewers belonging to different classes, genders, and sexual orientations" who responded to diverse images in "multiple, and sensory ways" (12). Building on Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer*, which argues that a new model of vision emerged in the nineteenth century, Williams mines his central insights and opens up his argument through considering the gender of the observer.<sup>29</sup> For example, Williams finds that

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<sup>29</sup>Crary documents the way that vision in the early nineteenth century is conditioned in particular ways by emerging visual technologies that derived from the new physiological status of the observer. Crary argues that these technologies—such as the phenakistiscope, panorama, diorama, and stereoscope—constituted a reorganization of vision and redefinition of the observer that overthrew the camera obscura model of perception, dominant from the Renaissance until the end of the eighteenth century. The camera obscura reflected a system of knowledge that conceived of vision as monocular, unified, and focused on a fixed point outside the body. The new technologies of the early nineteenth century challenged the fixed relations of the camera obscura,

even a cursory examination of the range of the erotic and pornographic images produced in the nineteenth and into the twentieth century “suggests the existence of a greater variety of spectator-observers than usually assumed” (22). Citing Baudelaire, who describes “thousands of greedy eyes...glued to the peephole of the stereoscope,” she also notes that in the mid-nineteenth century “a certain type of upper-class woman may very well have been in a position to observe erotic and pornographic images,” because new technologies made it possible for these images to be produced more cheaply and therefore they circulated more widely (25). Williams proposes that these new photographic technologies—such as the stereoscopes and magic lanterns so popular in Victorian parlors—created new viewing opportunities and expanded the range of viewers of erotic and pornographic images: “...it seems quite likely that a wider range of classes of both sexes had an opportunity to observe such images” (25).

Before I expand on the new viewing opportunities for women created by photography, I want to revisit the male gaze and the character of the Peeping Tom. Much period discourse around photography over-identifies with the male voyeur and posits a passive, helpless female victim. “The Camera Fiends” (1889) an article published in a period magazine, cites with outrage the existence of a “brotherhood of Peeping Toms” whose prurient objective is to lie in wait for women to dismount from automobiles in order “to catch a glimpse of feminine draperies and hose and record it for future use.” There are many outraged reports of amateur photographers menacing bathers at the seaside, where they were frequently reported to photograph “half-nude and innocent bathers,” particularly young ladies (qtd. in Mensel 33). A letter to the editor published in *The Nation* in 1902, titled “The Photographic Nuisance,” condemns photographers

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representing vision not as something detached from, but located in the “density and materiality” of the body. Williams notes that while Crary’s study provides a better understanding of “bodily sensations generated by images,” it is also “remarkably insensitive” to any notion of gender or sexuality of different observers” (7).

who, producing pictures for the advertising market, use the new detective camera (or hand-held camera) to photograph their oblivious subjects; these pictures are then sold and end up on placards or cigarette packages. Describing the practice as an “intolerable outrage” against the codes of chivalry, the author purports that “[t]hose who suffer directly are usually young and lovely women”—and “modest” and “unmarried” women at that. Likewise, press coverage around two of the most publicized court cases involving women—in which the plaintiffs claimed they suffered damages as a result of the actions of photographers who had taken surreptitious photographs of them that were then sold for commercial purposes—expresses outrage over the transgressions of photographers.<sup>30</sup>

The pattern that emerges in the complaints in the popular press demonstrates a particular sensitivity to the threat that the photographer-as-Peeping-Tom seemed to pose to Victorian ideals of modesty and discreet womanhood. A cursory reading of period discourse on handheld or snapshot photography gives the impression that unsavory photographers lurked behind every bush or lay in wait beneath every window for unsuspecting women. Such articles express concern—even paranoia—that women and girls are the primary victims of the camera craze. While the character of the Peeping Tom can be identified with the “Mulveyean gaze,” it is important to recognize that he represents one tradition of gazing. The mythos of the male gaze is so powerful that it obscures the diversity of gazers who embraced the new technology. Voyeurism and its visual pleasures were not the exclusive purview of men in an era in which photography was recognized as a popular hobby for a growing number of women.

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<sup>30</sup> See *Manola v. Myers* (not officially reported). See *Roberson v. Rochester Folding Box Co.* (1889), discussed in the Prologue of this dissertation. *Manola* lost (as did *Roberson*), but *Manola v. Myers* is cited by Warren and Brandeis in their paper “The Right to Privacy” as a “notorious case” (195). For more on the *Manola* and *Roberson* cases see Mensel 34-40.

I argue that the phenomenon of the female sleuth in domestic detective novels should be read in the context of new viewing opportunities for women created by the expansion of photography as a hobby in the snapshot era. She first appears in the 1890s<sup>31</sup> in the years just after the introduction of the first snapshot cameras. In *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*, Nancy West explains that before the Kodak camera, which was first marketed in 1888, amateur photography was practiced predominantly by wealthy, well-educated men (41). However, the Kodak made photography less technically challenging and more affordable<sup>32</sup>—and therefore a more accessible hobby with mass-market appeal. Kodak’s slogan, which first appeared in 1889, promised, “You press the button, we do the rest.” With no small degree of paternalism, this slogan implied that photography had been made so easy that anyone could do it—including the women and children Kodak ad campaigns targeted. When the Brownie camera, which sold for one dollar, was introduced in 1900, it was marketed as a harmless child’s toy, which, West argues, helped overcome adult fears about photography (90). Kodak ad campaigns shifted “the emphasis from knowledge to simplicity” and capitalized on “a persistent alliance between technological simplicity and femininity” (West 41). This alliance is epitomized in the marketing in the late

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<sup>31</sup> See Nickerson xiii.

<sup>32</sup> The Kodak #1, introduced in 1888, sold for \$25, which was still relatively expensive—as West reports, about \$400 in early twenty-first century terms and about the average yearly income for a farm laborer at the time. The Pocket Kodak, introduced in 1895, sold for \$5, making photography more affordable. It was not until the introduction of the Brownie camera in 1900, which sold for \$1, that photography truly reached a mass market. It is the inexpensive Brownie camera that initiates the mass proliferation of photography; West notes that Kodak, having sold 1.2 million cameras by the end of 1905, had expanded the hobby of amateur photography to include one third of the U.S. population (West 23-24, 40). In *Amateurs, Photography, and the Mid-Victorian Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) Grace Seiberling (with Carolyn Bloore) also credits the Brownie with “the democratization” of photography, observing, “Anyone with a relatively small amount of disposable income could become a photographer” (107). See also Brian Coe, *The Birth of Photography: The Story of the Formative Years 1800-1900* (New York: Toplinger, 1977) 63-65.

1920s of a camera called “Vanity Kodak,” a color-coordinated camera, lipstick case, compact, mirror and change purse (West 109).

In 1893 Kodak introduced ads featuring the Kodak Girl, a campaign designed “to reinvent amateur photography as a woman’s hobby” (West 53). The Kodak Girl, who was the center of Kodak’s ad campaigns through the early 1970s, was represented by a youthful looking women of “extraordinary vitality” depicted engaging in a gamut of outdoor activities, as West describes: “Sunburned, hair flying in the wind, she travels in a canoe, on a steamship, in a motorcar; she walks, rides a bicycle, plays tennis, journeys to Japan.” (West 54, 56). She was the embodiment of the 1890s “New Woman”—independent, athletic, adventurous, and unchaperoned. The first ad featuring the Kodak Girl was launched at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, where a large percentage of the amateur photographers who attended were women, a fact, argues West, that testifies to the success of the Kodak ad campaign in creating a female demographic for their product.<sup>33</sup>

In my own research in amateur photography journals and the *New York Times* archives, I found period citations that attest to the popularity of photography as a hobby for women in the period. For example, an article from the *New York Times*, dated 1890, comments on “The large number of girls who have caught the photographic craze... Girls leveling tripod cameras or pressing the button on detective and hand cameras are a frequent sight in the Park and out in the suburbs of the city”; the article also mentions that women are “welcome” members in many amateur photography societies (“Photographers at Work”). Another article, published in 1889, which reports on the meeting of the Society of Amateur photographers, notes the large number of members present “including several ladies, who are proving its most enthusiastic members”

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<sup>33</sup> See West 56; she cites the work of historian Julie K. Brown, *Contested Images: Photography and the World’s Columbian Exposition* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994).



("The Detective Camera"). While the Peeping Tom was portrayed as prurient and sinister, his counterpart, the Kodak Girl, is depicted as innocent and wholesome. Though West points out the paternalism in the depiction of the Kodak Girl as girlish and unsophisticated, she also stresses that her "apparent independence and sense of adventure cannot be ignored" (54). I would also argue that while Kodak used the young, athletic body of the Kodak Girl to sell cameras, it is important to recognize that she was not simply the passive object of the consumer or masculine gaze. Her camera identified her first and foremost as an active, adventurous observer. The camera provided women a license to look and an opportunity for visual pleasure that was outside the bounds of Victorian etiquette, giving rise to an era of female spectatorship that extends to the domestic detective novel's woman at the window. Like the Kodak Girl, the woman at the window transcends the confines of the domestic interior through exercising her freedom to look. Through the act of looking, the domestic detective novel's heroine not only transcends her own interior, she also opens up domestic space.

### **Facades: Reading Houses, Reading People**

In domestic detective novels, the act of reading architecture is inextricably linked with reading people. In Anna Katherine Green's *Lost Man's Lane*, Miss Butterworth is forced to correct assumptions she makes based on appearances and a presumed correspondence between exteriors and interiors. The novel raises nuanced questions about the value of surveillance as well as the fallibility of the detective's vision. In *Lost Man's Lane*, exteriors and interiors do not correspond, and the act of reading both houses and people is compromised by faulty assumptions and individual prejudices. The barriers that separate the detectives from the truth are not merely physical—as in facades or walls—but also originate within the detective's own perception.

Detective Gryce and Amelia Butterworth—who is recruited by Gryce as a civilian assistant—ultimately solve the mystery and determine the identity of the serial killer responsible for the murders of several individuals who disappeared while traversing Lost Man’s Lane, but to accomplish this they must learn to penetrate facades.

When Detective Gryce gives Miss Butterworth a briefing regarding the events on Lost Man’s Lane, including providing her a map of all the houses on the lane, Miss Butterworth asks him whether he has “come upon no suspicious-looking houses, no suspicious person?” (255). While Miss Butterworth equates a home’s appearance with the respectability of its occupants, Detective Gryce counters cautiously that “Every town has its suspicious-looking houses...and as for persons, the most honest often wear a lowering look in which an unbridled imagination can see guile. I never trust appearances” (255). However, despite Gryce’s advice about mistrusting appearances, Miss Butterworth continues to make judgments about people based on her impression of their home’s outward appearance. This is true of Miss Butterworth’s first impression of the Knollys’s mansion, a house belonging to the children of a deceased schoolmate of hers and which she hopes to make the command post for her investigation. She compares the house’s facade, thick with overgrowth, to a face, noting that the way that “vines”—like a shock of messy hair—“drooped in tangled masses over the face of the desolate porch” (266). The Knollys siblings suffered bad fortune after the their parents’ deaths, and their home is marked by decrepitude and neglect, such as rampant overgrowth and broken chimneys, pilasters and window frames.

Miss Butterworth equates William Knollys, her old friend’s eldest son, with his disheveled home. She notes derisively: “A gentleman usually takes pride in his place” (285). Immediately forming a negative opinion of William, Miss Butterworth cites his many character

flaws: stupidity, loutishness, sullenness, egoism, surliness, carelessness, laziness and all-around bad temper. Some of her observations reflect a subtle class bias. Though William is a landed gentleman, as Miss Butterworth reminds him, she describes his appearance and demeanor in terms that might be applied to a day laborer: his body is described as “stolid,” hulking” and “burly” with “heavy shoulders”; his gait is “lumbering”; his voice is “rough” and his manners are “boorish.” Confirming her worst suspicions about William’s character, Miss Butterworth discovers while snooping that he practices vivisection as a hobby. She concludes that William, whose morbid experiments on “weak and defenseless” animals make him capable of anything, suffers from a “deformity” of the soul. She suspects that he is responsible for the disappearances on the lane and that his sisters may be shielding him. Miss Butterworth believes that she sees through William’s facade to his interior; she reports to Detective Gryce that, “I have penetrated, I think, deeper than even yourself, into William's character” (366). These impressions lead Miss Butterworth down an ineffective line of inquiry, causing her to focus her investigation on William and the Knollys family and delaying her discovery of the culprit behind the disappearances.

In contrast to the Knollys’s neglected house, Mr. Trohm’s house earns Miss Butterworth’s admiration—as does its owner. The appearance of Mr. Trohm’s house provides a perfect counterpoint to that of the Knollys, as Miss Butterworth exclaims: “What a contrast to the dismal grounds at the other end of the lane!” (313). Trohm’s house is a paragon of middle class respectability—“exquisitely kept”—painted a sunny yellow, trimmed in neat white curtains, encircled by a white fence, and surrounded by rose bushes, flower beds, prize fruit trees and a sweep of velvet lawn. Admiring Mr. Trohm’s house and grounds endears Miss Butterworth to their owner, causing a twinning of house and owner that results in a blush of sexual attraction: “I

found my eyes roving over each detail with delight, and almost blushed, or rather, had I been twenty years younger might have been thought to blush, as I met his eyes and saw how much my pleasure gratified him” (312).

Just as Mr. Trohm’s house presents a diametrical opposition to the Knollys’s house, so too does Mr. Trohm’s person present a direct contrast to William Knollys. Remarking on the contrast between him and his neighbors—implying William Knollys—Miss Butterworth remarks to Mr. Trohm: “The contrast between your appearance and that of some other members of the lane is quite marked” (311). She notes Mr. Trohm’s many pleasing qualities: his “genial smile,” “hearty and pleasant voice,” his excellent manners (287, 310). Here too, there are class implications, as Mr. Trohm is identified approvingly as a “country gentleman” as well as a man of means—a man who upholds his class, unlike the downwardly mobile William (310). Miss Butterworth is most impressed by the “careful attention” that Mr. Trohm gives to his property and the pride he takes in it, which presents a contrast to William’s neglect of the Knollys’s estate. In each case, Miss Butterworth judges the man based on facades, that is, in relation to the house’s condition and his personal appearance, which she views as inextricably intertwined. She makes the assumption that there is a direct correspondence between interiors and exteriors.

As Miss Butterworth’s suspicions regarding William Knollys deepen, she is confronted with a dilemma regarding whether or not to summon the police—and betray the children of her old friend. Miss Butterworth decides to delay informing Detective Gryce of her suspicions, allowing for the possibility that “she had been deceived by appearances” (321). Exposing William’s gruesome hobby would be sure to bring scandal to the Knollys. Despite the efforts of the Knollys family to control Miss Butterworth’s movements in their house—which include attempting to lock her up in her room at night—Miss Butterworth keeps a steady surveillance on

the whole family. She keeps track of their movements by day and prowls the halls at night. Having discovered the trap door in the ceiling of William's private parlor, Miss Butterworth uses it to spy on his activities. From this vantage she witnesses William and his sisters lowering a coffin through a hole in the floor of William's room and down into the basement in what appeared to be the cover-up of a murder. Believing she has solved the mystery of Lost Man's Lane, Miss Butterworth reports what she saw to Detective Gryce. Though Gryce expresses some doubts regarding whether what she witnessed was a human burial or that of an animal sacrificed to William's vivisection experiments, Miss Butterworth is resolute in her conclusion. She insists that no animal would be buried with such great care. Furthermore, she discovered a small pair of red shoes too small to fit either Knollys sister. At Miss Butterworth's behest, Detective Gryce conducts a search of the Knollys's house.

While the search of the Knollys's house does not reveal the secret of Lost Man's Lane, it does uncover a family secret. Miss Butterworth did witness the Knollys burying a body—that of their own mother. Miss Butterworth and Detective Gryce learn that Althea Knollys, Miss Butterworth's family friend, who was thought to have been dead for years, had in fact been alive and living in Europe. Mrs. Knollys, a good but impulsive woman who bore poverty badly, had forged Mr. Trohm's name on a check and been forced to flee the U.S. when he threatened prosecution. Elderly and ill, Althea Knollys had returned from Europe to see her children and to die in her own home. To protect their mother from the litigious Mr. Trohm and avoid public shame, the Knollys children had entered into a conspiracy to conceal her. This fact accounts for their strange behavior, isolation, and vigilance in protecting their home from interlopers. When their mother died of natural causes, they concealed her burial. William Knollys fears that all the "digging and stirring up our cellar bottom" will expose his own secret to the "puritanical old

town,” which will likely persecute him “because a few bones have been found of animals which have died in the cause of science” (390). William’s fear of being misunderstood drives his desire to discover once and for all who is responsible for the disappearances on the lane, if only to deflect attention from his own private life.

With the help of Lucetta Knollys, Detective Gryce and Miss Butterworth expose Mr. Trohm as the murderer on the lane. Trohm reveals himself to be a sociopath who had lured weary travelers down the lane with the promise of a drink of fresh spring water. He sent his victims plummeting to their deaths through a trap door triggered by a spring mechanism built into the well-curb. While Lucetta’s instincts prove correct, Miss Butterworth is forced to examine her own faulty assumptions about the Knollys and Mr. Trohm, as well as her misreading of the cellar burial. At first, she finds it difficult to reconcile her own and Detective Gryce’s positive estimation of Mr. Trohm’s character with Lucetta’s insights. Miss Butterworth has trouble accepting that such horrific acts could happen within view of Mr. Trohm’s idyllic house and gardens. Admitting that she at last sees “Mr. Trohm’s true character exposed,” Miss Butterworth expresses regret over her “egotism and foolish prejudice” and her “blind partiality for a man of pleasing exterior...had prevented the cool play of my usual judgment” (432, 424, 418).

The revelations about Mr. Trohm also raise difficult questions about the accuracy of the detectives’ perceptions or the possibility of an objective vision—as well as the justifications for and value of surveillance. Speaking of the “unhappy chance” that has brought their secret to the attention of the police, Lucetta wonders aloud whether it was providence or “just the malice of man seeing to rob us of our one best treasure, a mother’s untarnished name!” (384). Lucetta’s words raise the question of whether any good has been served through exposing the Knollys’s

secret. While Miss Butterworth did uncover a secret in the Knollys's home, she is forced to question how relevant that discovery is: "When I understood to come to X., it was with the latent expectation of making myself useful in ferreting out this mystery. And how had I succeeded? I had been the means through which one of its secrets had been discovered, but not *the* secret..." (402). The exposure of the Knollys's secret does not make Lost Man's Lane a safer place. But it does unnecessarily intrude on one family's private sorrow and shame. The revelation also exposes William, already viewed as an eccentric outsider, to the further suspicion and mistrust of the community through the revelation of his vivisection experiments. However, while Miss Butterworth does privately own up to "shame and humiliation," it seems to stem more from her "egotism" and "foolish prejudice" in having been taken in by Mr. Trohm than from any guilt or regret of her transgression of the Knollys's privacy. Rather, the novel's resolution sees the rehabilitation of the Knollys family *through* the revelation of their secret.

Lucetta had been unable to marry her true love because of her need to shield the family secret. Thus, Miss Butterworth's forced revelation of the secret does initiate the family's rehabilitation, which culminates with the restoration of the Knollys's house in preparation for opening the home's doors once again for a public celebration of Lucetta's wedding. Though Miss Butterworth's and Detective Gryce's suspicions were proven wrong, the search of the Knollys's house and revelation of their secret ultimately restores transparency to their lives and allows for the family's rehabilitation. This outcome affirms Detective Gryce's post-facto justification for searching the Knollys's house. Even after the search yields no clues in the disappearances but rather produces Althea Knollys's body, Gryce insists, with feelings of "almost remorse," that sometimes "good people like yourself have to submit" to searches for the public good (387). The detectives digging in the cellar, like the analysts probing the dark

recesses of the mind, ultimately unearth a secret that when exposed to light brings peace to the unhappy Knollys family and restores the correspondence between interior and exterior. This resolution elevates the value of transparency above the principle “a man’s home is his castle” or the sanctity of privacy.

### **Cellars: Portals to the Unconscious**

If the psyche is imagined as a house, then the cellar is the unconscious. Bachelard’s phenomenological blueprint of the house treats the roof and the cellar as polarities—the “rationality of the roof” and the “irrationality of the cellar” (18). He identifies the cellar as “the *dark entity* of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces” (18). The cellar is associated with darkness and childhood fear—and with “criminal” stories, such as Poe’s “The Black Cat,” in which the cries of a cat walled up in the cellar echo “unredeemed guilt,” and “The Cask of Amontillado,” in which the narrator confesses having chained up a man alive and left him to die (Bachelard 20). The cellar, concludes Bachelard, “becomes buried madness, walled-in tragedy” (20). Likewise, Benjamin, in his essay “One-Way Street,” files his disturbing dream of a childhood friend under the tag “Cellar.” He takes this dream as a “warning,” an immured corpse that “brought to light like a detonation” a repressed longing for what can no longer be: “What things were interred and sacrificed amid magic incantations, what horrible cabinet of curiosities lies there below, where the deeper shafts are reserved for what is most commonplace” (47). Subterranean thoughts and dreams—death wishes, guilty consciences, repressed memories, unfulfilled desires, secrets—lie buried in the cellar, awaiting excavation by detectives and analysts.

Cellars inspire dread—even in detectives. In Anna Katherine Green’s *The Mayor’s Wife*, the sleuth Miss Saunders approaches the cellar with trepidation: “There is something about a



cellar door which is unmistakable, but it took me a minute to summon up courage to open it after I had laid my hand on its old-fashioned latch” (67). She wonders, rhetorically, why cellars evoke fear: “Why do we so hate darkness and the chill of unknown regions, even when we know they are empty of all that can hurt or really frighten us?” (67). Miss Saunders summons her courage to face these unknown regions and proceeds with her search of the cellar by candlelight, which casts “grotesque shadows” all around her (67).

The cellars of detective stories are unmapped, unknown regions of ominous import. In *Lost Man’s Lane*, Detective Gryce, contemplating the Knollys’s cellar, muses somewhat cryptically: “This cellar bottom offers a wide field for speculation. Too wide, perhaps...” (382). While, as Lisabeth During writes in “Clues and Intimations: Freud, Holmes, Foucault”: “The canny analyst knows where people keep their secrets because they tell him” (31)—the detective must dig. And so Detective Gryce commences with digging up the Knollys’s cellar. Slavoj Žižek notes in “Two Ways to Avoid the Real of Desire” that the analogy between analyst and detective has been made often, and that a number of studies have “set out to reveal the psychoanalytic undertones of the detective story: the primordial crime to be explained is a parricide” (433). And indeed, in *Lost Man’s Lane*, the mother’s corpse is unearthed in the cellar. And though not a parricide per se—but rather an attempt to cover up a death in order to bury the mother’s shame and shield the family honor—it has the appearances of one. But the mother’s body is not the only one recovered from the Knollys’s cellar; there are also the bones of animals sacrificed to William Knollys’s vivisection experiments. Though no crime has been committed, Detective Gryce views the cellar burials as evidence of devious minds at work: “Our work is not done yet. They who make graves so readily in cellars must have been more or less accustomed to the work. We have still some digging to do” (382).

However, having excavated the cellar, the results are unsatisfying; the detective has yet to penetrate thoroughly the dark recesses of the interior. Instead, the cellar yields a pile of bones that don't provide any answers to the mystery at hand—who is responsible for the disappearances on the lane and what happened to the bodies? Rather, the bones in the cellar function as ruins to be contemplated, abstract symbols that perhaps point elsewhere, to unconscious desires yet to be sounded. However, the essential elements necessary to decipher these symbols are missing—the key remains hidden somewhere in the interior, not of house, but in the Knollys themselves. Žižek points out that the analyst attempting to interpret a dream must always confront the “methodological a priori” of psychoanalytic interpretation: every dream “contains *at least one* ingredient that functions as a stopgap, as a filler holding the place of what is necessarily *lacking* in it”; that is, there is always an element that seems to fit “the organic whole of the manifest dream imagery” but that is merely holding the place of what is ultimately repressed (434). In comparing the formal strategies of the analyst and the detective, Žižek points out that the detective encounters a similar problem: “the scene of the crime with which the detective is confronted is also, as a rule, a false image put together by the murderer in order to efface the traces of his act” (435). The detective’s job, observes Žižek—like that of the analyst—is to find the detail that sticks out or breaks the continuity of the “surface image.” (435). Her challenge is not simply to “grasp the meaning of ‘insignificant details’” but to “apprehend absence itself” (Žižek 438). Žižek argues that the detective plays on the difference between “factual truth” and “inner’ truth,” but ultimately compromises “the ‘inner,’ libidinal truth” in order to “discharge us of all guilt for the realization of our desire” (439). Whereas psychoanalysis “confronts us precisely with the price we have to pay for the access of our desire,

with an irredeemable loss,” the detective’s solution, concludes Žižek, is “nothing but a kind of realized hallucination” (439).

In the conclusion of *Lost Man’s Lane*, the implications of the symbolic parricide are left unexplored, though Detective Gryce suspects that the depths of the Knollys’s cellar have yet to be fully plumbed. Instead, Detective Gryce pursues a quick return to lawful order and to a state of normality, which Žižek says the detective’s presence always guarantees in advance. The detective’s role, argues Žižek, is to “resymbolize the traumatic shock, to integrate it into symbolic reality” (439). The detective accomplishes this feat by providing a scapegoat: “The detective ‘proves by facts’ what would otherwise remain a hallucinatory projection of guilt onto a scapegoat, i.e., he proves that the scapegoat is effectively guilty” (439). In *Lost Man’s Lane*, the guilt associated with parricidal desires is displaced onto Mr. Trohm, a sociopath so extreme he becomes a ridiculous caricature who absorbs Knollys’s family guilt, and by extension, the reader’s guilt for any dark unnamed fantasies she may be harboring. What Detective Gryce and Miss Butterworth unearthed in the cellar is ultimately reburied there, deep in the interior.

## **Conclusion**

Domestic detective novels were enormously popular at the turn of the twentieth century and provide a valuable vantage on some of the big issues that shaped the period, especially greater transparency in public and private life and the value of surveillance.

The domestic detective genre—preoccupied with penetrating domestic space and imposing transparency on private life—should be read as part of a struggle to renegotiate the boundaries between public and private. Throughout this dissertation I argue that photography is part of a larger cultural reconsideration of the boundaries between public/private and interior/exterior in

the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In this chapter I have shown how the domestic detective novel erodes these same boundaries, undermining the assumption that home is a sacred or impenetrable space and elevating the value of transparency over privacy or interiority. In the domestic detective novel, architecture fails to perform its function as a protective barrier. Domestic detectives infiltrate the family home and undermine its status as an autonomous zone. With a penetrating gaze, domestic detectives see through facades, dissolve seemingly solid walls and expose private lives to light. The novels discussed in this chapter make no specific references to photography; however, they do share important conceptual links. While architecture presents a solid physical boundary between public and private that functions as a protective shell around interior life, these novels reveal it to be both vulnerable and permeable. Photographic technology threatens to penetrate facades and potentially expose interior thoughts and feelings or even the soul. Similarly, the domestic detective penetrates facades by exposing hidden interior lives beneath surfaces. The domestic detective novel and photography both complicate our understanding of interiority, eradicating or making ambiguous the boundaries between interior and exterior and public and private.

There is a palpable sense of vulnerability in these novels among the home dwellers, who discover that their walls do not protect them from exposure. While Warren and Brandeis argue in “The Right To Privacy” (1890) that the increasing intrusions into private life fostered by modernity require recognizing a new boundary between public and private, domestic detective novels, by contrast, celebrate the erosion of the boundary between public and private and elevate transparency’s value above privacy. Domestic detective novels are generally positive about surveillance’s value and its role in enforcing transparency. Likewise, these novels are optimistic about the detective’s ability to see through facades and penetrate the interior. While *Lost Man’s*

*Lane* casts some doubt on the detective's objectivity, these doubts are ultimately dispelled.

Focusing on the relationship between the detective genre and forensic photography, chapter two, "The Legibility of the Interior: Photographic Vision and The Conquest of Incognito in the Detective Stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle and Gertrude Stein," will explore the theme of legibility. In the detective stories discussed in chapter two, the body or identity replaces architecture as the site where privacy is negotiated.

## **Two—The Legibility of the Interior: Photographic Vision and The Conquest of Incognito in the Detective Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle and Gertrude Stein**

### **Introduction ~ Evidence: Photography and the Search for Identity**

Luc Sante's book *Evidence* presents a collection of crime scene photographs taken by New York City detectives in the early twentieth century. They are enigmatic documents. Who are these people? How did it come to this? The middle-aged man in the cheap three-piece suit—his body framed by tripod legs and the photographer's own feet—lies on a filthy sidewalk with a trickle of blood escaping one corner of his mouth. A weary looking woman with half-closed eyes is sprawled across the rumpled sheets that cover a striped mattress; her partially exposed bosom reveals a knife wound. The man behind the bar, his white shirt and apron saturated, lies in a pool of his own blood. The warm glow of sunlight from a bare window pours over the bodies of three children who lie together on a lumpy mattress as if soundly asleep. Head facedown on a bloody tablecloth, a woman is slumped over a kitchen table with her back to a cast-iron stove and her arms outstretched toward the day's *New York Times*, which bears headlines of The Great War and the Red Sox. A narrow hallway is smeared with a trail of blood that leads to no body. Certain details are repeated in the pictures: halos of magnesium flash outline the bodies of the victims, tripod legs awkwardly straddle bodies, and pairs of feet belonging to anonymous detectives appear at the edges of the frames.

These photographs, comprising 1,400 glass negatives, were salvaged from filing cabinets under a stairwell of an old police station in New York's Lower East Side just before it was demolished. All the other records—forensic photographs from earlier and later periods as well as documents—were dumped into the East River. Most of the glass plates had no captions, or

cryptic captions, such as “Homicide victim male interior.” Separated from the *archive*, from any related files or “facts” that give them meaning within a constellation of details, these photographs cease to function as evidence. The final violent moments of lives prematurely ended are preserved, but the identities of the victims, their stories, their killer’s motivations, and the plots—are all lost. What remains, says Sante, are “photographs of quotidian death” (60).

Haunted by these pictures, Sante takes on the role of a detective. His notes at the back of the book include reflections on his investigation—mostly speculations extrapolated from details provided by the pictures: a date on a calendar or newspaper, a visible street sign or building address, or a name scribbled on the back of a photograph. Occasionally these clues lead to a newspaper clipping or two which yield a few slender facts—just enough information to deepen the mystery by opening trap doors into the bleakness of ordinary lives. But mostly the clues are red herrings leaving Sante to spin out his own narratives around a missing murder weapon, a wall calendar open to June 1917, a pack of Mecca cigarettes, or the hem of a skirt. Sante’s project becomes a poignant if mostly doomed attempt to restore identities to these long-dead victims of terrible crimes. The pictures yield many leads but few satisfying answers, dissolving into mostly ordinary but also odd or intriguing historical and aesthetic details: radiators and old-fashioned shoes, dingy tenement interiors and bowler hats, Persian carpets and bric-a-brac, lace curtains and picture frames. What we most want to know the photographs can’t tell us. Each one represents an unsolved mystery for which answers, if any were ever found, are lost for us. The victims are anonymous and the identities of their killers will forever remain obscure—which makes for a very unsatisfying detective story.

There is some irony in the fact that the function of forensic photography, whether crime scene photography or mug shots, is to penetrate this problem of identity—to isolate, illuminate,

and preserve details that will reveal the identity of a victim or a criminal. These photographs have ceased to function as evidence in the forensic sense and have become something else—mute tombstones to anonymous lost souls. And yet, these pictures do have power as evidence—but a different kind of power, a different kind of evidence. Their power lies in their ontological truth rather than their evidentiary truth: they document the traces of people who passed through this world and are not forgotten if only because this photograph exists to bear witness. But the truth of identity, not only names, but stories, desires, memories—any real knowledge *about*—eludes us. The hazy light of the magnesium flash doesn't illuminate but rather gathers darkness, leaving us with questions about what photography can tell us about identity.

### **Whodunit: Photography, The Detective Story and The Conquest of Incognito**

Walter Benjamin links the emergence of the detective story with the beginnings of modern criminology and the invention of photography:

Technical measures had come to the aid of the administrative control process. In the early days of the process of identification, whose present standard derives from the Bertillon method,<sup>34</sup> the identity of a person was established through his signature. The invention of photography was a turning point in the history of this process. It is no less significant for criminology than the invention of the printing press is for literature. Photography made it possible for the first time to preserve permanent and unmistakable traces of a human being. The detective story came into being when this most decisive of all conquests of a person's incognito had

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<sup>34</sup> Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914), a French police officer who invented a system for identifying recidivist criminals using body measurements as well as the mug shot. Bertillon's method will be discussed in more detail in the following section of this chapter.



been accomplished. Since then the end of efforts to capture a man in his speech and actions has not been in sight. (“Paris” 48)

The conquest of incognito—the answer to the question “Whodunit?”—drives the plot of the detective story. In this respect, the subject of all detective stories is the same: identity. However, detective stories are less interested in the identity of the victim, which is generally known at the outset of the story, than in the revelation of the criminal. The logic of the detective story operates on the assumption that the criminal always leaves behind a trace; there is no perfect crime and it is only a matter of time before the canny detective, using modern methods of scientific detection, identifies the criminal.

While the above quote from Benjamin astutely links photography and detective fiction, Ronald R. Thomas, in his book *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science*, develops these converging histories with historical rigor. Thomas documents both the nearly simultaneous emergence of photography and detective fiction, as well as the correspondence between the camera and the camera-like vision exemplified in literary detectives such as Edgar Allan Poe’s C. Auguste Dupin and Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. He argues that the photograph—as it is employed by the fledgling science of criminology—and the literary detective “are allied forms of cultural defense in which the bodies of personas were systematically rendered into legible texts and then controlled by experts” (“Making” 156). In this respect, observes Thomas, the literary detective engages in “a new kind of reading” and represents a “new literacy” (3). Employing a kind of photographic vision, the literary detective is able to scan surfaces and see through exteriors—to penetrate a disguise or identify a mangled corpse. I take Benjamin and Thomas’s linking of photography and detective fiction as a starting point for my own

investigation of the legibility of identity through readings of the detective fiction of Poe, Conan Doyle and Gertrude Stein.

This chapter traces an arc that begins in the pre-history of detective fiction, moves through its “classical”<sup>35</sup> period and ends with a foray into the postmodern. This arc begins with Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd”—a story whose narrator can be claimed as a progenitor of the literary detective and which was published in 1840, one year before what is widely considered to be the founding text of the modern detective genre, Poe’s “The Murders at the Rue Morgue”<sup>36</sup>—follows with several “classical” texts by Poe and Conan Doyle, and ends with what is arguably the first postmodern or “metaphysical”<sup>37</sup> detective story, Stein’s *Blood on the Dining-Room*

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<sup>35</sup> The classical detective story originates with the publication of Poe’s “The Murder’s in the Rue Morgue” and culminates with Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories.

<sup>36</sup> Most literary critics name “The Murders at the Rue Morgue” as the first full-fledged detective story. Poe acknowledged William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* (1794) as an influence (Priestman, *Cambridge Companion* 2). While the “The Man of the Crowd” is not a classic detective tale in the “whodunit” mold—in which a brilliant, eccentric detective solves a crime using rational methods—it does have elements of the detective story. Thomas, for example, groups “The Man of the Crowd” among Poe’s detective stories, writing that between the years 1837-1844 Poe produced not only the Dupin trilogy but “other detective stories such as ‘The Tell-Tale Heart,’ ‘The Gold Bug,’ ‘The Man of the Crowd,’ and ‘Thou Art Man’” (*Detective* 43). However, Brand classifies “The Man of the Crowd” as an “embryo” or precursor to the detective story (7). Critics have also named and debated possible precedents for the detective fiction outside the English language tradition, such as the earliest precedent, the Arabic story “The Three Apples” (c. 8<sup>th</sup> century) one of the tales told by Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*. See David Pinault, who in his *Story-telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992: 91) cites Mia Gerhardt’s 1963 book *The Art of Story-Telling: A Literary Study of The Thousand and One Nights* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963: 169-170); and Ulrich Marzolph, who calls the story a “whodunit” and a “murder mystery” in his *The Arabian Nights Reader* (Wayne State University Press, 2006: 242). Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963: 169-170. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992: 91). Mia Gerhardt, *The Art of Story-Telling: A Literary Study of The Thousand and One Nights*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963: 169-170). Other possible precedents include the Chinese *Bao Gong An* (Ming Dynasty 1368-1644) and *Di Gong An* (18<sup>th</sup> Century), stories based on the case studies of real-life historical judges; as well as Voltaire’s *Zadig* (1748).

<sup>37</sup> According to Howard Haycraft, the term “metaphysical” detective story was coined by G.K. Chesterton and has been applied to postmodernist reformulations of the detective genre. See Marcus (253-254), who cites Haycraft’s *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story* (New York: 1942; Biblio and Tannen: 1974): 76.

*Floor* (1948).<sup>38</sup> The narrator of Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd,” who applies physiognomic analysis to decode identities, as well as the photographic vision of Poe’s Dupin and Conan Doyle’s Holmes, personify a scientific or positivist approach to identifying criminals. While the classic detective story—exemplified here by Poe’s Dupin trilogy<sup>39</sup> and Conan Doyle’s Holmes stories—mythologizes the detective as a figure whose camera-like vision thoroughly penetrates identities, Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” and Stein’s *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*—two texts at the fringes of the genre both chronologically and formally—provide counter-narratives that cast doubt on the notion that the detective’s vision is all-penetrating or infallible, and, more profoundly, on the legibility of the interior. Identity ultimately remains opaque in both “The Man of the Crowd,” whose central character is an unreadable text or cipher of resistance, and *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*, in which the identity of the murderer—which is never revealed—is secondary to ontological meditations. This chapter will explore the tensions, both within the detective genre and at the fringes of it, between what is transparent and what is opaque or what can and can’t be accessed through the detective’s heightened visual powers. These tensions reveal a dominant rift in American culture between privacy and transparency in the age of photography, a rift that both shapes ideas about privacy as well as illustrates their contradictions.

### **Traces: The Body as Legible Text—Nineteenth-Century Strategies of Reading the Body**

For Benjamin, disappearance without a trace is the nucleus of the detective story. Writing about Poe’s detective tale “The Mystery of Marie Roget” (1842) he said: “The original social content of the detective story was the obliteration of the individual’s traces in the big-city crowd” (“Paris” 43). In this view, the detective story is born of the frightening anonymity of the urban

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<sup>38</sup> While the book was not published until 1948, it was written in 1933-34.

<sup>39</sup> “The Murder’s at the Rue Morgue” (1841), “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” (1842), “The Purloined Letter” (1844).

context in which individuals become so opaque that they disappear into the sea of the masses, like “the man of the crowd,” or are caught in city’s dark and powerful undertow, which sweeps away beautiful young women like Marie Roget, who leaves the house to visit her aunt but turns up a corpse decomposed almost beyond recognition and found floating in the Seine. From the anxieties that surround urban anonymity—in which criminals can disappear into crowds and victims are erased—emerges the figure of the detective, whose superior powers of observation allow him to recover and read traces which have not been obliterated, but are merely invisible to others. As David Frisby writes, the prime concern of the detective is the “uniqueness of individuals, their *traits* and *traces*” (“City” 90). The mission of the detective is the recovery of the individual from the urban crowd—to render the obscure, the opaque, the anonymous *visible*.

The late-nineteenth century saw “The Era of the Crowd,” as Gustav le Bon names it in his influential book on the subject, *The Crowd* (1895). While le Bon deals with the crowd as a mass phenomenon and attempts to theorize its social dynamics, others focus on the problem of how to separate the individual from the crowd through precise identification, such as Sir Francis Galton, who published his book *Finger Prints* in 1892 (Frisby “City” 88-89). *Fin de siècle* culture is often described as suffering from “a crisis of personal identity,” or, as Frisby clarifies “the problematic relationship between individual identity and the development and recognition of masses of human beings as *masses*” (Frisby “City” 89). The problem of preserving individual identity in the face of urban anonymity is at the core of Georg Simmel’s essay “Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903) and is succinctly expressed in its first line: “The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of social culture, and the technique of life” (174). But for the criminal, the fact of urban oblivion provides cover

for illicit activities, allowing him or her to disappear into the sea of the crowd. Dana Brand describes the urgent desire for legibility that emerges in the context of the late nineteenth-century anxiety that cities were becoming more illegible and alienating places (Brand 89). It is, predictably, in the era of the anonymous crowd in which criminal photography emerges.<sup>40</sup>

Photographic technology was rapidly applied to the task of recovering the individual from the opacity of the urban crowd. Although it was not standard procedure to photograph prison populations until the 1860s, the potential of photography for identifying and tracking criminals was recognized shortly after its invention in 1839 (Sekula 344). As early as 1841—the same year that Poe publishes “The Murders at the Rue Morgue”—the Paris police reportedly were habitually photographing criminals (Sante 89). In 1846, American photographer Mathew Brady was commissioned to photograph prisoners in New York. The practice of photographing criminals extended to Brussels in 1843 and 1844, Birmingham in 1850, and San Francisco by 1854.<sup>41</sup> “Rogues galleries” were soon standard in major metropolitan police departments: New York 1858, Danzig 1864; Moscow 1867; London 1870 (Sante 89). In 1854 the French General of Prisons, who promoted photographing prison populations, suggested that photographic technology could be used to brand criminals with the “infliction of a new *mark*” (Ginzburg 25; qtd. in Gunning “Tracing” 21). Addressing the problem of identifying recidivists, this “new” technological marking replaces the more brutal ancient practice of inflicting marks or mutilations on the body of the criminal (Ginzburg 25).

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<sup>40</sup> See Gunning “Tracing” (23); he cites Christian Phèline’s study *L’Image accusatrice* (Paris: Cahiers de la Photographie, 1985) which “relates the emergence of criminal photography to other uses of photography within the modern world of anonymous crowds which devised bureaucratic means to trace and identify, such as medical documentation and the growing use of photographs in identity cards and passports, all of which demarcate a person as a unique entity.”

<sup>41</sup> See Gunning “Tracing” (21); he cites Phèline (15).

Inherent in this idea of marking is the notion that bodies can be translated into legible signs, that they can be read, not just for their physical histories but for signs of inner character. The idea of the criminal as marked was not a new one, but rooted in the pseudo-science of physiognomy, which originated with the ancient Greeks, fell into disfavor in the Middle Ages, and enjoyed renewed popularity and wide acceptance in the nineteenth century. The revival of physiognomy began in eighteenth century, when Johann Kaspar Lavater, a Swiss priest, published *Essays on Physiognomy* in 1775, in which he argued that it was possible to “read” a person’s facial features and expressions. Lavater defined physiognomy as a discipline that can illuminate invisible interiors: “the Science of discovering the relation between the exterior and interior—between the visible surface and the invisible spirit which it covers...” (qtd. in Phillips 15). Closely related to physiognomy, the practice of phrenology, which assumed that the bumps on the skull corresponded to personality traits and could be “read,” emerged in the early nineteenth century.

The logic of phrenology and physiognomy was based on the assumption that degenerate people were ugly, and moral people looked “good.” As Alan Sekula observes in “The Body and the Archive,”<sup>42</sup> both practices “shared a belief that the surface of the body, and especially the head and face, bore the outward signs of inner character” (Sekula 347). Tremendously influential within mid-nineteenth-century culture, physiognomy provided a means for navigating the rapidly transforming and often bewildering urban milieu—“a method for quickly assessing the character of strangers in the dangerous and congested spaces of the nineteenth-century city” (Sekula 348).

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<sup>42</sup> Sekula’s essay offers an in-depth look at the nineteenth century use of photography in the service of the sciences, such as criminology and anthropology, for the purpose of social control. See also John Tagg’s “A Means of Surveillance: The Photograph as Evidence in Law” in *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993): 66-102, Carlo Ginzburg’s “Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method,” and Sandra Phillips’s “Identifying the Criminal.”

In the 1840s numerous *physiologies* were published in Paris. Enormously popular, these illustrated mass-market paperbacks provided handy guides for identifying various social types within the urban crowd (“the drinker,” “the banker,” “the Spaniard”) using the principles of physiognomy. Between 1840-1842 approximately 120 such books were published (Ray 295). These typologies were so pervasive that it was considered inadvisable to choose a spouse or hire a maid without subjecting them to physiognomic analysis (Gunning “In Your Face” 5). In the United States in the 1840s it was not uncommon for newspaper want ads to request that applicants provide a phrenological analysis.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, popular American advice books stressed the importance of the face as an index of character.<sup>44</sup> Transitory encounters with strangers in urban spaces “enhanced the importance of appearances as the basis for forming impressions of others” (Kelly 12). Physiognomy provided a means to codify and interpret the facial expressions of strangers, promising to bring coherence and legibility to the often frightening or confusing interactions with strangers that characterize the urban experience. Phrenology, physiognomy and other anatomically based empirical “evidence” also shaped the emerging science of criminology.

Photography, invented in 1839, emerged in the heyday of physiognomy, which enjoyed enormous popularity in the 1840s and 1850s. Sekula argues that the “culture of the photographic portrait” can only be fully understood in relation to “the general physiognomic paradigm,” especially in the United States, where the proliferation of photography and physiognomy were simultaneous (348). Similarly, Robert Ray asserts in “Snapshots: The Beginnings of Photography” that the *physiologies* and photography, at least initially, would have seemed to be dedicated to the same project of social legibility; like the *physiologies*, photography was

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<sup>43</sup> Sekula 348; he cites his source as John Davies, *Phrenology: Fad and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955).

<sup>44</sup> See Kelly 12-13, who cites Karen Halttunen’s work on antebellum advice books in *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*.

predicated on the same “pseudoscientific basis” and was similarly entangled in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century mania for classification (297). The first application of photography in the service of phrenology was the series of photographs by Mathew Brady of prison inmates that were commissioned by American reformer Eliza Farnham in 1846 for a textbook on criminology.<sup>45</sup> Louis Agassiz, a leading period scientist and Harvard professor in the mid-nineteenth century, attempted to use photography to illustrate racial inferiority. To illustrate his theories, Agassiz commissioned a series of daguerreotypes of African-American slaves from photographer J.T. Zealy in 1850; these photographs—taken from profile, frontal and rear views—resembled mug shots. In the service of racial “betterment” another respected scholar, Sir Francis Galton,<sup>46</sup> progenitor of modern eugenics, invented in the 1870s a method of composite photography that could be used to identify physiognomic typologies (Sekula 353). In *Inquiries into Human Faculty* (1883), he proposed his process of composite photography as an improvement in the methodology of physiognomic typing. Galton used a process of superimposition that allowed for shared features to read as dominant while singular characteristics disappeared; the resulting slightly blurry images were intended to represent an average, what Galton called “pictorial statistics,” revealing the features of the “Jewish type,” or “criminals, semi-criminals, and loafers,” among others (Sekula 367-370). All of these

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<sup>45</sup> The engravings were included in Farnham’s appendix to her new edition of *Rationale of Crime* by Englishman Marmaduke Sampson. Sampson and Farnham both subscribed to what Sekula describes as a “less overtly racist” variant of phrenology that promoted “the possibility of therapeutic modification or enhancement of organically predetermined characteristics” (Sekula 348).

<sup>46</sup> Galton (1822-1911), an English scientist and cousin of Charles Darwin, invented the first statistical method for studying heredity. His first major book was *Hereditary Genius* (1869), which argued that “nature” dominated over “nurture” in determining human intelligence. He also proposed that racial groups could be divided across a hierarchy of intelligence (Sekula 367). Galton, who is credited as one of several inventors of the fingerprint, also developed a reliable system for classifying them in his book *Finger Prints* (1892), cited earlier in this chapter; according to Ginzburg, Galton tried to trace racial characteristics in the fingerprint, but did not succeed (27).



applications of photography relied on racial and other stereotypes and assumed that the exterior of the body could be read or decoded to reveal something essential about the interior beneath the surface.

As an empirical tool, photography—like phrenology, physiognomy and other anatomically based “evidence”—also played a crucial role in the development of criminology in the 1880s and 1890s. Known as the “father of criminology,” Parisian detective Alphonse Bertillon invented in the 1870s the first rational method for the identification of criminals. Bertillon’s system was designed to identify repeat offenders by undermining the criminal’s ability to rely on disguises and aliases to elude detection. While Galton used composite photography to pursue the identification of a criminal type, Bertillon devoted himself to devising a means of distinguishing one criminal from another. However, as Sekula points out, Galton and Bertillon share a foundation in the discipline of social statistics pioneered in the 1830s and 1840s. Drawing on the work of statistician Adolphe Quetelet’s quantification of the “average man”<sup>47</sup> (as did Galton), Bertillon introduced an archive system for the classification of criminals based on series of body measurements, physical description of unusual markings, and two photographs—one frontal and one profile—that later became known as mug shots. Bertillon also standardized forensic photographic techniques, prescribing consistent focal length and lighting, and innovated the profile shot, which neutralized facial expressions (Sekula 360). Bertillon’s method combined words and photographs to create what he called a *portrait-parlé* (speaking

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<sup>47</sup> Adolphe Quetelet (1796-1874), a Belgian astronomer and statistician and who applied mathematics to social paradigms. Quetelet accumulated statistics on rates of birth, death, and crime in order to determine the fundamental laws of social phenomena. He introduced the concept of the “average man,” a product of aggregate statistics whose binomial distribution could be charted on a bell curve. Sekula writes that Quetelet’s work was influenced by the physiognomic and phrenological “enthusiasm” of the era, noting that he subscribed to racist theories about “cranial angles,” though was less interested in “broadly racist physical anthropology” than in studying general patterns within European society of body measurements that deviated from “normality” (355-6).

likeness or verbal portrait) (Sekula 360). Sekula describes Bertillon's project as one of "inscription": "a transformation of the body's signs into a text" (360). Bertillon claimed that the resulting document "guards the trace of the real, actual presence of the person" and "necessarily implies the *proof of identity*" (Bertillon qtd. in Thomas 122 ). One could argue that it was photography that brought this "trace of the real" to Bertillon's verbal portraits. As Sekula writes, photography, "a medium from which exact mathematical data could be extracted" brought "metrical accuracy" to the nineteenth-century archive (352). Bertillon, Sekula argues, saw photography "as the final conclusive sign in the process of identification" (358). As different as their goals may seem, Sekula concludes that both Galton's and Bertillon's notions about identity are invested in the same "older, optical model of empiricism," one in which the photograph represents a physical trace of a "contingent instance" (373). However, Sekula suggests, this optical model of empiricism, bolstered as it was by statistical analysis and its power within the system of the archive, is already waning at the beginning of the twentieth century—though still exerting a lingering prestige (373-4). "Bertillonage," though tremendously influential through the turn of the twentieth century, was soon displaced by the more reliable forensic technique of fingerprinting, which became the ultimate standard of identity.

The applications of photography in the nineteenth century test beliefs about whether and to what degree the body—including the mind, soul, or identity—is permeable. For example, in Chapter 3 of this dissertation I discuss the popular belief that photography could reveal the human soul as well as the attempts of period scientists to photograph thoughts. The body is realized at once as a boundary that separates interior and exterior or public and private self as well as a permeable membrane that can be pierced and rendered transparent by photographic technology. Applied to identification, the new technology raises questions about what

information the surface of body can provide about identity—as well as the limits of that knowledge. Both Galton and Bertillon believed that the surface of the body provided empirical evidence that testifies to identity. While Galton read the surface of the body for signs of what might lie beneath—character or intelligence—Sekula points out that for Bertillon there were no secrets hidden beneath the skin—all the investigator needed to know could be read on the surface of the body (360). For Galton, the surface is a window into the interior and has a literal correspondence to depth, while for Bertillon identity is strictly material—a scar, birthmark or deformity—and is entirely subsumed by surface. Suren Lalvani<sup>48</sup> writes that in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault dispenses with “interiority,” because he recognizes that new disciplinary technologies—in which we can include photography—force prisoners to “signify the prohibitive law on the surface of their bodies” (33). The opposition between interior and exterior ceases to be relevant, because the interior—the “soul” or the “conscience”—is “now visibly inscribed on the surface” (Lalvani 33). As Lalvani observes, the boundaries of the body prove to be malleable and are continually “rewritten” by the “disciplinary discourses” that inscribe the body and demarcate “new interiors” (33-34). In this respect, he argues, “bodies of the nineteenth century were invested with a powerful new permeability” (33).

However, these different approaches to reading the body also reveal the limits of photographic knowledge. Each method is replaced by a new or competing method that makes a different set of assumptions about the nature of identity—whether it lies on the surface or in the interior, or is expressed through a soul, scar or fingerprint—as well as about the relation of surface to depth or the boundary between interior and exterior. What aspects of identity photography may penetrate or make legible and what remains illegible or private are

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<sup>48</sup> Lalvani cites Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990) in his gloss on Foucault.

continuously rearticulated. Forensic uses of photography interrogate the very possibility of “interiority” or a private, inner self. In this sense, the use of photographic technology in reading the body constitutes an extended engagement or meditation on the nature of identity—its location and contours, the permeability of its boundaries, and ultimately, its legibility.

### **“The Man of the Crowd”: The Body as Illegible Text**

Poe, who avidly followed new technological and scientific developments and who regularly wrote on such topics for popular periodicals, had an interest in both physiognomy and photography. In 1836 he published a favorable review of book on physiognomy.<sup>49</sup> Five years later, Poe made reference in a letter to having undergone physiognomic exams himself: “speaking of heads—my own has been examined by several phrenologists.”<sup>50</sup> Several critics have written about the influence of physiognomy and phrenology in Poe’s works.<sup>51</sup> Likewise, Walter Benjamin, in his essay “Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” refers to Poe as both “the first physiognomist of the interior” as well as an early theorist of “the physiognomy of the crowd.”<sup>52</sup> Other critics have pointed to the “near simultaneity” of the invention of photography in 1839 and Poe’s invention of the detective story less than a year later, with the publication of

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<sup>49</sup> See Thomas (297 n.26); the review appeared in the March 1836 edition of the *Southern Literary Messenger*. See also Grayson, who writes that Poe’s interest in physiognomy blossomed after this review of Mrs. L. Miles’s *Phrenology and Moral Influence of Phrenology* (Grayson par. 4).

<sup>50</sup> Qtd. in Grayson par 4. Grayson cites a letter written by Poe to Frederick W. Thomas, dated 27 Oct. 1841. The source is *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. John Ostrom, V1 (New York: Gordian Press, 1996): 184-85.

<sup>51</sup> See Eric Grayson (56-77). James V. Werner (102) also cites David S. Reynolds, who writes about the influence of phrenology in Poe’s literary theory in *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1988): 244-5. Thomas (297 n.26) writes that early editions of “The Murders at the Rue Morgue” included positive commentary on phrenology.

<sup>52</sup> Cited by Werner ix; quoted from Benjamin “Paris” (155-6).

“The Murders in Rue Morgue” in 1840.<sup>53</sup> Gilmore writes that the inventor of detective fiction was “right to sense a symbiotic connection” between photography and detection, noting that the “[T]he police moved quickly to enlist the photographic image as an ally in solving crimes, eager to take advantage of its documentary (as in mug shots) and surveillance possibilities” (70). In the months before the publication of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” Poe published three articles on photography—two in the same periodical that would publish “Murders.”<sup>54</sup> These articles reported with great enthusiasm and technical proficiency new developments in photography. In one of these essays, “The Daguerreotype,”<sup>55</sup> Poe calls photography “the most important, and perhaps the most extraordinary triumph of modern science” (37). He also lauds its potential for conveying “truth” beyond the capacity of language, calling the new technology a “positively perfect mirror” that brings us nearer to “reality” than any other means. Photography, writes Poe, offers “a more absolute truth” and “a more perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented.” I stress here the words “*a more perfect identity*,” which resonate with the central obsession of both the physiognomic project and criminology (38). Poe’s interest in physiognomy, phrenology and photography support important themes that run throughout his works—especially the relation between interior and exterior and an obsession with an often elusive legibility.

Poe’s story “The Man of the Crowd,” written just before he wrote “The Murders at the Rue Morgue,” can be read as a meditation on legibility<sup>56</sup>—on whether it is possible to penetrate

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<sup>53</sup> See Gilmore on “near simultaneity” (70) and Thomas (111-112).

<sup>54</sup> These two were published in 1840 in the April and May issues of *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine*; cited in Thomas (111, 302 n.11); see also Trachtenberg (37).

<sup>55</sup> The article was published in the June 15<sup>th</sup> edition of *Alexander’s Weekly Messenger* and is reprinted in Alan Trachtenberg’s *Classic Essays on Photography*.

<sup>56</sup> My thinking about the theme of legibility in “The Man of the Crowd” has been shaped by readings of both Dana Brand’s “From the Flâneur to the Detective: Interpreting the City of Poe” (in *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*), which establishes urban illegibility as a central preoccupation in this and other Poe stories, and more broadly by

surfaces, read identities or uncover motives. Benjamin once called “The Man of the Crowd” an X-ray picture of a detective story (“Paris” 48). While the story has elements of the detective tale—a detective figure who shadows a mysterious man through the seamy streets of a London by night in order to penetrate his secrets—it is not a detective story in the classic sense: no corpse is discovered, no crime is solved or even committed, and no criminal identity is revealed by a superior mind. Stripped of all the essential elements of a detective story, “The Man of the Crowd” has a spectral presence of a skeleton: “In it, the drapery represented by crime has disappeared. The mere armature has remained: the pursuer, the crowd, and an unknown man who arranges his walk through London in such a way that he always remains in the middle of the crowd” (Benjamin “Paris” 48). Like an X-ray, the narrative penetrates the surface of the detective story—beneath the skin of its facts and circumstances—to illuminate its *bones*, the faint outline of its interior landscape. The story is not only a skeleton, but also a skeleton key, because it opens up the same obsession that drives the detective story—the legibility of identity.

In a time when it seemed that nineteenth-century science would render the body legible as a type of text, Poe begins his tale with a reminder that not all texts are readable. “The Man of the Crowd” opens with an epigraph from Jean de La Bruyère—“*ce grand Malheur, de ne pouvoir être seul*” [Such a great misfortune, not to be able to be alone]—which, introducing a story set in metropolitan London of the late nineteenth century, reads as a lament over the lack of privacy and anonymity that characterizes urban life. In the first sentence of the story, which refers to an unnamed German book reputed to be so impenetrable that “*er lasst sich nicht lessen*” [it does not permit itself to be read], the narrator seems to undercut the sentiment expressed by La Bruyère, suggesting that even in the dense urban milieu, where privacy seems an impossibility, life retains

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Michael Gilmore’s *Surface and Depth: The Quest for Legibility in American Culture*, which argues that the drive for legibility played a central role in shaping American culture.

an isolating opacity. Just as there are books that can't be read, there are people who cannot be read as open books:

There are some secrets which do not permit themselves to be told. Men die nightly in their beds, wringing the hands of ghostly confessors, and looking piteously in the eyes—die with despair of heart and convulsion of throat, on account of the hideousness of mysteries which will not *suffer themselves* to be revealed. Now and then, alas, the conscience of man takes up a burden so heavy in horror that it can be thrown down only into the grave. And thus the essence of all crime is undivulged. (255)

In the midst of the urban crowd, individuals remain opaque to one another, isolated by the secrets that they keep. However, the narrator did not always accept his own insight about the illegibility of interior life, and he recalls a time “not long ago” when he presumed himself to be a better reader of people.

The narrator's story begins with him sitting at “a large bow window” in a London coffee house watching the crowd go by. Like a scientist over his microscope or a photographer behind a camera, he views the crowd through his window-lens while maintaining an objective distance. This sense of detachment is emphasized further in the narrator's mention of the fact that he has been ill for months—suggesting his isolation. His “returning strength” and happy mood prompt his visit to the coffee house, an event that marks the end of the narrator's convalescence and re-entry into social space. He describes his elevated mood and return to health as producing a heightened mental acuity in which “the film from the mental vision departs” (255). He feels his “electrified” intellect gives him special powers that transcend “its everyday condition”—powers he likens to the polymath Gottfried Leibniz's “vivid yet candid reason” or the rhetorical skills of

the sophist Gorgias. He also feels his physical senses enhanced—noting the pleasure he takes in each breath and even in his many bodily pains. This heightened awareness gives him an “inquisitive interest in everything”—his cigar, newspaper, and the people in the room. It is in this state of hyper-sense awareness that the narrator turns his attention to the crowd, “peering through smoky panes into the street” (255). As darkness falls, the narrator is “absorbed in contemplation” of the “continuous tides of population” that stream past the coffee house window (255).

The narrator applies a physiognomic gaze to “the tumultuous sea of human heads,” scanning faces for evidence of inner character (255). Taking advantage of the opportunity for study provided by his discreet position behind the window-lens and emboldened by his heightened senses, the narrator begins to evaluate the crowd with the confidence, even arrogance, of a specialist. Like all physiognomists, the narrator is interested in *types*. While his first observations are “abstract and generalizing,” the aggregate mass begins to crystallize into details of “innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage and expression of countenance” (256). He separates the crowd by costume and demeanor into classes and occupations—noblemen, merchants, attorneys, tradesmen, stock-jobbers, gamblers, pickpockets, dandies, peddlers, artisans and laborers. Using the language of biological determinism that is characteristic of the physiognomy and eugenics discourses in the nineteenth century, he identifies the clerks as a “tribe” and pickpockets as a “race” (356-357). He applies taxonomies, subdividing the “tribe” of clerks into “junior clerks”—with their class pretensions, “well-oiled hair” and “supercilious lips”—and “upper clerks”—with their “slightly bald heads” and ears visibly deformed by years of pen holding (256). He also recognizes a hierarchy of types, beginning his observations with aristocrats and professionals and the respectable classes; followed by faux gentleman or those who live by their wits, such as pickpockets, gamblers, dandies, and military men; and



“descending in the scale of what is termed gentility”—Jews, beggars, invalids ruffians, drunkards; and the poorest laborers—pie-men, porters, coal-heavers, sweeps, organ-grinders, monkey-exhibitors, ballad-mongers, “ragged artisans” (257). Placing the working poor at the bottom of his hierarchy, the narrator collapses this group with that of common criminals—a view that was not uncommon among physiognomists and eugenicists.<sup>57</sup> Like most physiognomists, he has less interest in the “decent” types than in the ones he perceives as deviant and in whom he finds “darker and deeper themes for speculation” (257). The narrator reads outer countenances for hints of inner depravity: gamblers exhibit “a certain sodden swarthy complexion, a filmy dimness of eye, and pallor and compression of the lip” and a “more than ordinary extension of the thumb in a direction at right angles to the fingers”; “Jew pedlars” reveal “hawk eyes flashing from countenances whose every other feature wore only an expression of abject humility” (257-8). The “vivacity” of the scene seems to have an over-stimulating affect on the narrator’s already heightened senses, producing a jarring in his ear and an “aching sensation” in eyes strained by the intensity of looking (258). Wholly absorbed in “scrutinizing” the crowd with his “brow to the glass,” the narrator’s gaze is both clinical and photographic (259).

The narrator admits that his interest in the scene “deepened” as the darkness causes the crowd’s “more orderly” representatives to withdraw and summons “every species of infamy from its den” (258). He describes this transformation much like a subtle change in expression that passes over a face and seems to alter character, observing that the crowd’s “gentler features” withdraw and “its harsher ones” come “into bolder relief” under the “garish lustre” of the gaslights (258). “The wild effects” of the gaslights train the narrator’s attention on his subjects and “enchain[ed]” him “to an examination of individual faces” (258). Even though the light

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<sup>57</sup> Sekula writes, for example, that Galton—whose photographic composites grouped the criminal together with the “unfit”—“dissolved the boundary between the criminal and working-class poor” (370).

flickers only briefly over each visage, the narrator is confident that under the influence of his peculiar mental state he can “read...the history of long years” into each face (258).

The narrator’s confidence in his ability to read people accurately is challenged by the appearance of a face he isn’t immediately able to classify. This face—that of a “decrepit old man”—captures his attention because of the “absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression” (258). The narrator is “arrested and absorbed” by the old man’s face, because he has never seen “[A]nything even remotely resembling that expression” (258). When the narrator does a quick initial “survey” of the old man’s countenance, the methodology he had used to analyze other individuals in the crowd fails him (258). His attempt to “form some analysis” of the “meaning” of the old man’s expression leaves him overcome by a confusion of paradoxical impressions—“of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, of intense—of supreme despair” (258-259). This confusion fuels the narrator’s fascination with the old man, who is both opaque and inaccessible to him. He wants access to the man’s interior, the “wild history” that “is written within that bosom” (259). The narrator’s desire to know is total, all-consuming and bordering on the psychosexual—a desire with no boundaries. Finding himself “singularly aroused, startled, fascinated” by the enigma of the old man and driven by “craving desire...to know more of him,” the narrator leaves the coffee house to pursue him through the streets (259).

Giving up his position of relative safety and detachment behind his window-lens, the narrator pursues the old man into more uncertain territory in order to satisfy his longing to know. Keeping his distance, the narrator trails the old man. He focuses on details, some of which offer contradictory information: his filthy clothes are made of beautiful linen, but his cloak is second-hand. He thinks he catches a glimpse of a diamond and a dagger through a rent in the old man’s

cloak. These objects lure the narrator like tantalizing red herrings that flash and disappear into the thick fog of the humid London night and disappear, leaving him uncertain whether his “vision deceived” him (259). As readers, we are also no longer sure we can trust his vision. Just as the narrator believes that his convalescence has sharpened his senses and analytical acumen, so too does he report that he is impervious to the heavy rains that begin to fall, finding the humidity “dangerously pleasurable” due to “an old fever” that still lurks in his system (259). This detail suggests that what the narrator has claimed as special powers of perception may in fact be delusional—the lingering effects of fever.

As the narrator proceeds with his pursuit, his powers of analysis continue to fail him. He is puzzled by the “waywardness” of the old man’s movements, in which he can discover no clear motive or pattern: while in some moments he walks rapidly and with purpose, in others he shifts pace and walks hesitantly or moodily and with no apparent object; while he enters shops, he buys nothing and speaks to no one. After an hour of walking, the narrator realizes they have repeated the same path several times. Driven by some “mad energy,” the old man continues his frenetic trajectory through the night, following “a great variety of devious ways,” leaving populous avenues and venturing into narrow, deserted lanes at the city’s edge and emerging once again “among the throng” (260-261). The narrator also observes that the countenance and demeanor of the old man continuously shifts between anxious and calmer states: at times “his chin fell upon his breast, while his eyes rolled wildly from under his knit brows,” he displays “a wild and vacant stare,” “looks anxiously around,” or presents an expression “more intense than despair,” while in other moments the narrator observes that “the intense agony of his countenance had in some measure abated” or he resumes his “solemn walk” (260-262). The continual transformations of the old man’s expressions would seem to thwart any attempt to apply

physiognomic principles. The narrator admits that he is “at a loss to comprehend the waywardness” of the old man’s actions (261).

As the sun rises, the exhausted narrator is forced to give up his quest. But not before he at last faces the old man directly, stopping “fully in front” of him and gazing “at him steadfastly in the face” (262). But this moment does not produce a physiognomic denouement; rather, the narrator concludes that to continue to follow the old man would be futile, because he will learn nothing more about him or his deeds. But he nonetheless concludes that the old man does have a type: “This old man...is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd*” (396). However, having deduced the old man’s type provides the narrator with no real insight, because he has learned almost nothing about him. Type turns out to be an empty category—a trap door that opens over a bottomless chasm. Like the German book the narrator alludes to both at the beginning and end of the story, the old man resists any reading: he retains his essential illegibility. In the age of photography, the old man is a cipher of resistance—incognito’s last stand. We can imagine the narrator staring after the old man as he disappears into the crowd without a trace.

Revising Benjamin’s analysis of “The Man of the Crowd” as an X-ray of detective story, Dana Brand has written that it is more accurately an “embryo” (79). Brand reads the narrator of “The Man of the Crowd” as an early articulation of the detective, whose more successful adaptation is realized in C. Auguste Dupin. While the narrator of “The Man of the Crowd,” who uses a mode of analysis Brand associates with the flâneur,<sup>58</sup> presumes to be a proficient reader of

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<sup>58</sup> Brand’s argument expands on Walter Benjamin’s linking of the flâneur and the detective. He reads the narrator of “The Man of the Crowd” as practicing the scopic and analytic strategies of the classic flâneur—whom he defines as “someone who tries to orient himself in a world he cannot understand, by thinking that he can read its most superficial aspects.” (81). Brand reads the story as “a critique of the interpretive strategies of the flâneur” (89).

the urban landscape, he is surpassed by Dupin, whose more rigorous and scientific strategies make him a more successful reader of the modern urban environment:

The detective suggests that if the authorities were to discover the proper scientific methods and were to pursue their investigations with appropriate rigor, they would be able to control what is threatening or unexplainable in urban social life. Dupin's fantasy is therefore an extension into the social sphere of the positivistic faith that science can ultimately solve all physical mysteries and provide the tools to eradicate what is threatening in nature. (Brand 103)

Through the figure of Dupin, Poe is able to resolve a crisis of legibility that originates from the popular perception that the nineteenth-century city was becoming a more dangerous, alienating and illegible place. The Paris of "The Man of the Crowd" leaves us with "a sense of the opacity of urban individuals to each other" (Brand 91). While "The Man of the Crowd" demonstrates "that urban life is too terrifying and opaque to be read," "The Murders at the Rue Morgue" delivers "the assurance of urban legibility" (Brand 90). Brand argues that when the narrator of the "The Man of the Crowd" encounters an unreadable face, the legitimacy of his entire system of interpretation is challenged. But the detective, i.e. Dupin, "suggests that what appears to be an increasingly opaque urban world can be grasped, even if only by a panoramic observer with superhuman powers" (Brand 103).

Rather than reading "The Man of the Crowd" as an "embryo"—a stage in a linear evolutionary progression of the detective story that culminates in detective Dupin's transcendence of an opaque world—I read it as a dark mirror of the detective story's almost utopian transparency that expresses Poe's enduring doubts about the possibility of legibility.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> By "utopian transparency" I am referring to the restoration of social order that occurs in the resolution of the classic detective story through the detective's revelations.

While Dupin personifies the idea of the detective as a kind of unattainable dream of transparency—a dream that may only be realizable as an expression of the ideals of positivism or the promise of new technologies—the narrator of “The Man of the Crowd” illustrates the limits of seeing and knowing. The answer to the question “whodunit?” remains frustratingly opaque—undermining the notion that criminal identity—or any identity—is transparent or knowable. The identity of “who”—in this case the old man of the story’s title—and the nature of the crime that he may or may not have committed are never established. The opacity of “The Man of the Crowd” is more consistent with much of Poe’s oeuvre, whereas the seeming embrace of transparency in the Dupin stories is more anomalous.

However, even in the Dupin stories, opacity is not entirely banished. For example, Brand also acknowledges that stories such as “The Murder of Marie Roget”—in which the murderer is never named or apprehended (rather Dupin points out how others have misread his identity)—and “The Murder at the Rue Morgue,” in which the animal who killed Mme. and Mlle. L’Espayne remains “a powerful embodiment of the threatening mystery and unpredictability of urban life” even when it is locked up—retain a level of opacity (Brand102). Likewise, in “The Purloined Letter,” the letter in question is found but, as Lacan points out in his “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter,’ ” neither the identity of the sender nor the contents of the letter are ever revealed. Brand acknowledges that it was likely Poe’s savvy about the literary marketplace and popularity of true crime journalism, rather than any personal belief in transparency, that led him to invent a genre which suggested that scientific crime-solving could restore social order: “It seems extremely unlikely that an author who was so consistently suspicious of all systematic penetrations of the impenetrable would have been likely to have seriously believed in the ‘method’ of Auguste Dupin” (104).

Brand's overall argument emphasizes the failures of the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" and the success of Dupin—and ultimately the triumph of transparency over opacity; instead, I want to emphasize the strain of opacity that persists even in the Dupin stories. While Brand reads Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" as a critique of the flâneur's mode of scopic analysis, I view him more broadly as a representative of Poe's persistent doubts about legibility. I read the Dupin trilogy not as a reversal or transcendence of the doubts expressed in "The Man of the Crowd" or as merely an example of Poe's cynicism or pandering to the literary marketplace, but rather as an expression of a kind of dream of transparency—which Poe so enthusiastically articulated in his articles on photography and which is embodied in the camera-like vision of Dupin—that *coexists* with Poe's more dominant doubts about the limits of legibility.

### **The Detective as Camera: C. Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes and the Limits of Photographic Vision**

Both C. Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes share a penetrating gaze that can be described as photographic. Observation is central to Dupin's method, as he explains to his friend in the first pages of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue": "...observation has become with me, of late, a species of necessity" (67). Both Dupin, who is associated with green spectacles, and Holmes, whose popular iconography is linked to the magnifying glass, share a type of vision that can be described as mechanistic or scientific. Thomas has read Dupin as a kind of "observing machine" with an "all-seeing gaze" ("Making" 136). Likewise, Conan Doyle's literary detective Holmes—Dupin's formidable heir—is described by Watson as a man with "sharp and piercing eyes" (*A Study in Scarlet* 1:11), whose machine-like qualities—Watson compares him to "an

automaton—a calculating machine”—make him “something positively inhuman” (*The Sign of Four* 1:135). In “A Scandal in Bohemia,” Watson describes Holmes as resembling a camera. Both characters are able to read people with precision—not just their faces or behaviors, but even their minds.

Reading people is central to Dupin’s method. Dupin’s method is indebted both to phrenology and physiognomy as well as photographic technology—discourses which, as established earlier in the chapter, were very much entangled in this period. The narrator’s commentary on Dupin’s method for reading people in the opening paragraphs of “The Murders at the Rue Morgue” invokes both phrenology and physiognomy, as well as emphasizes the quality of his vision. Dupin boasts to his friend and narrator of the story that “most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms” (65). The “analyst” (i.e., the detective), observes Dupin’s friend and narrator of the tale, exhibits “acumen which appears to the ordinary apprehension preternatural,” but in fact results from “the very soul and essence of method” (62). The narrator theorizes on the “reflective intellect” and “concentrative” chess player, invoking terms from the phrenological discourse that would have been familiar to the nineteenth-century reader (Hungerford 224). In the subsequent paragraph, the narrator also makes a specific reference to phrenology, marking a small point of disagreement between himself and the phrenologists regarding the difference between “analytical power” and “the constructive and combining power” (i.e., ingenuity) (64). Bernard Hungerford argues that the nuanced point the narrator makes here at once legitimizes phrenology while elevating Dupin’s powers of analysis (224).

Attempting to distinguish what makes Dupin’s method superior to that of an accomplished chess player or whist player, the narrator suggests that Dupin’s talents exceed “the



limits of rule” and mere “skill” (63). His advantage lies in what he observes—which includes things external to the game—and “the quality” of those observations (63). In this sense his vision can be described as photographic, bringing into sharp focus things that are often missed. Chief among the details that the detective focuses on is “the countenance” of his partner and his opponents (63). Like the physiognomist or criminologist, the detective makes a careful study of faces: “He notes every variation of face as the play progresses, gathering a fund of thought from the differences in the expression of certainty, of surprise, of triumph or chagrin” (63). He also studies behaviors, such as a “casual or inadvertent word; the accidental dropping or turning of a card, with the accompanying anxiety or carelessness in regard to its concealment; the counting of the tricks, with the order of their arrangement; embarrassment, hesitation, eagerness or trepidation—all afford, to his apparently intuitive perception, indications of the true state of affairs” (64). In a battle of wits, the detective’s advantage lies in his ability to penetrate the interior mindscape of his adversary: he “throws himself into the spirit of his opponent, identifies himself therewith” (63). Doing so allows him to understand his opponent’s weaknesses, to lay traps for him, or “to hurry” him into “miscalculation” (63).

In “The Purloined Letter” (1844) Dupin makes a similar point about the importance of accurately reading people, emphasizing the detective’s skill in identifying with or mirroring his subject. By way of example, Dupin relates a story about a boy he once met who excelled in playing a marbles game called “even and odd.” In this simple game, as Dupin explains, a player holds a number of toys in his hands and his opponent must guess if that number is even or odd; if he guesses correctly, he wins a marble. The boy who is Dupin’s exemplar in this story was the “even and odd” champion of the school, having won all the marbles. Dupin attributes the boy’s success not merely to his ability to read patterns of guessing but also to gauge accurately the

astuteness of his opponents. The boy reasons that a simpleton who holds an even number of toys in his hand on the first round—in which Dupin’s champion guesses odd and loses—is just clever enough to switch to an odd number in the second round, and so the champion guesses odd this time and wins. Dupin explains how the champion adapts his strategy to match opponents of greater degrees of cunning—sizing up each mind individually. When Dupin asks the boy how he is able to make such a “*thorough* identification” of his opponents, he replies:

When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond to the expression (140).

The crux of the boy’s method is a kind of physiognomic mimicry: he mirrors the countenance of his opponents—reproducing their likeness much as a camera would—and, much like a physiognomist, extrapolates from countenance the corresponding thoughts and emotions.

In “The Purloined Letter” Dupin’s ability to read people accurately—the police Prefect as well as the Minister who has hidden a letter stolen from the royal apartments—is coupled with the precision of his mechanistic or camera-like vision. Dupin uses his keen vision to spot the stolen letter, which, though concealed in plain view, is overlooked by the police, who have already thoroughly searched the premises of the Minister’s hotel apartment. The police are unable to uncover the letter even though they employ thoroughly systematic sleuthing techniques, which include the aid of a “powerful microscope” (136). Making a surprise call on the Minister at his apartments, Dupin succeeds where the police have failed by feigning weak vision and donning a pair of green tinted spectacles in order to conceal from his host the

circumspection of his penetrating gaze. Behind his spectacles, Dupin is able to survey the Minister's apartment "while seemingly intent only upon the conversation" of his host (144). "After a long and deliberate scrutiny" in which he methodically "circuits the room" with the camera-like panning action of his eyes, Dupin spots a tattered letter haphazardly stored in a card rack, which he quickly deduces is the stolen letter (144-145).

The police seem to suffer from a myopic failure of vision caused by such a profusion of microscopic details that they often overlook what is most relevant—or in this case most superficial. As Dupin observes in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," while the police are intent on discovering what is hidden or secret, they are often blind to the obvious: "The police have laid bare the floors, the ceiling, and the masonry of the walls, in every direction. No *secret* issues could have escaped their vigilance. But, not trusting to *their* eyes, I examined with my own. There were, then, no *secret* issues" (78). And what makes Dupin's eyes superior? According to the narrator of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," what distinguishes Dupin is the quality and precision of his vision: "He makes, in silence, a lot of observations and inferences. So perhaps, do his companions; and the difference in the extent of the information obtained, lies not so much in the validity of the inference as in the quality of the observation. The necessary knowledge is that of *what* to observe" (63). In other words, it is not necessarily that Dupin's lenses are more powerful than those of the police microscope, but rather the difference is expressed in the precision and intelligence with which visual technology is employed, mainly where and on what Dupin trains his lenses. Unlike the fixed vision of the police microscope, Dupin's vision, if we imagine him panning the room behind his green tinted spectacles, is unmoored and can be

compared to that of the mobile and highly sensitized gaze of the urban flâneur memorably described by Charles Baudelaire as “a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness.”<sup>60</sup>

Dupin attributes the Prefect’s failure to discover the hidden letter to his inability to look while maintaining a proper balance between surface and depth: “he perpetually errs by being too deep or too shallow for the matter at hand; and many a school boy is a better reasoner than him” (139). In Dupin’s estimation, the Prefect fails to exercise the powers of *identification*—he does not fully engage with the intellect of his suspects. When he searches for something that is hidden, his imagination will only allow him to conceive of where he himself might have hidden it. The Prefect’s method does not allow for the great variation of individual intellects. Once again, Dupin frames the problem as failure to maintain a proper relation between surface and depth. While searching for the concealed letter, the Prefect might strive to penetrate depths, but Dupin questions to what effect:

What is all this boring, and probing, and sounding, and scrutinizing, with the microscope, and dividing the surface of the building into registered square inches—what is it all but an exaggeration of the application of the one principle or set of principles of search, which are based upon the one set of notions regarding human ingenuity, to which the Prefect, in the long routine of his duty, has been accustomed? (140-141)

Dupin asserts that the Prefect’s mistake is in assuming that all men will go about concealing a letter in the same way—“in *some* out-of-the-way hole or corner”; the Prefect is unable to conceive of the problem outside his own narrow set of principles (141).

What the Prefect lacks is a proper perspective—a balance between surface and depth. While his obsession with depth perception often blinds him to surfaces, his reading of surfaces

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<sup>60</sup> See Baudelaire’s essay “The Painter and Modern Life” (1863).

proves that subtleties of depth also escape him. Because the Minister is a poet “of some renown,” the Prefect makes the superficial judgment that the man (and by extension all poets) is a fool and thereby underestimates the ingenuity of his opponent. But Dupin points out that the Minister is a man of layers, not only a poet, but also a mathematician and courtier; this combination makes him an excellent reasoner, one astute enough to have anticipated the Prefect’s every move.

Reasoning that the Minister would be canny enough to recognize that “the most intricate and remote recess of his hotel would be as open as the commonest closets to the eyes, to the probes, to the gimlets, and to the microscopes of the Prefect,” Dupin concludes that the Minister would be “driven...to simplicity” (143). Indeed, Dupin discovers that instead of ferreting away the letter in some interior recess, the Minister has openly displayed it in a card rack as well as

“turned” the letter “as a glove, inside out” (146).<sup>61</sup> As James V. Werner argues in *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville*, in

Poe’s stories the relationship between inner and outer is always complex, challenging our notions about interiority and exteriority: “The most effective route to perceiving the ‘inner’ truth of an event, or a person’s ‘inner’ secrets, is not a direct linear trajectory ‘inward,’ but an oscillating zig-zag, an in-and-out movement that blurs and problematizes this mutually constitutive opposition of ‘inner’ to ‘outer’ ” (110). For Dupin, the relationship between interior and exterior is much more fluid and permeable than it is for the Prefect, whose more rigid interpretation blinds him to certain details. Unlike the Prefect, Dupin exercises a kind of 3-D vision that allows him constantly to keep both surface and depth in perspective.

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<sup>61</sup> Dupin describes the letter as “soiled,” “crumpled,” and partially torn. It is not in an envelope, but is folded and bears a “large black seal” and is “conspicuously” addressed in a female hand to the minister himself. Dupin notes that the letter has been refolded inside out and readdressed: “In scrutinizing the edges of the paper, I observed them to be more *chafed* than seemed necessary. They presented the *broken* appearance which is manifested when a stiff paper, having been once folded and pressed with a folder, is refolded in a reversed direction, in the same creases or edges which had formed the original fold” (145).

Ultimately, it is Dupin's ability to read the man (the Minister) that allows him to read the room. The physiognomist (however spurious his "science" turns out to be), is highly attuned to the relation between surface and depth, as is the photographer, whose camera reveals not only a multitude of surface level details that often go unnoticed by the eye but at the same time seeks to reveal depth where there appears to be none—in two-dimensional space. While the nineteenth-century physiognomist and photographer might aspire to map both the surface of the body and plumb the depths of the human psyche, it is the literary detective who succeeds in mastering both. In the Dupin trilogy, Poe does not entirely abandon the physiognomic strategies employed by the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd"; rather, he improves upon them by joining them, in the figure of Dupin, with a mechanistic precision of vision that borders on the photographic or holographic.<sup>62</sup> Dupin can be read as personification of a dream of transparency in which human reasoning is wedded with the power of visual technology.

However, in Poe's world the dream of transparency is not without limitations. While Dupin commands a view that brings transparency to mysteries that seem to elude even trained professionals, it is also a privileged view. Though the reader's own view is expanded by Dupin's insights into the minds of both the Prefect and the Minister or his illumination of the "hidden" letter, certain aspects of the mystery (the identity of sender of the letter and the contents of the missive) remain opaque to the reader. The reader, while reassured that Dupin brings resolution and legibility to this and other seemingly impenetrable urban mysteries, continues to dwell in partial darkness.

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<sup>62</sup>Holography, which appears to capture a three-dimensional image on a two dimensional surface, was not invented until 1947, and did not become an applicable technology until after the invention of the laser in 1960. A hologram is produced without the use of camera by exposing film to coherent light, such as from a laser.

Though British author Conan Doyle began writing detective fiction at the end of the nineteenth century, more than four decades after Poe introduced Dupin, Doyle's detective Sherlock Holmes is very much Dupin's descendent. Watson comments on the similarity to Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) shortly after their first meeting: "You remind me of Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin. I had no idea that such individual did exist outside of stories" (1:18). Like Dupin, Holmes's method depends on deductive reasoning and the precision of visual observation. Doyle also shared Poe's interest in photography—a medium that had seen significant technological innovation in the intervening decades. While the influence of photography is visible in the works of both authors, it is more immediate in Doyle's stories, several of which directly refer to photography,<sup>63</sup> and in the character of Sherlock Holmes. Thomas has argued that Holmes embodies the culmination of nineteenth-century visual technologies.

Like another remarkable Victorian apparatus, the camera, we might think of Holmes (and the "sharp-eyed" detectives he represents) as the literary embodiment of the elaborate network of visual technologies that revolutionized the art of seeing in the nineteenth century. Just as the popular iconography of Sherlock Holmes invariably identifies the magnifying glass, he and these other literary detectives personify the array of nineteenth-century "observing machines" (from the kaleidoscope to the stereoscope to the camera itself) that made visible what had always been invisible to everyone else. (Thomas "Making" 135)

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<sup>63</sup> See "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891), "The Man with the Twisted Lip" (1891), "Silver Blaze" (1892), "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box" (1892), "The Yellow Face" (1893), and "The Adventure of the Illustrious Client" (1924) (Thomas *Detective* 175-6, "Making" 151). Also notable is "The Red-headed League" (1891) in which the villain is identified as a photographer.

It is especially fitting then, as Thomas points out, that Watson describes Holmes as resembling a camera in the very first story in the series *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, “A Scandal in Bohemia” (1891).<sup>64</sup> In the first paragraph of the story, Watson describes Holmes as “cold” and “precise,” a “sensitive instrument” possessing “his own high-power lenses”—and as “the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has ever seen” (1:239). Holmes is the ideal observer, a man whose finely tuned visual abilities—“excellent for drawing the veil from men’s motives and actions”—allow him to see through people (1:239).

The heyday of Sherlock Holmes corresponds with important years in the evolution of photography, including developments such as the perfection of the dry plate process—which decreased exposure times and made instantaneous photography possible—and the proliferation of handheld fixed-focus cameras accomplished by the Kodak (Thomas *Detective* 169). While the invention of the handheld camera and the birth of the detective novel are a significant coincidence in these intertwining histories, Thomas argues that what is more striking is the degree to which the cultural impact of photography is visible in the detective genre. A decade after Poe created Dupin, the first detective in the English novel—the character Mr. Bucket from Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1852)—is described in terms of photographic technology: “The detective appears in the Victorian popular imagination, that is, looking like a camera” (Thomas “Making” 138). It was only a few years after the invention of the handheld camera, initially called “the detective,”<sup>65</sup> that Sherlock Holmes made his debut in 1887. These cameras—which

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<sup>64</sup> See Thomas *Detective* 171. The character Sherlock Holmes makes his first appearances in Conan Doyle’s novels *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and *The Sign of Four* (1890). “A Scandal in Bohemia” (1891) was the first short story to feature Holmes—the form that was to catapult the character to popularity—as well as the first story in the series *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, which was originally published serially in the *Strand Magazine*.

<sup>65</sup> In 1881, Englishman Thomas Bolas patented and produced two hand-made prototype “detective” cameras designed for police work (Brayer 59-60). Bolas never commercially



were typically box-shaped and fit in the palm of the hand, though more notorious models were also concealed as hats, canes, ties, and books—derived their name from their early association with police work. Handheld cameras—with their increased mobility and faster shutter speeds—were also used by amateur photographers and photojournalists, who were able to more freely (or secretly) snap candid photographs of their subjects without consent.

Like “detectives” Dupin and Holmes, these cameras were adept for surveillance and could be used unobtrusively to make a study of a given subject. The *Strand* magazine, which serialized the first Holmes short stories, frequently carried advertisements for the new handheld cameras, as well as published articles on advances in photographic technology, including its use in solving crimes. The first Holmes story appeared in an issue of the magazine that included a text on the “warranted detective ” titled “London from Aloft,” which anticipated the use of the new cameras for aerial surveillance in warfare (Thomas *Detective* 169-170). Holmes, too, imagines surveilling “London from Aloft”:

If we could fly out of that window hand in hand, hover over this great city, gently remove the roofs, and peep in at the queer things which are going on, the strange coincidences, the plannings, the cross-purposes, the wonderful chains of events, working through generations, and leading to the most *outré* results, it would make all fiction with its conventionalities and foreseen conclusions most stale and unprofitable. (“A Case of Identity” 288)

Holmes envisions total transparency in a world transformed by photography.

Though photography makes only rare appearances in any of Holmes’s adventures, it was a subject in which Conan Doyle had a keen interest. When in 1891 Doyle abandoned his medical

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marketed his invention, but the name stuck and for the next decade hand-held cameras were generically referred to as “detectives” (Brian Coe, “Rollfilm” 60 and *Cameras* 41).

practice—interestingly, as an eye specialist—to become a full-time writer, he wrote his mother regarding his intentions to sell his eye instruments in order to buy photographic equipment.<sup>66</sup> Like Poe, Doyle also wrote on the subject of photography, both prolifically and enthusiastically. Between 1881 and 1885 Doyle published a series of twelve articles on photography in *The British Journal of Photography*, covering topics such as the technical aspects of the emulsion process, his own experience with travel photography, and “an analysis of photography as a ‘scientific subject.’”<sup>67</sup> He also had a special interest in spirit photography and wrote several articles and two books on the subject, which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

No detail escapes Holmes, who operates like a sensitive, mobile snapshot camera. Holmes uses “his immense faculties and extraordinary powers of observation” to resolve mysteries which the police have abandoned as hopeless (“Scandal” 1:1). And indeed, Holmes dazzles Dr. Watson, the police and the reader with his feats of ocular prowess. In “The Red-headed League” (1891), Holmes transforms even a casual stroll down the street into an opportunity to record and catalog visual information in his photographic memory: “I should like just to remember the order of the houses here. It is a hobby of mine to have an exact knowledge of London. There is Mortimer’s, the tobacconist, the little newspaper shop, the Coburg branch of the City and Suburban Bank, the Vegetarian Restaurant, and MacFarlane’s carriage-building depot” (1:278). In *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes shocks Watson when he is able to identify a man from across the street as a “retired sergeant of Marines.” Watson marvels at Holmes’s “powers of analysis,” as Holmes explains that “[E]ven across the street I could see a great anchor tattooed on the back of the fellow’s hand” (1:21). It seems to Watson that Holmes’s visual powers are so

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<sup>66</sup> Holmes’s letter to his mother is partly quoted in Thomas *Detective* 169.

<sup>67</sup> On Doyle’s writings on photography see: Thomas *Detective* (167); Schmit (92, 94 n.4) cites that the articles Doyle published in *The British Journal of Photography* are reprinted in *The Unknown Conan Doyle: Essay on Photography*, Intro. John Michael Gibson and Richard Lancelyn Green (London: Secker & Warburg, 1982).

exceptional that he is able to see what is invisible to most of us: “I had had such extraordinary evidence of the quickness of his perceptive faculties, that I had no doubt that he could see a great deal which was hidden from me” (*A Study in Scarlet* 1:24). Holmes sees through things, including disguises. In “A Scandal in Bohemia” he surprises his client Count Von Kramm, who for reasons of discretion, calls on Holmes at 221b Baker Street wearing a mask; however, the shrewd detective immediately sees through his incognito, recognizing him as the King of Bohemia and addressing him accordingly as “your Majesty.” On another occasion, Holmes proceeds to explain to Watson how he knows that Watson had gotten very wet recently:

It is simplicity itself...my eyes tell me that on the inside of your left shoe, just where the firelight strikes it, the leather is scored by six almost parallel cuts.

Obviously they have been caused by someone who has very carelessly scraped round the edges of the sole in order to remove crusted mud from it. Hence, you see, my double deduction that you had been out in the vile weather, and that you had a particularly malignant boot-splitting specimen of London slavery. (“A Scandal in Bohemia” 1:241)

Astonished by Holmes’s uncanny, preternatural powers of observation, Watson remarks that it is likely Holmes would have been burned at the stake had he lived a few centuries before.

Indeed, Holmes’s powers of observation seem to border on clairvoyance. As Watson expresses with puzzled awe in “The Red-headed League,” it is not only that Holmes sees what is invisible to everyone else, but he also sees the future: “I trust that I am not more dense than my neighbours, but I was always oppressed with a sense of my own stupidity in my dealings with Sherlock Holmes. Here I had heard what he had heard, I had seen what he had seen, and yet from his works it was evident that he saw clearly not only what had happened but what was about to

happen” (1:279). Likewise, Dupin continually startles his assistant with what, though always the product of careful reasoning, seems like the ability to read thoughts: “Dupin...this is beyond my comprehension. I do not hesitate to say that I am amazed, and can scarcely credit my senses. How was it possible you should know I was thinking of--? ... Tell me, for Heaven’s sake...the method—if method there is—by which you have been enabled to fathom my soul in this matter” (“The Murders at the Rue Morgue” 66). Dupin proceeds to enlighten him through revealing his chain of deductive reasoning. Holmes, too, seems to have the power to read minds. Like a psychic performing an impressive parlor trick, Holmes is able, within moments of his initial meeting with his client in “The Red-headed League,” Mr. Jabez Wilson, to read the man’s past: “Beyond the obvious facts that he has at some time done manual labour, that he takes snuff, that he is a Freemason, that he has been to China, and that he has done a considerable amount of writing lately, I can deduce nothing” (1:265). Spooked by these revelations, Mr. Wilson jumps up from his seat and demands an explanation for these insights: “How, in the name of good-fortune, did you know all that, Mrs. Holmes?” (1:265). After Holmes explains how he gleaned this information through observation, Mr. Wilson lets out a hearty laugh, visibly relieved that Holmes’s demonstration is based on acute vision and scientific deduction rather than supernatural powers: “Well, I never! ... I thought at first that you had done something clever, but I see that there was nothing in it, after all” (1:265).

But Holmes is not a witch, a magician or a psychic. He is a man of science, and his seemingly super-human ability to see the invisible or to read people’s minds is grounded in science and technology. Holmes is first described to Watson preceding their first meeting in *A Study in Scarlet* as “A fellow who is working at the chemical laboratory up at the hospital” and “an enthusiast in some branches of science” (1:5). He studies anatomy and is also “a first-rate

chemist” (1:5). Watson’s companion identifies Holmes as a man who “appears to have a passion for definite and exact knowledge” (1:6). While offering to introduce Watson to Holmes, who is searching for a new roommate, the companion warns Watson that Holmes is “a little too scientific” and “approaches to cold bloodedness” (1:6). While Holmes himself is not a doctor, it is significant to note that Doyle abandoned his medical practice to write detective fiction, and that Watson is a doctor. Tom Gunning cites that several scholars have argued that Holmes is based on a professor with whom Doyle studied medicine, Dr. Joseph Bell of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, who reputedly “astonished students and patients with his ability not only to diagnose diseases and symptoms but also to read a person’s occupation and background from details of body, gait, and clothing” (“Tracing” 23). Gunning writes that in 1893 Bell described his method in terms that could be applied to Holmes: “Racial peculiarities, hereditary tricks of manner, accent, occupation or the want of it, education, environment of every kind, by their little trivial impressions gradually mold or carve the individual, and leave finger marks or chisel scores which the expert can direct” (“Tracing” 23). This method of reading people, which rejected the notion of a physiognomic criminal types in favor of a system that attempted to identify and catalog unique bodies, was employed by criminologists like Thomas Brynes, chief of detectives in New York City, who asserted that criminals exhibited no consistent physical features or physiognomic type,<sup>68</sup> and Alphonse Bertillon (discussed earlier in this chapter), who pioneered a system for measuring bodies as well as the mug shot. Likewise, there is a link between the development of “scientific” detection and the statistical analysis employed by criminologist like Bertillon (Frisby “City” 90). Criminologists in this period (as discussed earlier) also employed photography (and later the fingerprint) as the ultimate register of identity.

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<sup>68</sup> See Gunning “Tracing” (23). Brynes also compiled a collection of mug shots or “rogues gallery,” and published some of them in *Professional Criminals of America* (1886).

It is fitting then that in the first tale in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, “A Scandal in Bohemia,” Holmes, a character who is described in the opening lines of the story as resembling a camera, is engaged by the King of Bohemia to recover a photograph (Thomas *Detective* 170). In a youthful indiscretion, the King had been “entangled” with Irene Adler, a young American opera prima donna. About to be married to a Scandinavian Princess of fastidious morals, he now wishes to recover any incriminating evidence of the liaison that would jeopardize the marriage. Holmes dismisses the consequence of the letters the King sent the diva; however, a photograph of the pair retained by Miss Adler, which she refuses to return and threatens to send to the King’s betrothed, is a much graver matter: “You have compromised yourself seriously” (1:247). Holmes acknowledges the incontrovertible evidentiary power of photography: a letter, reasons Holmes, could be forged, a photograph of just the King could be purchased, but a photograph of himself with Miss Adler would confirm the liaison and establish his identity beyond doubt.<sup>69</sup> Holmes immediately assesses that the photograph represents a significant threat to his client, because he recognizes it as “a genuine index to truth and authenticity, but also as a powerful weapon with which the truth can be manipulated” (Thomas *Detective* 172). Holmes concludes emphatically that the picture “must be recovered” (1:247).

However, because of a lack of objective vision, Holmes does not succeed in recovering the photograph for his client, making “A Scandal in Bohemia” anomalous in the oeuvre of the detective’s adventures. Holmes is completely outsmarted for the only time in his career—and by a woman—Irene Adler, who sees through his ploy to trick her into revealing where she

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas comments on several other Holmes stories in which photographs operate as “a means to secure an identity, unmask an imposter, or substantiate an accusation.” See also “The Man with the Twisted Lip,” “Silver Blaze,” “The Yellow Face,” and “The Adventure of the Cardboard Box,” which are not discussed in this chapter, as well as “The Adventure of the Illustrious Client,” which will be discussed later in this chapter. (Thomas *Detective* 175-176; “Making” 151).

concealed the photograph. Adler too recognizes the power of the photograph and explains in a letter to Holmes that while she gives her promise not to expose her former lover, she will retain the photograph “to safeguard myself” against any future actions of the King. In place of the portrait Holmes sought, Adler leaves a photograph of herself in an evening dress for the King. In lieu of the payment the King offers Holmes for his services, the detective requests something that he “should value even more highly”: the photograph of Irene Adler (1:262). The request is another testimony to the power of photography and the thrall cast by Irene Adler. Using her “woman’s wit,” Adler, disguised as a young man, manages to elude a trap Holmes set for her and slip away right under the detective’s watchful eye—even daring to bid him “good-night” as she crosses his path. While Holmes is able to penetrate the King’s incognito, his vision—perhaps clouded by his inability to register any serious challenge from a female adversary—fails to let him see through Miss Adler’s disguise. It is a lesson Holmes never forgets. Indeed, Adler is the only one, as Thomas observes, to ever “put the crack in his lens” and compromise the cool objectivity of the legendary observing machine, Sherlock Holmes (Thomas *Detective* 174). Thereafter, Watson reports, Holmes refrains from his making “merry over the cleverness of women,” and whenever Holmes speaks of Adler or her photograph, he refers to her not as a woman, but “*the woman*.”

As “the woman” Adler represents for Holmes the exemplar of an ideal woman. Thomas writes that Adler embodies for Holmes all the quintessential qualities of the feminine, and that in doing so she exists for him first and foremost as a photographic image (“Making” 149; *Detective* 173). On this note, I observe that as “*the woman*” Adler represents for Holmes a physiognomic type—the ideal woman. Because Holmes reads Adler as a type, he is unable to recognize her when she breaks type and appears in men’s clothing. Holmes’s vision fails him in this case

because of his reliance on types—as they are epitomized in the photograph—to interpret identity. While Holmes’s method is generally grounded in individuation, gender proves a stubborn prejudice to overcome, one that binds Holmes to a reliance on physiognomic typing that seems antithetical to his standard *modus operandi*.<sup>70</sup> Adler is a confounding figure for Holmes because she frustrates his reading strategy; as Thomas puts it, “She pits Galton’s typing against Bertillon’s individuation” (*Detective* 173). Holmes fumbles the case because he is unable to see Adler as an individual, and in this failure he never really sees her at all. We can read the photograph in “A Scandal in Bohemia” both as powerful evidence that can be used to substantiate identity beyond a doubt (in the case of the King), as well as a document whose truth is always filtered through the beholder’s subjectivity. While “A Scandal in Bohemia” is a story whose premise centers on the evidentiary power of the photograph, Doyle rather curiously and cautiously concludes with a lesson about the limits of Holmes’s objectivity. If Holmes, a legendary observing machine, views Adler through a cracked lens, then photographic truth or objectivity is arguably an ideal rather than a given.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Thomas argues that it is not only women that are “typed” in Holmes stories, citing an example from “The Adventure of the Illustrious Client” in which Watson describes the murderer Baron Gruner, a foreigner (he is Austrian): “If ever I saw a murderer’s mouth it was there—a cruel, hard gash in the face, compressed, inexorable, and terrible... It was Nature’s danger signal, set as a warning to his victims” (Thomas *Detective* 177). While I had underlined the same passage in my copy of the story as an rare example of physiognomic typing in the Holmes canon, I would qualify that it is significant that this observation comes from Watson, who often operates as a foil for Holmes’s more scientific methods, and not from Holmes himself. See “The Adventure of the Illustrious Client” (2:533). Ray makes a stronger argument for the survival of the reference codes promoted by the “physiologies,” asserting that for Holmes, “physical evidence is always unproblematically indexical”: “the ‘writer’ will inevitably display a shiny cuff and worn elbow patch, ‘the laborer’ a muscular hand, ‘the visitor from China’ a particular Oriental tattoo” (“Snapshot” 298).

<sup>71</sup> See also Victoria Rosner’s reading of “A Scandal in Bohemia” in her book *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (2005): 106-110. Rosner argues that the story is “about privacy and who has a right to it” (108). She reads Adler as reversing traditional gender roles in making the king the “subject of secrets instead of the masculine keeper of them” (110). She keeps the king’s secret in sitting room, “a place where secrets should be leaked, not kept,” and which she uses



While photography has some unsavory or sinister associations in several Holmes stories, the character of Sherlock Holmes—as the “most perfect reasoning and observing machine”—redeems the potential of photography for fighting crime. In “A Scandal in Bohemia,” the photograph Holmes seeks to recover is an instrument of blackmail, though the destructive potential of this photograph is transformed when it is replaced by a more innocuous photograph of Miss Adler that Holmes values highly and retains as a keepsake. In “The Red-headed League,” the story’s criminal mastermind is identified as an amateur photographer whose tendency to vanish mysteriously into the cellar, ostensibly to develop his pictures, turns out to be a cover for subterranean motivations: he is digging a tunnel that leads to a bank vault. The villain of “The Adventure of the Illustrious Client” (1924), the handsome and charming serial murderer Baron Adelbert Gruner, is a collector of photographs. He keeps a trophy book of snapshot photographs of women he has ruined (and in one at least one case murdered), as one of his victims describes:

I tell you, Mr. Holmes, this man collects women, and takes a pride in his collection, as some men collect moths or butterflies. He had it all in that book. Snapshot photographs, names, details, everything about them. It was a beastly book—a book no man, even if he had come from the gutter, could have put together. But it was Adelbert Gruner’s book all the same. “Souls I have ruined.” He could have put that on the outside if he had been so minded. (2:523)

In the story, Gruner’s book of photographs operates much like the painting in Oscar Wilde’s of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890)—as a record of his transgressions and as a true representation of his depraved inner life. In the pivotal moment of “The Adventure of the

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like a masculine study “just as its owner is a woman who acts like a man” (108). Adler, she argues, not only adopts a masculine disguise, but assumes roles associated with masculine authority, such as detective, author and king.

Illustrious Client,” Sherlock Holmes procures Gruner’s “lust diary”—thereby ensuring his exposure—just as a former victim of Gruner’s takes her revenge by throwing acid in his face. Following this attack, Gruner’s visage is described as a distorted or erased painting: “The features which I had admired a few minutes before were now like some beautiful painting over which the artist has passed a wet and foul sponge” (2:535). Holmes’s discovery of the photo book coincides with the moment of Gruner’s public exposure, when the acid renders his external features as hideous as the transgressions commemorated by the photographs of young women he used and abused. In contrast to Wilde’s novel, in Doyle’s story it is photography, not painting, which functions as the index of truth and revealer of Gruner’s true identity. At once trophies as well as potential tools with which to blackmail the shamed and fallen, Gruner’s collection of photographs also link him to his crimes. As in “A Scandal in Bohemia,” Holmes recognizes the tremendous evidentiary power of photography, realizing at once “what a tremendous weapon” the photo book represents (2:536). He uses it to persuade Gruner’s fiancée (and last intended victim) of his true character when no other evidence would sway her.

While the criminals in these three stories (“A Scandal in Bohemia,” “The Red-headed League,” and “The Adventure of the Illustrious Client”) are represented either as photographers, collectors of photography, or as manipulators of the medium with corrupt motivations, Holmes himself is represented as a camera—as an objective or pure representation of the technology itself. Using his mechanical vision in the service of apprehending criminals, Holmes redeems photography from its more sinister associations. The popularity of Sherlock Holmes and the characters he inspired, argues Thomas, played an important role in promoting photography as a “benign form of police work” and “a clear benefit to public safety” (“Making” 138). The detective becomes a sort of stealth ambassador of an emerging surveillance culture, perhaps

because, like Dupin and Holmes, they are free agents with no direct ties to state bureaucracy. Yet, as Thomas argues, the detective and the discipline of criminology can be viewed as “allied forms of cultural defense” (“Making” 156). Holmes, whose career is contemporaneous with that of the French detective Bertillon, is both an admirer of the pioneering criminologist and an advocate of his methods: Holmes expresses his admiration for the great detective in “The Adventure of the Naval Treaty,” and in “Hound of the Baskervilles” a client compares Holmes and Bertillon, claiming they are the two greatest criminal experts in Europe (Thomas *Detective* 178). In Thomas’s view, Holmes and his literary offspring become popularizers of a particular type of anthropological vision: “Together, camera and literary detective developed a practical procedure to accomplish what the new discipline of criminal anthropology attempted more theoretically: to make darkness visible—giving us a means to recognize the criminal in our midst by changing the way we see and by redefining what is important for us to notice” (“Making” 135). Thomas views detective fiction as being part of what he calls “the regime of visual correction,” and he further suggests, though without providing direct evidence, that detective fiction’s endorsement of photography as a viable surveillance technique may have contributed to the “widespread deployment of photography in actual nineteenth-century police work” (“Making” 136).

Detectives Dupin and Holmes both embody a type of precise, machine-like vision that can be described as photographic. This vision functions to reverse the process of obliteration, to develop traces—and to conquer incognito. Not only do these characters register minute details seemingly invisible to others, they are able to pierce through surfaces—whether behaviors, disguises or masks—to read permeable interiors and identify the criminals in our midst. While Dupin’s method retains some acceptance of the physiognomic model of identification, it is also

aligned with or enhanced by the promise of photographic technology. Holmes's method, honed several decades after Dupin, rejects the physiognomic model of identification to a greater degree and embraces the individuationist approach to criminology that came into vogue in the later decades of the nineteenth century. In both fictional universes, the detective is a figure who renders criminal identities legible and brings transparency to urban mysteries.

However, the Dupin and Holmes stories also reflect Poe and Doyle's differing attitudes, both hopeful and doubtful, about the limits of photographic vision. In Poe's Dupin stories, while the detective himself seems to embody the ideal of social legibility or total transparency, that ideal is never completely accessible to the reader because some fundamental opacity is always retained. In Doyle's Holmes' stories, wherein Holmes elucidates to Watson (and readers) all the stubborn details of a mystery as "elementary," transparency seems to carry the day. Within the Holmes canon, there is less opacity and more reassurance that identity is always legible.

However, even in the Holmes stories, which come closer to imagining a world in which visual technology (as represented by Holmes) can render urban culture totally transparent, on at least one occasion (in "A Scandal in Bohemia") Holmes's vision is compromised or limited both by a stubborn clinging to the physiognomist model of identification and by his own subjectivity.

Holmes, at least in this instance, is not operating as a purely as an "automaton," "calculating machine" or purely objective technology; rather, the application of visual technology cannot be separated from the functioning of subjectivity. Even while photographic vision seems to bring identity into clear focus, identity is exposed as something that is not fixed or permeable, but highly mutable and subject to the imperfections of one's own lenses. Both Poe's and Dupin's detective stories explore the promise and limits of visual technologies, especially in terms of the degree to which identity can be penetrated and social transparency is possible.

## **Beyond Photography: Gertrude Stein's and the Ontological "Whodunit"**

In the works of Poe and Doyle visual technology (and especially photography)—as represented by the figure of the detective—plays an important role in the process of identification. The identity of the criminal or murderer is a puzzle that can be solved within the paradigm of photographic technology and other visually based diagnostics (such as physiognomy and phrenology). In contrast, I argue that Stein's detective novel *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* is post-photographic, because the realization of identity lies outside the reach of photographic technology or visual penetration. Likewise, the novel privileges aural over visual evidence. Though Stein does not mention photography in *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*, it is possible to glean some of her attitudes towards the technology in the short text "Photograph" (1920)—which Stein subtitles "a Play in Five Acts" but which might also be read as a poem—in *Last Operas and Plays*. Stein conceives of identity as something too expansive, too elusive to be captured or contained in a photograph, as she writes in "Photograph": "Photographs are small. They reproduce well. / I enlarge better. / Don't say that practically. / And so we resist" (152). Photography is described as something to be resisted, perhaps because it leaves Stein "very sleepy and very burned. / Burned by the sun today" (154). Not only is too much light uncomfortable, but in photography it produces an overexposed image, which results in a loss of detail. Ironically, too much illumination can limit rather than expand our knowledge. Stein's response to feeling "burned" is to "Stand up and sing"—again, an expansion or release, a refusal to be contained within the frame (154).

While Stein's *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* is preoccupied with the questions of identity that, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, are at the heart of the detective genre, the

novel simultaneously undermines the logic of the “whodunit?” formula, reframing questions of identity in ontological terms. Identity is not the object of the investigation, but rather the starting point for an ontological quest. Stein’s detective novel never confirms the identity of the murderer, nor does it establish whether a murder has even taken place. Identity is elusive, and it can’t be realized visually but only epistemologically.

Stein’s love of detective fiction is well known—and though this interest has been acknowledged by critics it is often dismissed as one of her many “idiosyncracies—akin to her fascination with automobiles or garages” (Landon 488). Stein was a keen reader of detective novels, often reading several in a week. In *Everybody’s Autobiography* Stein writes about why they hold her interest: “I never was interested in cross word puzzles or any kind of puzzles but I do like detective stories. I never try to guess who has done the crime and if I did would be sure to guess wrong but I like somebody being dead and how it moves along...” (2). According to Stein’s biographer John Malcolm Brinnan, Stein’s reading preferences throughout her life remained Shakespeare, Samuel Richardson’s epistolary novel *Clarissa*, and detective novels (Holland 540). Brooks Landon writes that Stein expressed an interest in detective fiction as early as 1923, and in the years 1933-1936 pursued “the radical intensification and perhaps the philosophical development of that interest” (489). She wrote frequently about her obsession in her own work, including in “Subject Cases: Background of a Detective Story” (1923), *The Geographical History of America* (1936), “What are Masterpieces and Why There Are So Few of Them” (1936), *Everybody’s Autobiography* (1937), and “Why I Like Detective Stories” (1937). In addition, Stein made several attempts at writing her own detective stories or detective-

themed stories, including “Is Dead” (1936), “A Waterfall and Piano” (1936), “Three Sisters Who are Not Sisters” (a play; 1943), and *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*.<sup>72</sup>

A few critics have argued that there is an important link between Stein’s interest in detective fiction and her conceptual concerns and theory of writing.<sup>73</sup> Other critics have discussed the relation of detective fiction to modernism. John Herbert Gill writes that Alice B. Toklas—in the chapter of her cookbook called “Murder in the Kitchen”—attributes Stein’s first fascination with detective stories to her view that the genre is “typical of the twentieth century way of viewing life” (98). Laura Marcus argues that the genre may have appealed to high modernists such as Stein because it allowed them to “escape rather than explore depth psychology” (250). Similarly, Michael Holquist<sup>74</sup> notes that “The same people who spend their days with Joyce were reading Agatha Christie at night” arguing that modernists were drawn to detective fiction because it offered an escape from the irrational modes of high literature, such as the exploration of myths or the subconscious, through its reassuring rationalism. Modernism, says Holquist, straddles a position “between the high art of the novel with its bias towards depth and psychology and the popular art of the detective story with its flatness of character and setting” (qtd. in Marcus 249).

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<sup>72</sup> On Stein’s interest in detective fiction, see Landon 487-489, from which I drew for most of this background except where otherwise noted.

<sup>73</sup> See Susanne Rohr, who argues that Stein’s interest in detective fiction was epistemological, and stemmed from her exploration of the distinction between “human nature” and “human mind” (595); and Landon, who argues that detective stories held “a larger significance for her career and for her theory of writing,” citing both Donald Sutherland’s suggestion that Stein had a structural interest in detective fiction and Richard Bridgman’s speculation that Stein’s interest in the genre was motivated by more personal and psychological concerns, such as guilt over the “crime” of her success and anxiety and insecurity following the success of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (488).

<sup>74</sup> See “Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Post-War Fiction,” *New Literary History*, 3.1 (Autumn 1971): 147.

Stein herself, in “What are Masterpieces and Why Are There So Few of Them” (1936), called detective fiction “the only really modern novel form” because it “gets rid of human nature by having the man dead to begin with the hero is dead to begin with so you have so to speak got rid of the event before the book begins” (87). Commenting on this passage, Marcus writes, “The significance of the murder in detective narrative, in this account, is that it kills off both character and event, creating a radically altered literary space” (Marcus 250). Marcus further argues that Stein was especially interested in the radical narrative possibilities of detective fiction, which “intertwined with her foremost preoccupation, the question of identity and displacement” (Marcus 251). Again, Marcus quotes Stein: “So if this Everybody’s Autobiography is to be the Autobiography of every one it is not to be any connection between any one and any one because now there is none. That is what makes detective stories such good reading, the man being dead he is not really in connection to anyone. If he is it is another kind of a story and not a detective story” (Stein qtd. in Marcus 251). While Stein’s *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* can be interpreted as a modernist expression of the detective genre, I argue that it can also be read as a post-modern incarnation, wherein crimes are not solved, murderers are not identified, unease is never soothed, and the quest for meaning or order is continuously diverted in favor of a meta-discourse on the nature of identity.

Stein’s interest in detective fiction is central to her inquiry into the nature of identity, a question that preoccupied her throughout her career and which served as the conceptual engine for much of her work. As Stein writes in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, everything comes down to identity: “The thing is like this, it is all the question of identity. It is all a question of the outside being outside and the inside being inside. As long as the outside does not put a value on you then it gets inside or rather if the outside puts a value on you then all your inside gets to be outside”



(48). What is the relation between “outside” and “inside” and how do we distinguish between the two? Questions of identity trouble Stein. In “The Gradual Making of Americans” (1935),<sup>75</sup> Stein recalls that from a young age she was fascinated by what defined identity or made each individual unique: “I wanted to know what was inside each one which made them that one,” she writes, later finding herself “tremendously occupied with finding out what was inside myself to make me what I was” (242). Her interest in interior life and mental and physical processes fueled an interest in psychology, which she pursued at Radcliffe through her study with William James, and later in the four years she spent at Johns Hopkins Medical School. In 1898, Stein found herself disengaged from the primary objectives of the experiments she was working on but “enormously interested in the types of their [the subjects’] characters that it was what I even then thought of as the bottom nature of them...” (“Gradual” 243).

In her magnum opus *The Making of Americans* (written 1906-1908; published 1925) Stein attempts to capture what she calls “the bottom nature” of everyone. She defines bottom nature<sup>76</sup> as “the nature or natures mixed up in them to make the whole of them in anyway it mixes up in them,” and asserts that it is revealed through repetitions, “slowly everything comes out from each one in the kind of repeating each one does in the different parts and kinds of living they have in them” (“Gradual” 244). Using a methodology reminiscent of the cataloging and chart-obsessed nineteenth century-physiognomists but toward very different ends, Stein begins “to make charts of all the people I had ever known or seen or met or remembered” (“Gradual” 245). Stein writes, “[W]hen I began *The Making of Americans* I knew I really did know that

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<sup>75</sup> This text is one of the *Lectures in America* delivered by Stein in 1934-1934.

<sup>76</sup> Stein defines bottom nature variously in multiple passages both in “The Gradual Making of the Americans” and in *The Making of Americans*. Miller cites George B. Moore, who, in his book length study of *The Making of Americans*, defines bottom nature as “the essential quality of being distinguishable in each of us,” writing that Stein conceives of bottom natures as “unchangeable...idealized conceptualizations” (Moore qtd. in Miller 54).

complete description is a possible thing” (“Gradual” 255). She is confident that she “could finally describe really describe every kind of human being that ever was or is or would be living” and that “the enigma of the universe could in this way be solved” (“Gradual” 246).

Stein, at this point, believes, not only that every kind of human type can be described, but that each individual was a key to understanding identity in more universal terms: “And so I say and I saw that complete description of every kind of human being that ever could or would be living is not such a very extensive thing because after all it can be all contained inside in any one and finally it can be done” (“Gradual” 253). Given Stein’s interest in discovering the universal by way of the individual, it is not surprising that Matt Miller concludes in his essay “Makings of Americans: Whitman and Stein’s Poetics of Inclusion” that “[T]he majority of the characters in *The Making of Americans* possess little to no strong individuality, but Stein painstakingly, meticulously combs through their personalities for the slightest hint, even if she eventually dismisses them” (53). Miller writes that Stein’s methodology “‘averages’ the vast majority of human character types” (55). In this sense, Stein’s characters exist more as composites rather than individuals, reminiscent perhaps of Galton’s composite photographs (discussed earlier in this chapter)—at least in terms of serving a universalizing impulse though not sharing Galton’s eugenics-driven ideological goals. Contrary to Galton’s agenda, Miller argues that Stein’s project in *The Making of Americans* is: “To recover the strains of queer individuality into a new, more pluralistic system of understanding diversity,” and to “define a new concept of centrality to replace the idea of conventional bourgeois respectability” (53). “Thus,” concludes Miller, Stein “reflecting on the epistemological crisis of early modernism, replaces the romantic authority of the poet with a new kind of hybrid poetic/scientific authority” (55). Stein applies and adapts her

training in the methodologies of the late-nineteenth century scientist, steeped in typing and cataloging, to the twentieth-century problem of redefining identity in an expanded field.

The certainty Stein expresses in *The Making of Americans* about the possibility of pinning down or distilling identity is absent in some of Stein's later works. While it is not within the purview of this chapter to trace the evolution of Stein's theories of identity from *The Making of Americans* through her later works, I want to point out here the evident shift in Stein's ideas about identity in several works written 25 years later—"Identity A Poem" (1935), "What Are Masterpieces and Why Are There So Few of Them," and *Blood on the Dining Room Floor*—in which she expresses more doubt about the knowability of identity. Stein's "Identity A Poem,"<sup>77</sup> begins with the claim "I am me because my little dog knows me" (71). But later in the play Stein proceeds to undermine the certainty of this statement, posing the troubling question about what happens to this axiom if she can't identify her own dog: "I am me because my little dog knows me. / Which is he. / No which is he. / I am I why. / So there. I am I where." (74). Likewise, a similarly vexing challenge to identity arises if Stein's dog doesn't know her: "I am I because my little dog knows me, but perhaps he does not and if he did I would not be I. Oh no oh no" (75). The certainty of the statement Stein makes at the beginning of the play—"I am me because my little dog knows me"—is gradually eroded, giving way to questions: On what basis can we claim identity? How is Identity established? How do we know who we are, and for that matter, how do we know who anyone else is? Identity is always elusive: "The person and the dog are there and the dog is there and the person is there and where or where is their identity, is the identity there anywhere" (72). Or perhaps it is even non-existent: "And so dogs and humans nature have no identity" (74). Any stable notion of identity is repeatedly undermined throughout the play. The

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<sup>77</sup> Dydo notes in *A Stein Reader* that Stein also explored the question of identity in other late works, including *Four in America* and *Ida* (588).

instability of identity remains a theme throughout Stein's works, as it is in *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*.

A year after writing "Identity a Poem," Stein continues to reflect on the problem of identity in her essay "What Are Masterpieces and Why Are There So Few of Them." Making a distinction between "human nature and the human mind," Stein concludes, "one has no identity that is when one is in the act of doing anything. Identity is recognition, you know who you are because you and others remember anything about yourself but essentially you are not that when you are doing anything" (84). It comes back again, she says, to "I am I because my little dog knows me" (84). As Susanne Rohr summarizes Stein's argument, "Human nature is connected to memory and recognition, and recognition is connected to identity, and identity is what destroys creativity...The human mind, on the other hand, is that 'memoryless' state of consciousness where the creating subject does not recognize itself in the act of creation..." (595). Stein writes that "At any moment when you are you you are you without the memory of yourself because if you remember yourself while you are you you are not for purposes of creating you"—in other words, in the instant in which one knows/remembers who one is or self-consciously inhabits identity one ceases to be oneself, or at least a creating self (Stein "What" 85-86). Paradoxically, it is not possible to know oneself and be oneself at the same time. Identity is mercurial—it can only be reached through memory and can only be truly realized in a state of forgetting or unselfconsciousness.

Detective fiction, argues Stein, gets around this problem because it "gets rid of human nature by having the man dead to begin with" (87). As Rohr concludes, "What makes detective novels so valuable for Stein is that the classic twentieth-century genre allows the human mind to rid itself most easily of the constraints of human nature. Or to put it differently, this is the genre

where the human mind is liberated through the elimination of the mortal remains of human nature” (595). The detective genre, according to Stein, has the potential to free the mind from the paradox of identity, releasing us into the state of not-knowing that fosters creativity. Any certain knowledge about identity is not only unrealizable—as Stein says, “We live in time and identity but we do not know time and identity...”—it is also undesirable. In this sense, while Stein’s *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* does employ many of the conventions of the traditional “whodunit,” it also goes against the grain of the genre in failing to identify a murderer.

The discovery of identity—the identity of the murderer or criminal—is the narrative engine of any detective story. The promise of this discovery and the tantalizing clues along the way is what engages the reader, keeps us reading to the end. Which brings us back to the question that has dominated this chapter, how do we identify criminals in our midst? In “American Crimes and How They Matter” (1935), Stein shares an anecdote about being invited to ride along with police officers in the “homicidal squad car.” She recalls her conversation with the sergeant: “We talked together a lot about not crime but whether any one would know a criminal if one saw one in another place than where one was accustomed to see them I asked the sergeant could he tell in a town he had never been in which ones were men who could commit crimes. He said very likely he could but he also very possibly would be mistaken...” (101). Even the police sergeant admits that there can be mistakes in identification—ambiguity.

Stein’s novel *Blood On the Dining-Room Floor* exploits this ambiguity. As Rohr observes, she playfully engages the conventions of the detective novel, “presenting all the standard elements of the genre,” such as “a startling observation, a motive, a witness, a confession and some thorough investigation of the events” (596). However, what is missing is the most critical, defining element of the detective novel: “What we don’t have, though, is a

result—the single elements of the genre are at no point brought together to betray the culprit” (Rohr 569). Dydo comments on how Stein uses our expectations of the standard conventions of the genre to play the reader:

The crisp logic of the traditional detective story—the engine of discovery—is bent out of its sharp shape. We have no culprit, no witness. We have only twisting whispers, changing scenarios, disconnected tenses, fragments dangling in a story and whispers of incessant, unspoken conversations behind half open doors. Always we expect ratiocination, and always it gets cut off. Stein starts a topic but then turns a corner. She sets herself up as a detective to explain what happened, the Stein way, not with step-by-step detection (Dydo & Rice 568).

Stein’s objectives and those of the detective story diverge at a certain point. Stein is not interested in answers so much as she is in questions, in engaging the mind and imagination. As she says in “American Crimes and Why They Matter,” “Everybody remembers a crime when nobody finds out anything about who did it...” (102). Likewise, Stein seeks to expand or liberate identity rather than narrowly focus or define it, because, as she argues in “What Are Masterpieces,” dwelling self-consciously in identity inhibits the creative impulse. And so in *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* Stein stubbornly withholds from us what every detective story must deliver—a murderer.

Before we can begin to take a closer look at *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*, whose disjointed narrative requires some explication, it is useful to review the mysterious events of the summer of 1933, which provide the inspiration for Stein’s novel. In *Everybody’s Autobiography*, Stein relates: “It was a funny thing that summer so many things happened...I have so often wanted to make a story of them a detective story of everything happening that summer and here I

am trying to do it again...” (53). Stein first tells the story of that summer in *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*, which she began in 1933, then again in “Is Dead” (1936), “A Waterfall and a Piano” (1936), and in *Everybody’s Autobiography*; from these four texts, it is possible to piece together the “plot” of *Blood*.<sup>78</sup> For Stein, the summer was a chain of mysterious events that become linked for her through coincidence. As Landon observes, these events “seemed to convince Stein that the events of the summer added up to a great mystery”; in *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* Stein combs these events looking for patterns and themes “in an attempt to find the central, unifying mystery she felt must be there somewhere” (491). The novel is Stein’s attempt to make sense of the strange events of the summer in the form of a sort of ontological inquest.

Stein and Toklas spent the unsettling summer of 1933 in their country house in the French town of Bilingnin. The season begins with a lot of trouble with servants for Stein and Toklas—hirings and firings, comings and goings, and general domestic unrest. The arrival of two visitors corresponds with strange happenings (covered in the first chapter of *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* and in *Everybody’s Autobiography*): blood found on the dining room floor of Stein’s house (which provides the title for Stein’s novel), a car that wouldn’t start because of sabotage, a telephone that didn’t work because the lines had been tampered with, and Stein’s writing desk scattered with hair and dust. The servants were fired, but no answers surfaced. Later that summer, Madame Pernollet, a woman with whom Stein had been friendly and who was the wife of a hotel proprietor in a nearby town, fell from a window onto the cement courtyard below and broke her back; she died five days later. Alexander, the village horticulturist, put forward the

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<sup>78</sup> See *Everybody’s Autobiography*: 53-56, 62-64, and 81-85. In addition to the primary texts cited above, see also Gil (“Afterward” of *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*) 90-96, Dydo & Rice 564-566, Landon 490-491 and Rohr 594. I have drawn from these sources for the summary of the events of the summer of 1933 that I provide in the following paragraph.

explanation that Madame Pernollet was a sleepwalker. The death was ruled accidental (Gill 94). However, the event incited town gossip, and Stein's novel circles around the possibilities of suicide and murder. Madame Pernollet had discovered shortly before her death that her husband was having an affair, and that she was visibly unhappy (she weeps repeatedly in the novel). It was with the sister of Alexander the horticulturist, a maid in the employ of the Pernollets, with whom Monsieur Pernollet had carried on an affair. *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* hints at the possibility of a brother-sister scheme of murder and cover-up. That summer a second death occurred, which is not included in *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* (though the text does refer to characters associated with the story); however, the death appears in "A Waterfall and a Piano" and *Everybody's Autobiography*.<sup>79</sup> The body of the victim, an English woman and an acquaintance of Stein, was found in a ravine with two bullet holes in her head. Though the death was reputedly a suicide,<sup>80</sup> Stein seems to entertain doubts in "A Waterfall and a Piano," speculating, based on a few anecdotes, whether it is possible for anyone to shoot themselves twice.<sup>81</sup>

The narrator of Stein's novel fulfills the role of detective, but employing detecting strategies that are radically different from those of Dupin or Holmes. The narrator/detective promises to tell the reader what happened—"This is what happened..."—beginning a circuitous narrative in which very few "facts" are imparted (13). What we do know at the beginning of the novel—that Madame Pernollet has fallen from a window to her death—is the single fact that seems to stick at the end of the novel. It is never made clear whether a crime has indeed taken place, or who the murderer (if there is a murderer) is, though the narrator shares some suspicions.

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<sup>79</sup> See *Everybody's Autobiography* 81-85.

<sup>80</sup> Dydo & Rice cite Bridgeman (*Gertrude Stein in Pieces*), who notes, without documentation, that both Madame Pernollet's and the English woman's deaths had been ruled suicides (Dydo & Rice 566 n. 32).

<sup>81</sup> See excerpt from Stein's "A Waterfall and a Piano" in Gill 95.



The narrator is obsessed by different kinds of “facts” than those collected by Dupin and Holmes. Instead of focusing the investigation on one culprit, the narrator traces the family trees and connections among the villagers. Much of the “evidence” the narrator accumulates is through conversation and gossip, which the narrator actively cultivates. Listening, then, is more important than seeing in *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*.

Unlike Dupin and Holmes, the narrator’s mode of inquiry privileges the auditory over the visual—listening over seeing. Evidence regarding identity is not reduced to visual information, i.e., the sorts of things Bertillon measured or mug shots revealed. The narrator frequently asks the reader to “listen”—as in “Listen carefully” (13), “Listen to me” (50), “Listen to all about Alexander” (53), “Listen while I tell you all the time” (79). Likewise, characters in the novel are listeners: “She listened, she listened about everything and helped him to hear it. She helped him to hear everything. She heard everything, and she told everybody everything and this gave the eldest son the horticulturist’s eldest son a great reputation” (33). Unlike the detective stories of Poe and Doyle, which often contain detailed physical descriptions, Stein’s detective novel contains very little physical description. Madame Pernollet is described as having a “small but rather flat of face,” Monsieur Pernollet is described as a “little man,” but Alexander, the prime suspect, is never described at all (17). No one ever seems to *see* anything in *Blood*: “What happened, nobody saw, but everybody knew,” and there is no definitive witness to Madame Pernollet’s death (13). And yet the narrator is also frustratingly contradictory, insisting in other places “Now you see what there is to see,” “So now you see” or declaring that “Everybody knows, and they need not say. This is why everybody talks and nobody says, because everybody sees, and everybody says they do” (17, 65, 79). However, these statements are eroded by the irony that in fact nothing is ever illuminated for the reader, and what—if anything—“everyone

sees” is never revealed. “Seeing” doesn’t seem to refer literally to a visual sense, but rather to something like a sixth sense—it is a matter of mind or instinct, of *knowing*.

The narrator also employs a number of rhetorical strategies that don’t seem to further the investigation; rather, they generate doubt or uncertainty and seem to prod frustrated readers to solve the mystery on their own. As Rohr writes, “The text denies resolution for a number of reasons, the most obvious reason is that it wants the reader to do the ratiocination” (Rohr 597). One such rhetorical strategy is the continual accumulation of questions that don’t have answers. However, these are not technically questions at all but rather declarative statements—ending with a period instead of a question mark—that seem to function to short-circuit or undermine the rhetorical mode of the question: “How did she die”; “Did she walk in her sleep”; “Can you see crime in it” (15, 21, 49).

Likewise, the narrator’s investigation is marked throughout the text by a persistent pattern of suggestion or insistence and then denial. For example, the narrator mentions several times that Alexander the horticulturist did not sleep well at night, a fact which the narrator finds suspicious: “It was extraordinary how little he slept” (5). The narrator goes on to suggest a possible connection between the fact that Alexander can’t sleep and the fact that he has said that Madame Pernollet walked in her sleep: “Now is there any connection between this and the fact that he had said that the hotel-keep’s wife she who had not died in her bed, but on the cement walk instead walked in her sleep” (39). However, the narrator seems to retract this insinuation of guilt in the observations “I think in any case his saying this thing had no connection with his not sleeping” and “I think it possible she did walk in her sleep” (40, 39). Likewise, though the narrator claims not to put much stock in gossip—“It is not of the smallest importance what everybody knows about anybody’s ways not of the smallest importance. In a way it does not

make any difference even what is said”—the narrator is also a primary conduit of gossip, actively spreading stories, even in the very next lines (22).

Another rhetorical strategy the narrator employs is to involve the reader through direct address. The tone is intimate, even conspiratorial, and the narrator alternately promises revelation—“Remember I wish to tell you in every way what they do not say” and badgers the reader to keep up with the convoluted tale: “Has everybody got it straight” or “Do you remember what happened” (39, 26, 28). The narrator also continually addresses a character named Lizzie, who may be a personification of the audience,<sup>82</sup> or perhaps the notorious suspected murderess Lizzie Borden: “Lizzie do you understand,” “Lizzie do Lizzie do try to understand,” “Of course Lizzie you do understand of course you do” (14, 61, 27). As Gil argues, Lizzie Borden is, after all, the “patron saint of unsolved crimes,” which is the type of crime that most interests Stein (88-89). Stein refers to Borden in “American Crimes and How They Matter,” both for her endurance in the collective imagination and her “integrity”; much like the characters in *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*, “she held back nothing she never lied but she never told anybody anything” (102-103).

Unlike the urban crime stories of Poe and Doyle, Stein’s detective story, which takes place in a rural setting and begins “They had a country house,” challenges preconceptions that “nothing happens in the country” (11, 51). The narrator insists that more happens to a family living in the country in five years than one living in the city, including the breaking up of families, the banishing of fathers—and the killing of mothers (51). Even sleepy little French villages have their secrets. Crime, in fact, is everywhere, and the cliché of the peaceful, rustic country house is displaced by something more unpredictable and ominous. A curious thing about

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<sup>82</sup> Landon argues that Lizzie, a name that probably came from Alice B. Toklas, is a personified or surrogate audience who represents Stein’s often-vexed relationship with her readers (494).

the country is that everyone shuts their doors, but, as the narrator concludes, “The more you see the country the more you do not wonder why they shut the door” (46). In this respect, the residents of the country seem to guard privacy more closely than urbanites. A character in *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* “was not able to live continuously in the city as she had an absolute need for privacy” (32).

In “American Crimes and How They Matter,” Stein relates that American soldiers in France were troubled by the fact that “all the houses were all shut up with shutters that they all had walls around them and that nobody could look in” (102). The shuttered houses were a contrast to the transparency of American homes with their open windows. As Stein explains, “Europeans do not like anybody outside to come inside unless they are invited beside they like to feel that once inside they are inside and once outside they are outside they cannot comfortably mix the inside and outside” (“American” 102). Maintaining this boundary between inside and outside and preserving privacy takes on even greater importance in small country villages where “everybody knew where everybody went and what everybody did” (*Blood* 71). People in small villages such as the one depicted in *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* live an odd mixture of very public lives, in which they are under continuous surveillance by neighbors and gossip is rampant, and very private lives, in which the boundaries of home and family are also closely guarded. But ultimately, even in a small town, as *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* illustrates, no one really ever knows anyone.

Alexander, the horticulturist, emerges as the prime suspect in the novel. In addition to Alexander’s claim that Madame Pernollet was a sleepwalker and that Alexander himself cannot sleep, there are a number of other things that the narrator seems to find troubling and suspicious about him. The narrator suggests that “Alexander may be a witness,” which would put him at the

scene of the “crime” (62). However, much of what we know about Alexander is based on gossip the narrator both collects and spreads, a contrast to the methodical and camera-like precision of the observations made by detectives Dupin and Holmes. The narrator promises “to tell and to tell very well very very well how the horticulturists family lived to tell everything” and asks the reader to “Listen to all about Alexander” (22, 53). The narrator notes that Alexander’s four younger brothers and four sisters exactly resemble him and his mother, implying possible incest. The narrator plants this nasty story but quickly undermines its credibility: “But of course this is not possible. It is foolish to think such a thing possible since there was only two years difference between every brother and sister until the youngest” (22). Alexander is also reputed to have conducted a number of affairs with married women in village whose “gardens” he “tended”:

Anyway they all started to live in their way and Alexander the horticulturist knew their way and hoped some day that they would have a garden and he would do what he would for their garden. Of course he will. That is what happens in the country. Of course they will.

It makes no difference how often it is said that everybody everybody can go to bed.

That is the arrangement they have made (49).

Reflecting on this story, the narrator proposes: “Can you see crime in it. No not I” (77). While pursuing Alexander throughout the investigation as a prime subject, the narrator also continually questions what constitutes a crime, with statements like “This is not a crime,” as well as whether crime even exists—“There are so many ways in which there is no crime” (39, 42). In questioning whether or not a crime exists or a murder has been committed, the novel challenges or renders ambiguous two central conventions of the detective genre.

Likewise, the novel also undermines the notion that identifying a murderer is, to quote Holmes, an “elementary” deduction, instead revealing identity to be complex, fluid, and elusive. With the exception of Alexander, very few characters in the novel are named. Most characters are referred to by their roles, whether “hotel-keeper,” “mechanic” or “horticulturist.” The character Alexander is first introduced as the horticulturist, and we do not learn his name until halfway into the novel. Besides their jobs, people are identified especially through their roles within the family context—husband, wife, father, mother, eldest son, youngest daughter—underscoring that people are not just individuals in isolation, but rather that identity is the product of an individual’s place within the contexts of family and community. Alexander is identified by his many roles. Besides a horticulturist, Alexander is identified as “the eldest” (he is the eldest son in a family of eight), “the hero,” a philanderer, a would-be priest, and a suspect in a potential murder. The text refers to Alexander on one page as the horticulturist, on another as the eldest, in other places by name. It is often difficult to keep track of who is being discussed, and the exercise requires constantly tracing a chain of referents and linking them together—the “hero,” who is also the eldest, who is also the horticulturist, who is also Alexander. Alexander’s identity comprises many facets, which come together in different combinations. His identity can’t be easily contained by or reduced to a single, cohesive notion of identity.

Alexander is identified not only by who he is (son, brother, horticulturist etc.) but also by what he might have been and what he might be—a priest or a murderer. In *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*, identity is not static but also encompasses potential. The narrator mentions that Alexander’s youngest brother was to be a priest, “To make up for the eldest one who wanted to be one. What had stopped him. Everything. The war. Poverty” (27). The war had intervened in Alexander’s life and irrevocably changed his path from priest to horticulturist. Throughout

Stein's novel, the war constantly intrudes in the lives of the villagers, many of whom served in the war, such as Alexander and Monsieur Pernollet, and many more who were affected by it: "He had fought in this war, he would have been a priest before or after or during this war. But not all. Nobody had died. A great many were killed but nobody died" (24). The narrator's words here, insisting that nobody had "died" in the war but that "many were killed" imply that these deaths were in fact murders. In wake of the mass carnage of The Great War, it seems somewhat futile to investigate whether a single death was in fact a crime or to identify one murderer. The war puts into perspective the narrator's questions and reflections on how to define crime and whether it exists, and likewise, how to identify a murderer. If Alexander is a murderer, it is perhaps the war that made him what he is—transformed him from would-be priest to murderer. However the novel reduces him to neither, but rather considers Alexander as the fluid incarnation of all of his roles and potential roles. Near the end of the novel the narrator asks, "will they put the elder brother, do you remember Alexander, away to pray" (73). Playing on multiple meanings, this line emphasizes that Alexander's identity is not solidified—he could be "put away" to pray in a monastery like the priest he could have been or still could be, or "put away" in a jail cell.

It is not just Alexander's identity that is difficult to pin down; throughout the text, identities are often fluid—characters are easily confused with other characters and identities also occasionally merge. In this passage, one of the few in which characters are named, the names don't help us to keep people straight, but rather encourage confusion: "This brings us up to Mabel and to be followed by the confessions of Mary M. in this case. There is no Mary M. in this case, but if there were this is what she would do. / Mary M. does not sound the same as Mary I. or even Mary D. or what is the difference between Mary B. and Mary C." (34). By the end of the passage, the narrator is not even sure if Mary B. and Mary C. are different people—all the

Marys seem to flow together. Not only is it difficult to keep individuals straight, it also difficult to keep track of all the families the narrator has introduced—and the possible crimes that accumulate:

You call this person you are kind to Mabel if her name is Mabel but the person who is kind is not called Mabel. Oh not at all. But to everybody's astonishment this time it was the other way around.

How confused are you all but I, I am not confused.

It is really not confusing.

How many house and families do you know about now.

One two three four five.

And how many crimes.

One two three.

And how many possible crimes (33).

The narrator also tangles the identities of the suspected murderer, Alexander, and the dead woman, Madame Pernollet. While Alexander is identified by first name, the dead woman never is, though the narrator, who must know her name, speculates on what it might have been while withholding it from the reader. Teasing the reader with denials which nonetheless insinuate connections, the narrator links Madame Pernollet both to Alexander, adding a layer of gender ambiguity, as well to the original woman, Eve, which universalizes her rather than individuates her: "her name was not Alexandrine, as may be, not any one, can or cannot dream. For which, for sooth, for faith. Eat Eve when inclined. Her name, the name of the one who was dead was not Eve or Eva. Of course she had a name" (74). Madame Pernollet's familiar name is withheld from readers, just as most names are in the novel. And yet, the narrator implores the reader to



remember names: “Please remember everybody’s name. But nobody had given the names away. They never do when there is only a crime, that is to say a background for a crime” (36). People’s names, like their identities, are not easily given away.

The narrator’s use of pronouns in *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* also works to create ambiguity or to destabilize identity. The narrator frequently uses indefinite pronouns such as “everyone,” “everybody,” “anybody,” “nobody,” that work against defining or identifying individuals: “What happened, nobody saw, but everybody knew” (13), “Everybody proposes that nobody knows even if everybody knows” (25), “everybody talks and nobody says, because everybody sees, and everybody says they do” (79). Subjective personal pronouns often seem to have no referents, or else they have no nearby referent and require the reader to trace back several pages or even chapters to find one, which leads to confusion and misidentification. The first line of the novel begins with a pronoun for which there is no referent: “They had a country house” (11). While this first chapter of the novel begins by describing a series of mysterious events in the house of “they,” “they” are never named nor do we know their numbers, whether two people or a family—though from reading outside the text into Stein’s biography we can identify “they” as Stein and Toklas and the events as those of the strange summer of 1933 that are the origin for *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*.

In tracing Alexander, the reader often has to sift back through chains of pronouns and identities. When we encounter “He had not placed his sisters where they worked,” which takes place in the context of a discussion of the horticulturist’s family, we track back a few paragraphs to a referent to “the eldest of the eight”—which we learn later is Alexander but which has not been established yet—and forward a few paragraphs to “the hero of the garden,” which must be the horticulturist, who, it is confirmed on the following page is the oldest: “The hero was older

than the seven, that is to say he was the eldest of eight” (23-24). It is not until twenty pages later that we learn the horticulturist is Alexander: “the eldest of the eight we may call him Alexander” (45). It is possible to establish that the horticulturist is the eldest, who is the hero of the garden, who is also Alexander, but it is a convoluted path through chains of pronoun referents and requires triangulation and re-reading. The reader is often set up to guess at pronouns, as in “She slept and it has not happened. He will have been unhappy and it has not happened”—is “she” Madame Pernollet? Is “he” Monsieur Pernollet? Is “it” the death/murder? (15). In other passages, pronouns are slippery, shifting before our eyes: “They said, that is he said, he the horticulturist said...” (21). The narrator’s shift from “they” to “he” creates confusion, making the distinction between group and individual murky. The narrator plays upon our confusion and compounds it: “He her son may be thought to be thoughtful. Do not confuse the son of the hotel-keeper, she who was dead with the son the eldest horticulturist son Alexander. Listen to me, they had nothing to do with it” (57). Here, the narrator’s attempts to distinguish the son of the hotel keeper from Alexander are undermined by the introduction of the pronoun “they.” The reader of *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* experiences pronouns much as one experiences gossip: the words flow over us and we try to attach them to referents. The experience is like eavesdropping on a conversation in which we hear things out of context and fill in gaps by guessing at who “he” or “she” or “they” may be—and we often guess incorrectly.

Unlike a traditional “whodunit,” Stein’s *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* does not end with the identification of a murderer. In fact, it doesn’t really end at all. Stein herself wrote in “Why I Like Detective Stories” that though she tried to write a detective story, she did not ultimately feel she succeeded: “I did write, it was such a good detective story but nobody did any detecting except just conversation so after all it was not a detective story...on the whole a

detective story has to have if it has not a detective it has to have an ending and my detective story did not have any” (148-149). The first line of the last chapter is “Once upon a time they began it is begun” (78). Rather than following the linear path of the scientific deductive reason that defines the Dupin and Holmes stories, Stein’s narrative turns out to be circular, with the narrator taking us back to where the story began: “There was a country house...” (80). Instead of the accumulated clues coming together to form a solution, the story becomes a loop that endlessly repeats. The narrator reminds us of the chain of servants at the beginning of the novel: “there were one two three four five and now six couples who succeeded one another” (69). This chain of servants doesn’t represent a “coincidence” but a “succession” (69). Likewise, one could conclude that there is not one crime or one murderer, but generations of crimes and generations of murderers that form a succession not unlike the chains of pronouns the narrator strings throughout the text, pronouns which always refer back to something that came before. The “accused,” in time “are all forgotten” (69). Everything repeats, and in time, all will be forgotten—the dead woman will be forgotten, the alleged murderer will be forgotten, just as the war that disrupts the lives of the villagers will likely be forgotten. There is a sense of inevitability, of history repeating itself—and of narrative that is more expansive and universal than individual identity.

Life in the village goes on as it was before the death: “And so dear woman she is dead, she the wife of the hotel-keeper and everybody knew where everybody went and what everybody did, and why everybody hoped and where everybody pleased and spoke and comforted and was answered” (71). Alexander does not leave the village, neither to pray nor to be imprisoned: “His brothers may not say do go away and pray to him because it makes him angry not to stay. Which he does” (81). Alexander’s life continues much as before, and the narrator predicts that there will

be always be women with “gardens” for him to tend: “And so the whole account in count and country. Forgive forget, forewarn foreclose foresee, for they may they be met to bait. He will add each strange lady to his past because they have a garden, hear me because they have a garden” (81). If we are still looking for the murderer, we are left with nobody: “It has to be that holding all together, there must be a family whom nobody lost and nobody cost and nobody nobody which is nobody” (80). In the end, “There is no further guess. Everybody knows, and they need not say” (79).

And yet, the narrator suggests earlier in the narrative that the people of the village do not look at each in quite the same way after these events: “There are servants, there are marriages, there are hotels, there are horticulturists, there are butchers, there are other people living, there are markets and there are garages and there are automobiles. Of course there are and in each case it is all strange that they did not look upon each other before. Before when” (41). The specter of “crime” seems to transform their relationships: “Think of it, think how near crime is, and how near crime is not being here at all. Think of it. Think how strange it is that if they met they had never met. Oh dear, think of it” (41).

As Stein says in *Everybody's Autobiography*, “I never get over the fact that you are very likely to know everybody a long time and the difference between knowing them a long time and not knowing them at all is really nothing” (57). *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* expresses this sense of “not knowing”—even embraces it. In spite of the fact that that in such a small town everyone “talks,” and everyone “knows,” and there are supposedly “no secrets,” no one really knows anyone well enough (81). Identity remains something that is not transparent or easily defined. It is not realized as something that can be captured by the mug shot’s visual inventory,

but rather lives large in the expanded field outside the frame. It is in this sense that I call *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* a detective novel that is post-photographic.

## **Conclusion**

Like nineteenth-century physiognomists and criminologists who utilized scientific methodology and new technologies such as the camera to render identity legible, the literary detective can be read as an extension of the project of social legibility. The detective, who functions in the Dupin and Sherlock Holmes stories as a proxy for the camera, can penetrate identity and accurately read the psychological interior—thereby preserving order and transparency, and, by extension, undermining the legitimacy of privacy. Even within this positivist paradigm, Poe and Holmes each express reservations or doubts about the limits of photographic vision; it is possible to see fissures within this visual hegemony. Conversely, in “The Man of the Crowd” and *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*, in which the detectives are unable to penetrate criminal identity, a discomfiting social disorder and opacity reign while privacy and anonymity are retained. Though Gilmore has concluded that the detective tale “moves ineluctably toward an outcome of solution or transparency” (65), I read the “The Man of the Crowd” and *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* as providing meaningful counter-narratives or critiques of this dominant plot arc, revealing identity to be opaque or illegible. The poles of transparency/opacity and order/disorder that shape the detective genre are at the heart of the struggle to define privacy in the age of photography. While this chapter has focused on how photography or photographic vision was employed to read the surface of the body as a key to identity, the next chapter, “The Horrors of Photography and the Mysteries of the Deep:

Photography, Science and Mystery Fiction,” will consider how photographic technology pierces the surface of the body to reveal the secrets of the interior.

### **Three—Transparency and Opacity (or Between Science and the Supernatural): Photography and Mystery Fiction**

#### **Introduction ~ The Horror of Photography and the Mysteries of the Deep**

##### *The Camera Fiend*

The title of the mystery novel *The Camera Fiend*, published in 1911 by the best-selling British mystery writer E.W. Hornung,<sup>83</sup> conveys a sense of the anxiety around photography at the turn of the century as well as the deep suspicion—even fear—conjured by the figure of the photographer. *The Camera Fiend* is a tale of a deranged German-born intellectual, Dr. Baumgartner, whose monomaniacal obsession is to photograph the human soul. Baumgartner's library, which includes photographic yearbooks, reports from the Society on Psychical Research,<sup>84</sup> and secondhand books on the occult, reflects topics that were in vogue in period media and which were seriously discussed in London's intellectual circles at a time when Spiritualism had taken root with great fervor.

Baumgartner, author of several scholarly articles on spirit photography, approaches ontological problems as a scientist, arguing that revealing the soul is not a question of “spiritualism” but a technical problem that requires “no other medium than a good sound lens in

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<sup>83</sup> E.W. Hornung (1866-1921), the brother-in-law of Arthur Conan Doyle, was the author of the popular “Raffles” series of crime stories, which were adapted for stage, screen, and later, television. The series also enjoyed popularity in the United States. *The Camera Fiend* was in print as recently as 2010, with a new edition published by Createspace; it is also currently available as a Kindle Edition from Halcyon Press.

<sup>84</sup> The Society for Psychical Research (SPR), an organization that survives through the present, was founded by a group of Cambridge scholars in 1882. SPR describes its mission as: “Psychical research and parapsychology are concerned with the scientific investigation of the ways that organisms communicate and interact with each other and with the environment, that appear to be inexplicable within current scientific models. Stories of the paranormal (apparitions, prophetic dreams and visions, inexplicable awareness of events faraway, divination, miraculous cures etc.) have been with us since antiquity, but it was only in the nineteenth century that the subject began to be studied in a systematic and scientific way.”

a light-tight camera” (65). Citing photography’s success in documenting phenomena undetected by the human eye as well the advances of “the branch of physics known as ‘florescence’” (i.e., X-ray photography), Baumgartner argues that only the “lamp of spirit photography” can illuminate the “path to the Invisible”—including the “invisible spirit of man” (322). He further theorizes that there are only two instants when the soul can be “caught” by the camera: the moment of dissolution, i.e. death, and that following dream flight “when the soul returns to its prison (66).” Because Baumgartner’s dream experiments are unsuccessful and he is denied access to hospital deathbeds and prison executions, he confesses that he had to “resort to taking human life” (321).

To this end the doctor invents a camera gun that utilizes an automatic pistol in place of the second lens of a stereoscope camera. He conducts his lethal “experiments” on subjects he deems to be “the moral or material wreckage of life”—those who “had nothing to live for, or they had no right to live,” such as the alcoholics or desperate poor who take shelter in the park at night (324-5). The doctor even blames his victims’ perceived immorality for the failure of his experiments—he conjectures that these “human derelicts” are so “sodden with drink, debauched, degraded and spiritually blurred or blunted to the last degree” that they are bereft of souls to yield to the cause of spirit photography (333). The “cold-blooded” Dr. Baumgartner’s “wintry smile,” eyes of “cold steel” and “cool and keen” brain express the technology’s “intellectual cruelty,” and his monomania exemplifies science’s worst excesses and follies. While Baumgartner values the technology’s potential to reveal “the permanent life of the spirit” over the finitude of human life, asserting that he would “sacrifice a million lives to prove that there is no such thing as death,” the novel’s protagonist—an adolescent boy nicknamed Pocket Upton, who is himself an amateur photographer as well as a fledgling detective—defends the humanity



of one of his victims, a Hyde Park beggar the doctor labels a “worthless creature” but whom Pocket’s mourning reclaims: “It was a human life” (97, 321).

*The Camera Fiend* brings together several threads running through late-Victorian anxieties around photography, including: the potential for abuse in utilizing photography for criminology, wherein the camera’s identification of the criminal face or body may in fact be a misidentification; the concern that new technologies are misused through dehumanizing cruelty, madness or lack of ethical boundaries; the physical and semantic link between the camera and the gun enacted by the “snapshot” as well as the association between photography, death and the terrifying possibilities of unseen worlds *beyond*. The fear of photography is the fear of deep penetration: of the private interior, body, mind, —and ultimately the piercing of something so deep and unknowable that it can only be approximated by the terms “soul” or “spirit.”

At *The Camera Fiend*’s conclusion readers are spared any revelation of the interior’s indelicate mysteries by the innocence of children—Dr. Baumgartner’s angelic niece Phillida and the righteous Pocket. Though Phillida rescues Dr. Baumgartner’s camera from the Thames, where it floats like a deadly creature with “one long, thin, reddish tentacle finishing in a bulb that moved about gently in the rain pocked water,” Pocket accidentally destroys its final plate—potentially an image of the murdered Dr. Baumgartner’s spirit. Exposed to light and cracked through the middle, the plate—moments ago a potential portal to the Other Side—is now merely a “blank sheet of glass and gelatine... a slate from which some infinitely precious message had been expunged unread” (317). Pocket advises Phillida to dispose of the device as she wishes and offers her a chivalrous pledge to spare her “the supreme humiliation and distress of sharing their secret” (343). Phillida promptly casts the camera and its destructive secrets back into the Thames “as a body is committed to the deep” (345). With the camera cast into the darkness of a watery

grave, the boundary between this world and the next is preserved intact and order is restored—at least for the time being—but with the lingering knowledge that this permeable boundary was very nearly breached.

The destruction of the camera in *The Camera Fiend* echoes the ending of Rudyard Kipling's 1890 ghost story "At the End of the Passage," in which the protagonist violently smashes a Kodak camera to pieces and tears up its films lest they reveal the "impossible" secrets of a dead man's eyes. In terms of genre, *The Camera Fiend* is an interesting hybrid of both the detective and mystery genres. Though the plot of the novel centers on the exploits of an amateur boy detective who ultimately does help lead the police to the culprit responsible for a series of mysterious murders, the logic of the narrative is also contrary to that of the traditional detective story, because like the classic mystery tale, it retains an unsettling ambiguity and opacity—functioning to conceal rather than to reveal and to preserve the unsolved mysteries of the deep.

### *Between Science and the Supernatural*

A central question of this dissertation is why photography—more than any other new technology—generates so much anxiety in relation to issues of privacy and interior life at the turn of the twentieth century. I argue that the medium's curious positioning between science (and technology) and the supernatural provides an important context for understanding this unease. While photography is a technological sensation and important new tool of science, it is simultaneously linked to death, the occult, ghosts, and the unconscious. In this chapter I read photography in the context of the cultural history of the last decades of the nineteenth century, exploring the links between the proliferation of photography, the peak in popularity of the mystery genre, the rise of the Spiritualist movement, and the advent of psychoanalysis.

Photography's position between science and the supernatural also places it between the rational forces of the detective story and the unsettling ambiguities of the mystery tale. Mystery fiction is a loosely defined classification that is frequently used interchangeably with detective fiction. Rather than using "mystery" and "detective" interchangeably, I want to make a distinction between these genres in order to highlight that the classical detective story always pursues rational solutions to crimes and is invested in establishing order, while the mystery story does not always resolve ambiguities. Rather, the mystery depends on ambiguities, quelling forces of disorder or evil only partially or temporarily. Detective fiction is a sub-genre of crime fiction, and features either a professional or amateur detective who solves a crime—frequently a murder. Mystery fiction, a classification that casts a much wider net, can be identified as a sub-genre of detective fiction, but also has roots in the gothic mystery, romance and adventure traditions. The term mystery fiction can apply to a specific type of detective story that focuses on the logical solution to a puzzle: the reader is given clues and competes with the literary detective to solve a crime. It can also apply to ghost stories or stories that have supernatural elements.

However, in *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, John G. Cawelti distinguishes that the fundamental difference between the mystery and "the story of imaginary beings or states" is that in the later mystery is not resolved (43). The classic mystery story is often marked by: a focus on hidden secrets, suspense, fantastic or supernatural elements, and uncertainty. Cawelti argues that in the mystery formula, problems always have a rational solution (42). However, Robert Briney observes in his essay "Death Rays, Demons, and Worms Unknown to Science" that there are many examples of mystery stories in which fantastic or supernatural elements are not explained. In some mysteries, he writes, "the natural and supernatural explanations are developed in parallel and are often left on an equal footing at the end of the story, so that it is up to the reader to decide

which to believe” (238). I will discuss several texts that fit this description, which I have termed “hybrid mystery/detective” stories. I am particularly interested in these hybrid texts, in which “scientific” detecting methodologies and supernatural inquiries are employed in tandem. In these texts the mysteries are only partially illuminated while fundamental aspects remain unresolved. These hybrid texts also speak to photography’s unstable position between science and the supernatural within late Victorian culture, as well as underscore the anxieties around photography.

Allen Grove observes in his essay “Röntgen’s Ghosts” the curious irony that by the late 1890s, when it seemed science had as good as killed off the old-fashioned ghost, the ghost story is at the peak of its popularity (141). Grove argues that the efforts of scientists to either affirm or discredit suspected “hauntings” likely contributed to the popularity of ghost stories. Moreover, Grove names science as “the ally of ghosts” (141). He cites the activities of the Society for Psychical Research, whose program was devoted to documenting “real” ghosts and exposing fakes. SPR’s membership included some of the era’s leading intellectuals and scientists; presidents included Henri Bergson, Sir William Crookes, and William James. James was also a founder of the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) in 1885. The Society’s mission was to examine paranormal phenomena through the application of scientific methodology.

Photography often played a central role in SPR’s inquiries. The Society believed that the photographic plate could potentially detect “ghostly rays invisible to the human eye” (Grove 142). In support of this belief, the Society “earnestly sought to discover legitimate spirit photographs,” a process that included discrediting spirit photographs they deemed to be fakes (Grove 156). As John Durham Peters observes in *Speaking into Air*, the SPR’s program was aimed at “fending off the anarchy of pop spiritualism of the middle and lower classes and

preserving a properly scientific hold on the supersensual universe” (Peters 101). By validating the spirit photograph as a scientific document, SPR attempted to remove the aura of charlatanry and gimmick associated with spirit photograph as exploited by the Spiritualists.

Submitting the spirit photograph as incontrovertible, material proof of ghosts, the Spiritualist movement capitalized on photography’s aura of science. Citing Anne Bruade’s study on Spiritualism, Gunning notes that there is a shift in emphasis from sound and verbal messages, such as rappings etc, to “more spectacular visual and sensual manifestations”—including photography (“Haunting” 10, “Invisible 60). Following a dark room accident in which he reused a plate that was not properly cleaned, the American photographer William H. Mumler, in 1861, was the first to claim he had captured a representative of the spirit world—the ghostly apparition of a girl who appeared to float alongside his sitter (Apraxine & Schmit 12, O’Toole, n.p.). Spirit photography became popular in Europe in the early 1870s.<sup>85</sup> The evidentiary power of photography to testify to the invisible was bolstered by the discovery of the X-ray in 1895. As Erin O’ Toole writes, the discovery of the X-ray and electromagnetism, which appeared magical to the average person, complicated the relationship between occultist and scientific uses of photography in the period (“Spirit Photography”).

Tom Gunning argues that while the persistence of a belief in ghosts might seem archaic by the mid-nineteenth century, it emerged as part of “a new attitude towards spirits that saw itself less as the survival of ancient superstition than as the avant-garde of a new rationality fully in concert with recent scientific technology and theory” (“Invisible” 58). Spiritualism’s emphasis on evidence, writes Gunning, “demonstrated its modernity and scientific nature” (“Invisible” 59).

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<sup>85</sup> See Fishcer 29. See also, O’Toole, who, citing Chéroux 51 “Ghost Dialectics: Spirit Photography in Entertainment Belief”), notes that spirit photography remained popular in America and Britain much longer than it did in France, where it was largely discredited with the public in 1875 as the result of the conviction of the spirit photographer Édouard Isidore (n.p.).

Despite numerous attempts to discredit spirit photography, its popularity, which reached the level of a craze with thousands of spirit photographs in circulation, persisted into the twentieth century (O' Toole, n.p.).

Reading the photograph alongside the mystery story provides insight into the doubts and insecurities that shaped the late-Victorian era. While in the previous chapters I read the photograph with the detective story, arguing that the genre serves the desire for transparency, in this chapter I read the photograph with the mystery in order to reveal the uncertainty of total transparency. While the detective genre articulates a quest for transparency, the mystery genre embraces opacity. Building on Ronald R. Thomas's observation in *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* that photography's cultural impact is visible (or invisible as the case may be) in the mystery genre—only as a ghostly force or portal to the other side. While photography functions within detective fiction to reinforce the genre's underlying mandate to provide rationalizing reassurance and restoration of order—in identifying criminals, bringing crimes to light, and imposing the penetrating vision of an emergent surveillance culture—its function in the mystery novel, in which photographic technology is aligned with supernatural vision, is to deepen the unsettling ambiguities and opacity that characterize the classic mystery story and erode the boundaries between this world and the next.

Photography breaches the same boundaries as the mystery story between the visible and invisible, knowable and unknown, life and death, and conscious and unconscious. The first half of this chapter examines photography's vexed relation to science and the supernatural as well as its conceptual links to mystery fiction; it includes discussion of two "hybrid" texts, E.W. Hornung's *The Camera Fiend* (1911),<sup>86</sup> Mary Roberts Rinehart's *Sight Unseen* (1921), and Henry James's ghost story "The Friends of Friends" (1896). The later half of this chapter

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<sup>86</sup> This text is discussed in the introduction of this chapter.

engages theoretical discussions of what is *haunting* about photography through readings of Walter Benjamin's "A Short History of Photography," Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, and Sigmund Freud's "The Uncanny."

## **Part 1: Illuminating Invisible Worlds**

### **The New Photography: The 'Revolting Indecency' of the X-Ray**

In *The Camera Fiend*, as well as within the wider frame of Victorian culture, photography's power—its thrall, horror, and sublimity—derives from its potential to make visible the unseen world. From photography's invention in 1839, science had utilized the new technology—in the fields of botany, microscopy, astronomy and physiology—as a tool to extend human vision further into invisible realms and to render these discoveries visible to all by producing the first photographs of crystals, insect wings, plant sections, white corpuscles, blood vessels, the moon's surface, sunspots, eclipses, and distant stars.<sup>87</sup> On December 22, 1895, Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen, who had been conducting experiments on the properties of what he believed to be a new invisible ray, took a photograph of his wife Bertha's hand. The resulting picture, which Röntgen christened X-ray<sup>88</sup>, offered the first glimpse of human bones visible through flesh. It is a poignant if not uncanny image—in which the odd detail of a wedding band encircling a bony finger serves as ghostly reminder that death dissolves all earthly unions. Frau

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<sup>87</sup> For a good general reference on the history of photography, see: Michel Frizot, ed. *A New History of Photography*. (n.p.): Könemann, 1998. For the early history of the applications of photography for science see especially Frizot's "The All-Powerful Eye: The Forms of the Invisible" (273-291). See also, Corey Keller's "Sight Unseen: Picturing the Invisible" in *Brought to Light: Photography and the Invisible 1840-1900* (19-36).

<sup>88</sup> On the history of the X-ray, see: *Kelves Naked to the Bone: Medical Imaging in the Twentieth Century* and *Reiser Medicine and the Reign of Technology*.

Röntgen allegedly described the experience of viewing the image as akin to seeing her own death (Kelves 38). The medical application of X-ray technology was perceived immediately: it would now be possible for doctors to see into the body's interior to make a diagnosis without making any incision in the flesh. The X-ray had rendered the boundary between the body's interior and exterior permeable, eradicating, as Stanley Joel Reiser suggests in *Medicine and the Reign of Technology*, the "distinction between outer and inner spaces of the body" by making both "susceptible to visual examination" (qtd. in Danius 78). Sara Danius further argues in *The Senses of Modernism* that the X-ray also breaks down the dichotomies of surface and depth, visible and invisible, knowable and unknowable in what constitutes a radical "epistemological reorganization of the interior of the body" (81).

News of Röntgen's discovery was cabled around the world, and its impact on popular culture was also swift and profound. U.S. newspapers published enthusiastic headlines—such as "New Light Sees Through Flesh to Bones," "Hidden Solids Revealed," and somewhat more eerie "A Photographic discovery Which Seems Almost Uncanny"—often accompanied by line drawings of Röntgen's X-ray photographs.<sup>89</sup> The public fascination with the X-ray was fueled in part by a naïve faith in its potential as a universal remedy that could cure skin diseases, kill microbes, fight tuberculosis, and even cure blindness.<sup>90</sup> Demonstrations of the new technology were held in colleges, high schools, and public venues (Goodman "Century"). Röntgen's iconic image of Bertha's hand spawned a sub-genre of X-ray photography: scientific journals and popular magazines featured X-ray photographs of hands; New York society women had their

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<sup>89</sup> See Goodman "Century" and Reiser 60. Goodman does not cite the newspaper that published "New Light Sees Through Flesh to Bones." Reiser cites the *New York Times*, January 16, 1896 p. 9 as the source for "Hidden Solids Revealed," and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* as the source for "A Photographic discovery Which Seems Almost Uncanny."

<sup>90</sup> See Chéroux, "Photographs of Fluids: An Alphabet of Invisible Rays" (114-125). Chéroux's essay documents the scientific and cultural impact of the X-ray in France.



hands X-rayed as vanity novelties; and X-rays of mothers' hands became popular sentimental souvenirs, as did those of the entwined hands of newlyweds.<sup>91</sup> The invention had additional appeal to the public taste for spectacular entertainment or "attractions,"<sup>92</sup> and X-ray machines made appearances in fairground sideshows, shop windows, department stores such as Bloomingdales in New York City, coin-operated slot machines in Chicago and Kansas, as well as on Paris boulevards where they were demonstrated alongside the Lumière brothers' Cinemotograph.<sup>93</sup> The X-ray was also incorporated into demonstrations of occult phenomenon in vogue in the late nineteenth century:

Among the various new attractions involving X-rays, séances of "neo-occultism" were particularly appreciated at high-society soirées. The guests would gather in a large salon in which an X-ray generator had been concealed. The room would be plunged into darkness, the generator switched on, and, through a well-known property of X-rays, every glass object would at once begin to glow with strange fluorescence. The china would light up, the crystal chandelier would gleam, the mirror would become incandescent, and guests' jewels would sparkle with all their brilliance. The whole salon, so dark a moment ago, would fill with fantastical bluish light. The effect could be further refined by arranging a few skeletons here and there, covered in fluorescent paint, or by hiring actors to

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<sup>91</sup> See Danius 78. See also her cited sources: Reiser; Otto Glasser's *Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen and the Early History of the Roentgen Rays* (Springfield: C.C. Thomas, 1934).

<sup>92</sup> Film historian Tom Gunning has used the term "cinema of attractions" to describe early cinema's relation to the mode of spectatorial address shared by late nineteenth-century spectacular entertainments, which include screen entertainments such as the magic lantern and stereopticon, as well as the diorama, panorama, wax museum, and amusement park. The term, borrowed from the fairground, derives from Sergei Eisenstein's use of "attraction" to designate a form of theater that subjected the spectator to "sensual or psychological impact" (qtd. in "Cinema" 59).

<sup>93</sup> See Danius 78, Kelves 25, Chéroux 115.

wander around draped in floating, fluorescent fabric. The result was highly unusual and could produce a profound effect on those with a penchant for strange wonders (Chéroux 115-116).

The degree to which the X-ray permeated popular culture and captivated public imagination—inspiring poems, cartoons and advertisements—prompted a British journalist to observe: “Never has a scientific discovery so completely and irresistibly taken the world by storm. Its results were of a kind sure to acquire prompt notoriety. The performances of ‘Röntgen’s rays’ are obvious to the ‘man in the street’; they are repeated in every lecture-room; they are caricatured in comic prints; hits are manufactured out of them at theaters.”<sup>94</sup>

While the new technology fascinated the public, it also generated unease about the potential uses of a technology that represented the ultimate encroachment upon privacy—the exposure of the secret spaces of the body’s interior. Concerns regarding what one London-based newspaper called the X-ray’s “revolting indecency”<sup>95</sup> underscore the erotics of exposure and were focused especially on the potential violation of Victorian-era proprieties regarding the female body. A London firm began marketing X-ray proof lead-lined underwear, and a New Jersey assemblyman proposed banning the use of X-rays in opera glasses (Goodman 1043). Similar concerns were also expressed in editorials, cartoons, and poems. A satirical song called “The New Photographee”<sup>96</sup>—as X-rays were frequently referred to in this period—expressed fears that X-rays could reveal all sorts of intimate and potentially embarrassing details about a person, from what one ate for dinner and how much money one carried in his pocket, to whether

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<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Grove 143. The original source, by an anonymous author, is “The Photography of the Invisible,” *The Quarterly Review* 183 (April 1896): 496.

<sup>95</sup> Qtd. In Goodman “The New Light” 1043; period source *Pall Mall Gazette* (March 1896).

<sup>96</sup> This sheet music is in the archives of Eastman House in Rochester, NY. The song was published in 1896 and written and composed by E.W. Rogers. Sung by Harry Randal. London: Francis, Day & Hunter, 195 Oxford St.; New York: T.B. Harms & Co. 18 East 22<sup>nd</sup> St.

one's socks had holes or how much a ladies' figure was padded with newspaper. In spite of the humor the song expresses, its chorus insists that this is "nothing for us to laugh at," and that the X-ray represented something quite terrifying: "What's inside of everything you see—a terrible thing, a horrible thing, is the New Photographee." The author of a poem titled "The New Photography"<sup>97</sup> expresses similar concerns, but extends them to include the supernatural, objecting to Röntgen's "grim and graveyard humor" and the X-ray's ghoulish purpose to "take our flesh off" and reveal every "little rift /And joint" of our bones, thereby creating a kind of *memento mori* of the living—a premature epitaph and "tombstone-souvenirs unpleasant." The poem's author describes the X-ray's dissecting gaze as so thorough that it can reveal "Your worse than 'altogether' state"; these words seem to suggest the fear that the X-ray can reveal interior regions so deep or mysterious that that they cannot even be named.

Concerns such as these do not merely derive from superstitious paranoia, for in fact around 1900 there was significant interest among scientists in photography's potential to reveal interior processes, including thoughts, feelings, dreams, and even the soul. While experiments that used photography to demonstrate that the body emanated a "vital fluid" were conducted as early as 1849, the discovery of the X-ray renewed interest and publicity for the work of the "effluvists"—including the work of Jacob von Narkiewicz-Jodko, Hippolyte Baraduc, Louis Darget,<sup>98</sup> among others—who believed that fluids or a "vital force" similar to the X-ray could be captured on photographic plates.<sup>99</sup> Like the X-ray, Effluvist experiments were designed to "render people's insides visible" (Chéroux 117). According to Clément Chéroux, Baraduc and Darget considered "thoughts, dreams and feelings" to be "forms of radiation similar to the vital

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<sup>97</sup> The text of the poem is reproduced in Grove 143 and Reiser 61. The original was published in *Punch* (25 January 1896): 45.

<sup>98</sup> From Chéroux: Narkiewicz-Jodko, a Russian scientist; Baraduc, an expert on nervous illnesses; Darget, a retired soldier fascinated by the occult (116).

<sup>99</sup> See Frizot "The All-Powerful Eye"; Chéroux "Photographs of Fluids."

fluid, and consequently, liable to be externalized (117). Using radiography as a model for these experiments, effluvists also borrowed from the X-ray's vocabulary in discussing their work (Chéroux 117). In 1897 Baraduc expresses his confidence that a photographic record of human thought could be obtained:

If thought is simply fixed in an image, this image of light, the luminous clothing of our idea, will have a sufficiently powerful photochemical action to imprint the gelatinous film, either directly or mediated through glass, and in a manner invisible to the human eye; these are what I have called psychions, luminous, living images of thought (qtd. in Chéroux 117).

By the late 1890s, effluvist photographs were discredited when various experiments revealed the phenomenon to be physical rather than psychical. In one compelling demonstration cited by Chéroux, in which a photographic plate taken from a living person's hand was compared to a plate taken from a corpse's hand, only the living hand produced "effluvia" while the corpse's hand did not until it was heated (121).

Meanwhile, in the United States, just a few months after the sensational news of Röntgen's discovery, Thomas Edison—acting on a request from publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst, who was hoping to generate a sensational story—further incited public fascination with X-ray technology with the announcement that he would attempt to photograph the human brain. Edison conducted the experiments for three weeks while reporters and curious individuals bivouacked outside his laboratory in West Orange, New Jersey. The experiments, though ultimately unsuccessful, generated publicity, including two *New York Tribune* articles that compared Edison's work to Baraduc's and reported that Edison's goal was to photograph

human thought and the human soul.<sup>100</sup> Such experiments place X-ray at the outer limits of human knowledge, blurring the line, as Alan Grove writes in his essay “Röntgen’s Ghosts,” “between science and spiritualism, humans and ghosts.” Grove argues that the X-ray inspires fear in the Victorians because it represents “a type of spiritual radiation that had been brought under human control” and ultimately, a new kind of *human* vision that can dissolve walls and clothing and render the interior processes of the body and mind opaque (165).

In this respect, photographic technology becomes curiously aligned with supernatural vision, providing a plausible scientific explanation for the powers of clairvoyants or mediums. For example, in 1897 a columnist for the *Revue spirite* describes the clairvoyant’s vision as a type of equipment-free X-ray that utilizes “a kind of highly developed Crookes’ tube, connected to their sense of sight, so that objects hidden to ordinary eyes are exposed by astral light to the cathodic rays generated by these mediums; the images are photographed on their brains” (Chéroux 116). Similarly, the narrator of Mary Roberts Rinehart’s 1921 mixed genre detective/mystery story *Sight Unseen* cites “the theory of rods of invisible matter emanating from the medium’s body” as a possible explanation of psychic phenomena.

In *Sight Unseen*, the attendees of a séance are made witnesses to a murder through a medium who describes the events—in real time—as if she were there.<sup>101</sup> The story’s title, an

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<sup>100</sup> On Edison’s X-ray experiment see: Reiser 60, Kelves 36, Goodman “The New Light” 1044, Mary Seelhorst, “PM People: Thomas Alva Edison” *Popular Mechanics* (January 14, 2003), Mensel 6. Mensel cites two *New York Tribune* articles (Dec. 21, 1897: 6; June 7 1896: 21) as the sources which reported that the goal of Edison’s experiment was to photograph thought and human soul; I have found no viable sources that corroborate these reports. An article by B.C. Forbese published in *American Magazine*, “Edison Working on How to Communicate With the Next World” (October 20, 1920: 10-11, 82) provides a possible link between Edison and fringe science later in his life; Edison is quoted as saying that he is “building an apparatus to see if it is possible for personalities which have left this earth to communicate with us,” which he believes can be accomplished through scientific rather than occult means.

<sup>101</sup> Mary Roberts Rinehart (1876-1958) was a best-selling American novelist and leading writer of detective fiction of the “scientific detection” genre. A profile of Rinehart, titled “Mary Roberts

oxymoron, describes an impossible condition on the threshold of the knowable and unknowable—an act of vision that is empty or a spectacle or thing worth seeing that can't be perceived. The group gathered for the séance, known as the Neighborhood Club, become witnesses to a crime without *seeing* anything. A “sight” is verifiable, it can be documented; but the unseen requires a suspension of disbelief: “If, sitting in Mrs. Dane’s quiet room a woman could tell us what was happening in a house a mile or so away, it opened up a new earth. Almost a new heaven” (20). How the medium, a young woman named Miss Jeremy, knows what she knows is more frightening to the character Clara than the revelations themselves: “How does this woman, this medium, know these things? It is superhuman. I am almost mad” (73). While science does not fully explain the “how” of Miss Jeremy’s revelations, the rational methods applied by the Neighborhood Club’s amateur sleuths do verify their authenticity. The murder is solved under the auspices of science and the supernatural working in tandem through mechanisms not yet fully understood: “For mental waves remain a mystery, acknowledged, as is electricity, but of a nature yet unrevealed. Thoughts are things. That is all we know” (78). The answers, suggests the narrator at the story’s beginning, may lie with psychoanalysis “in that still uncharted territory, the human mind” (6).

### **“The Subtle Beyond”: Photography, Death and the Spirit World**

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Rinehart: For 35 years she has been America’s best-selling lady author,” in *Life* magazine (24 February 1946: 55) notes that Rinehart’s name appeared in the top ten of the best-seller list more than any other detective story writer. Rinehart’s novels appeared on the *Publisher’s Weekly* best sellers list for 241 weeks; in comparison to 52 weeks for Dashiell Hammett (Van Dover 186-187). According to *Publisher’s Weekly*, the following novels by Rinehart appeared on the best seller’s list between 1909 and 1936: *The Man in the Lower Ten* (1909), *The Window at the White Cat* (1910), *K* (1915), *The Amazing Interlude* (1918), *Dangerous Days* (1919), *A Poor Wise Man* (1921), *The Breaking Point* (1922, 1923), *Lost Ecstasy* (1927), *The Door* (1930), and *The Doctor* (1936). See the database “20<sup>th</sup>-Century American Bestsellers,” hosted by Brandeis University (Web 28 July 2015).

Within the context of the late-nineteenth century, in which technology in league with science had already revealed myriad details of the unseen world, it is understandable that the belief in photography's potential to penetrate the body, the mind, nature, and the heavens might extend into as yet unknown territories or even to the spirit world. In this period there is already a strong connection between photography and death: from the ghostly quality of early photographs, wherein long exposure times render movements into ghost-like traces; to the tradition of postmortem photography, which made photographs of deathbeds more common than those documenting births or weddings; to the art of photo-collage, in which the cut-out faces of dead children might appear as angels floating in clouds above their parents' heads; and to the X-ray with its power to turn a living human being into a skeleton.<sup>102</sup> And it is photography's capacity to make connections with the world beyond the visible which perhaps is its most haunting quality.

Henry James places the connection between photography and death at the center of his 1896 mystery tale "The Friends of Friends." While James's story is an aesthetically purer form of gothic mystery than the populist thriller *The Camera Fiend*, these texts share a preoccupation with the ontological implications of the medium of photography. The main characters of James's story—a man and woman whose names and identities are never revealed and who never meet—share two connections: an aversion to having their photographs taken and the fact that each had seen the ghost of a parent materialize at the moment of death. The implied association between photography and ghosts is also the source of the strange bond between the man and the woman.

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<sup>102</sup> On the omnipresence of death in Victorian photography see Jennifer Green-Lewis *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* 45, and Nancy M. West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* 153-154. According to West, the tradition of post-mortem photography was most popular in photography's first decades; by the 1880s cultural changes such as longer life spans and shifts in religious beliefs produced an increasing aversion to subjects of death and decay.

While the characters are intrigued with one another, having been described to each other in great detail by mutual friends, circumstances, and perhaps superstition, keep them apart for years. For their friends, the fact that each shares the “rare perversity” of never having been photographed or “taken” becomes the subject of lore as well as “the very liveliest of all the reasons why they ought to know each other...” (4) Conversely, as a mutual friend observes, a meeting between the two “would have been a mere flatness” that would dispel the mystery and romance of the strange connection they shared.

Like the flatness of a photograph, a meeting would be shallow, two-dimensional and overtly literal in comparison to the unrequited curiosity the pair has sustained about one another; this flatness is not only the death of romance and mystery but also death itself. In the story, the flatness of photography is expressed as a kind of reckoning with mortality. When the male protagonist of the story finally succumbs to being “taken” at the behest of his fiancée, the event is described as a kind of death or crossing over; his photograph, with its “high distinction,” rests on the chimneypiece in memorial to his “sacrificed perversity.” The word “taken”—perhaps the key to understanding the connection between photography and ghosts in the story—is rich with nuance, alluding to a life seized or snatched, a photograph snapped, as well as a loss of virginity or sexual consummation. With words that reinforce the association with death, the photo-phobe perversely rejoices “in the *fall* of her *late* associate” and defiantly vows that she will “live and die unphotographed” (5). She savors the sensation of her own individuality: “Now too she was alone in that state; this was what she liked; it made her so much more original” (5).

It is not just photography’s flatness that signals death, but its capacity to reproduce its subject infinitely—to annihilate the individual. Photography is frightening because it threatens an ontological shake-up—the loss of one’s depth, subjectivity and originality or perhaps even the



revelation that the interior is empty after all. While the woman's status as a photographic virgin has left her originality or subjectivity intact, her moment of individual triumph is also mixed with mourning: when the woman holds the photograph of her late associate in her hands it is at once a physical consummation of a longed-for acquaintance as well as the loss of a soul mate who is betrothed to another. The woman's belief that the pair can now only be united in death perhaps explains why she mysteriously passes away that very night, but not without making a ghostly appearance to her soul mate—she has followed him into the vast flat space so like the photograph, where his likeness and hers may now be reproduced together to infinity. Haunted by the ghost of a woman he never met, the man answers her “irresistible call” with his own suicide six years later.

While in James's story the photograph represents a portal through which the living pass to the other side, the genre of spirit photography represents the return journey: the return of the dead. Spirit photography emerges from a fault line between science and science fiction, and between modernity's technological frontier and the lingering superstitions of a bygone era. As a cultural figure, the photographer is loosely associated with the magician or the medium as an agent of the occult. Spiritualists, in turn, seized upon photography as a means to provide scientific proof of the spirit world—not the séance parlor tricks of “rappings” or verbal messages transmitted via medium, but visual manifestations of spiritual energy in the form of tangible photographic documents with all their evidentiary power.

Tom Gunning argues in his essay “Haunted Images” that in the mid-nineteenth century, photography as scientific process was understood as analogous to Spiritualism: “Just as Spiritualism depended on mediums whose passivity and sensitivity allowed the spirit message to come through clearly (such mediums were chiefly women, who were believed to possess these

qualities more strongly than men), photography depended on a sensitized plate, which could capture the image of the world exposed before it” (11). Spirit photographers produced portraits in which the semi-transparent bodies of the sitter’s departed loved ones appeared to hover above them or to pose besides them, perhaps with a ghostly hand resting intimately on a shoulder, as well as more abstract photographs of balls of light identified as spirit energy or ectoplasm—a kind of foamy condensation of spiritual energy—which frequently oozed from the various bodily orifices of mediums in trance states. Perhaps alluding to some of the most bizarre examples, such as the graphic images in which a female medium appears to give birth to a blob of ectoplasm,<sup>103</sup> Tom Gunning observes the genre’s “occasional breaching of bodily propriety” and photographic conventions (“Haunting” 13). Gunning also suggests that the ectoplasm images illustrate the contradictions inherent in spirit photography because their “dematerialized nature” situates them ambiguously between the spiritual and material worlds—a contradiction that one could extend to the medium of photography itself. It is perhaps this blurring or transgression of physical and psychological boundaries that inspires such faith in photography’s power.

While the Society for Psychical Research, for example, sought to expose hoaxes, their investigations also sought to authenticate genuine paranormal phenomena, thereby strengthening the public’s belief in the capacity of science—and especially photography—to document authoritatively invisible realities (Grove 154, 156). And in spite of a series of court cases in the 1870s that exposed a number of prominent spirit photographers as frauds, belief in spirit photography persisted, though somewhat diminished, even experiencing a revival after WW1.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> For example, see the photographs by Juliette Alexandre-Bisson of the medium Eva C. giving birth to ectoplasm (1920) in Chéroux 198.

<sup>104</sup> Pierre Apraxine and Sophie Schmit, in their essay “Photography and the Occult,” in Chéroux 12-17, document that the most intense phases of Spiritualist activity correspond with or follow wars. These phases are fueled by the urgent desires of families for a final communication with lost loved ones—particularly in the United States after the Civil War, in France following the

When Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's son Kingsley died in 1918 as a result of wounds suffered serving in WWI, he visited the well-known spirit photographer William Hope, from whom he obtained what he believed to be authentic photographs of his son from beyond the grave (Schmit 92). Doyle was an active member of the Society for Psychical Research from 1891-1923, and recalls in his memoir that the turning point in his commitment to Spiritualism came when the SPR sent him to investigate the case of a poltergeist in Dorchester.<sup>105</sup> He also accumulated one of the world's largest collections of spirit photographs, which he used to illustrate his public lectures on Spiritualism (Thomas *Detective* 179-180). His first article on spirit photography was published in 1887, the same year as *A Study in Scarlet*, the book that launched the character Sherlock Holmes.<sup>106</sup>

While Doyle, to his reputed dismay, is best known for the creation of a detective who champions scientific method, he also wrote several books defending the authenticity of occult photography, including *The Case for Spirit Photography* (1923)—a defense of his friend William Hope, who was accused of fraud by the SPR—and *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922), which upholds the authenticity of a series of widely acclaimed fairy photographs, known as the Cottingley fairies, taken by two Yorkshire girls. The Cottingley fairy photographs continued to be the subject of serious study and debate for decades, until one of the girls, by then an elderly woman, admitted to the hoax in 1981—years after Doyle's death in 1930. As Thomas writes, Doyle's belief in the evidentiary photography was so profound that it led him to defend publicly and fervently the existence of fairies and "other manifestations of the spirit world": "That a

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War of 1870, and in Europe in the wake of the millions of deaths during WW1 (Apraxine and Schmit 15).

<sup>105</sup> Schmit "Conan Doyle," Chéroux 92. She cites her source as the chapter "The Psychic Quest" in Doyle's memoir *Memories and Adventures*. 1924. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

<sup>106</sup> Schmit writes that this article was published in the spiritualist journal *Light* on July 2, 1887 (Chéroux 92).

person of Doyle's scientific turn of mind was so susceptible to the hoaxes these photographs turned out to be is a testimony to the prestige the photograph had achieved as a virtually unassailable form of evidence by the turn of the century" (Thomas *Detective* 179-180). For Doyle, and for many interested in technology's capacity to capture the unseen at the end of the nineteenth century, his belief in the spirit world and his conviction in photography's incontrovertible scientific truth-telling were entirely compatible. Doyle himself reputedly "returned" six hours after his death to pose for a photograph; other reports came from cities around the world that the writer had materialized in psychic photographs (Schmit 92-94).

While to the modern eye pictures such as the Cottingley Fairies—which look like poorly executed cut-outs—appear naïve or absurd to the contemporary viewer, Gunning argues that such images perhaps convey a desire to believe in the possibility of immortality or communication with the dead powerful enough to stretch credulity. But Gunning also offers another reading of the reception of these pictures, suggesting that belief in spirit photographs might not only be viewed as a remnant of quaint nineteenth-century notions, but as harbinger of the modern era in which technology might eradicate all obstacles in communication, including between this world and the next. Spirit photographs also resonate with an understanding of a dematerialized modern subject, because the state of disembodiment they evoke "provides a powerful emblem of the fate of the body in the modern age" (Gunning "Haunting" 14). Part of what is fascinating about these pictures is not only their distinctive Victorianness, but also their enduring modernity.

## **Part 2: Photography and the Limits of the Knowable: Reading Barthes, Freud and Benjamin**

### **Benjamin's "Small History" and the Haunting Power of Photography**

Walter Benjamin's writings on photography offer an extended mediation on the dematerialized condition of the modern subject, whose aura is eroded by mechanical reproduction. In "A Small History of Photography" (1931), Benjamin first introduces the term "aura," a concept that he continues to develop in later writings. He articulates the power of photographs both in terms of their uniqueness and presence—or aura—as well as their representation of absence and emptiness—or liberation from aura. The photographs that inspire Benjamin are those that shimmer on the threshold of absence and presence, lightness and darkness, aura and anti-aura, such as the first daguerreotypes—in which the "continuum from brightest light to darkest shadow" endow them with aura—or the photographs of Eugène Atget, who "initiates the emancipation of the object from aura" and creates "empty" pictures that "pump the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship" (246; 250-251). Benjamin's aura is an unstable term—always in the process of disintegrating—connoting both a positive value that photography destroys as well as a concept the new technology renders obsolete because it cannot be reconciled with the experience of modernity. Aura is always intangible—predicated on distance, loss or absence—as Benjamin defines it here: "What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be" (250).<sup>107</sup> Inherent in the concept of aura is a desire—a longing—for an original someone or something that is not there; it is entangled with nostalgia and mourning. Aura is also

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<sup>107</sup> Benjamin continues to develop his definition of "aura" in the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) in which he not only expresses nostalgia for the experience of aura but also acceptance—even embrace—of the radical possibilities of the "post-aura" condition.

defined by its vaguely mystical sense of dislocation in space and time. If aura can be pinned down, Benjamin tells us to look for it in the shadows, such as when “a branch throws its shadow on the observer, until the moment or the hour become part of their appearance” (248). He also locates aura in the spectral darkness of early daguerreotypes—darkness put to flight by optical advances that “record reality as faithfully as a mirror” (248).

Benjamin’s “A Small History of Photography” is one of the intertwining strands that unite the history of photography and the mystery—and it can be read as a kind of mystery story itself. It is in this text that Benjamin best articulates what he finds so haunting about photography. He begins his essay like many promising mystery stories—in a fog—which he says surrounds photography’s origins. Writing ninety years after the birth of photography, he searches the darkness of the pre-industrial heyday of the medium for the sparks discharged by the “historical tension” in this glance backward: “It is in the illumination of these sparks that the first photographs emerge, beautiful and unapproachable, from the darkness of our grandfather’s day” (256-7).

Benjamin presents us with a series of reliquaries or clues: the pale, gray images on iodized silver plates that were the first daguerreotypes. These one-of-a-kind objects have a material presence and were “not infrequently kept in a case, like jewellery” (242). They also possess mercurial qualities; Benjamin describes how they “had to be turned this way and that, until, in the proper light, a pale grey image could be discerned” (242). Designed to be held in the hand, daguerreotypes are also tactile, creating what photography historian Geoffrey Batchen describes as an “entanglement of both touch *and* sight” that allows the beholder simultaneously to experience the “*thingness* of the visual” and the “*visuality* of the tactile” (“Vernacular” 61). Benjamin’s imagination turns and polishes these artifacts like talismans, lingering over the

images of David Octavius Hill—an English portrait painter turned photographer—whose images he admired for their threshold quality, for “[T]he way light struggles out of darkness” (248). These pictures reveal for Benjamin what is “new and strange” about the medium of photography. Though Benjamin concedes that Hill may have taken pictures that “lead even deeper into the new technology” than this series of portraits, what fascinates Benjamin about these photographs—which precede the era of the snapshot camera and “candid” photography—is that they are anonymous, and therefore intriguingly mysterious, and not posed, which engenders them with a spark of life that the expired decades have not leached from them (242).

For Benjamin, Hill’s picture of a Newhaven fishwife in particular is a clue to understanding the thrall that photography can produce in us. To Benjamin’s mind, this photograph derives its allure in part from the condition that it is candid, and that in spite of her modesty and her downcast eyes, the fishwife exudes an “indolent,” “seductive” quality that is uncontrived. And yet, this does not entirely explain this picture’s allure, which Benjamin says goes “beyond the photographer’s art, something that cannot be silenced” (242). Benjamin locates this elusive quality in the opposition he seems to find in the fishwife’s anonymity and opacity and in the irrepressible vitality and materiality that is at once concrete but ungraspable, a quality that “fills you with an unruly desire to know what her name was, the woman who was alive there, who even now is still real and will never consent to be wholly absorbed in *art*” (242-243). The fishwife’s discreet anonymity and inherent vitality keep her from being fully contained by the flatness of the photograph, allowing her identity and essence to elude him. And it is to this unfathomable condition that Benjamin traces his desire *to know her*—a desire he places at the center of photography’s power: “And I ask: how did the beauty of that hair, those eyes, beguile

our forebears: how did that mouth kiss, to which desire curls up senseless as smoke without fire” (243).

Photography, as Benjamin experiences it, unleashes a powerful desire for connection—and not merely in an abstract or metaphysical sense, but as an intimate, vital, bodily experience that is inspired by the daguerreotype’s material tactility. Roland Barthes echoes this sense of physical longing in *Camera Lucida* when he names what he always seeks in the photograph as “the desired object, the beloved body” (6). The “unruly desire” inspired by photography—which here can be described as a kind of possession—is located in the body: not in the dematerialized corpus depicted in the photograph but in the longings that stir in the viewer’s own body. This haunting desire—“the smoke without fire”—that the photograph of the fishwife inspires in Benjamin brings him a heightened awareness of his own physicality. What Benjamin finds profound in the experience is the photograph’s capacity to form a momentary bridge between present and past, material and ethereal, and mortality and immortality. His desire is “unruly” because it breaches boundaries, leading Benjamin to meet the fishwife in the unmapped space she occupies between death and life.

Benjamin emphasizes the connection between photography and mortality by moving within the same paragraph directly from a discussion of the photograph of the fishwife to his second “exhibit”: he conjures for us a picture of the photographer Karl Dauthendey at the time of his engagement to a woman who, Benjamin tells us, sometime after the birth of her sixth child, would be found lying on the floor of the artist’s Moscow house with her arteries severed. What intrigues Benjamin about the engagement photograph is the way the ill-fated woman seems to gaze past him “absorbed into some ominous distance” (243). For Benjamin, this gets at a central mystery of photography: the inexplicable contradiction that “the most precise technology” could



render products of “magical value” which a painted picture could no longer provide. Benjamin does not attribute this “magical value” to the photographer’s artistry, but sees it as embedded in the technology itself, which captures the “spark of contingency” of the “Here and Now” that is forever “seared to the subject” (243). Benjamin understands the photographer’s role not as that of a magician, but as he claims later in the essay, as diviner of the future, a reader of omens and entrails who is “the descendant of the augurs and the haruspices” (256). Photography opens a space-time continuum through which a glance backward restores “the immediacy of a long-forgotten moment” in which “the future subsists so eloquently” (243). It is not only the past that Benjamin believes photography brings back to us, but also the future: Madame Dauthendey’s eyes, focused on some ominous distance, foretell a future death.

The haunting power of photography is something Benjamin felt profoundly, and which infuses his “Small History” as well as his other writings on photography. In *Burning with Desire*, Batcheon argues that postmodern critics often fail to recognize the haunting of photography, which requires more than theorizing photography’s political dimensions—“photography and power”—but also an understanding of how “photography *as* power” is reproduced “in the very grain of photography’s existence” and understood within “the ontological field that makes any photography possible” (194, 202). While Benjamin is certainly interested in photography and power—a central preoccupation of his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935), an essay he concludes with an analysis of how fascist governments aestheticize politics through successfully co-opting film—he is also one of the first critics to articulate the profound philosophical and ontological implications of photography as power.

Benjamin’s recognition of the haunting power of photography shares insights with his contemporary Siegfried Kracauer, who describes the “the shiver” felt by viewers of old

photographs, as well as the post-structuralist critic Barthes, who similarly describes this experience as producing in him a sensation of the “vertigo of time defeated.”<sup>108</sup> For Barthes, looking at the photograph of a man condemned to die<sup>109</sup> inspires an uncanny sense of an anterior future that is not unlike what Benjamin describes when he gazes into Madame Dauthendey’s eyes: the certain knowledge that “*he is going to die*” and the simultaneous sense that “*This will be and this has been*” (*Camera* 96). Kracauer’s “shiver” is mirrored in Barthes’ “shudder” over the thought that every photograph represents “*a catastrophe which has already occurred*”—either the “return of the dead” or a future death (Barthes 96, 9). It is in this respect that Barthes asserts that all photographers are “agents of Death” (92). For Barthes, this is not just Death in the abstract, but a confrontation with the inevitability of his own death: “each photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death” (97). Photography is haunting because it pricks or wounds us, providing that “tiny shock” that Barthes calls the “punctum”—also defined as a “cut” or a “little hole”—which allows a glimpse into a “sort of subtle *beyond*” (Barthes 27, 59). From this vantage, every photograph becomes personal and presents a fresh ontological mystery that foretells not only the death of the subject, but also one’s own death.

### **Stepping Out: Photography and the Optical Unconscious**

Benjamin’s meanderings through photography’s history lead down an ontological path that goes beyond the stirrings of “unruly desire” inspired by the fishwife’s corporeal beauty or the horror of a suicide found lying on the floor of a Moscow apartment; that is, they ultimately lead beyond the discovery or loss of a body—to the unconscious: “For it is another nature that

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<sup>108</sup> See Siegfried Kracauer “Photography” (1927) in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* 49, and Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* 96-7.

<sup>109</sup> The photograph referenced by Barthes and reproduced in *Camera Lucida* is of Lewis Payne, who was hanged for his role in the Lincoln assassination conspiracy; photographer Alexander Gardner took the picture in 1865.

speaks to the camera than to the eye: other in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious” (243). Benjamin identifies devices specific to the medium of photography—slow motion and enlargement—which he believes reveal “the secret” existence of the unconscious. He likens photography, to which he attributes the discovery of what he calls the “optical unconscious,” with psychoanalysis, which leads to the discovery of the “instinctual unconscious” (243). Like technology and medicine, Benjamin argues that photography, by virtue of properties “native to the camera,” is concerned with exposing the details of deep internal structures: it reveals the minute physiognomic aspects of hidden realities. In Benjamin’s example of Karl Blossfeldt’s “astonishing plant photographs”—in which a picture of a horse willow might reveal the forms of ancient columns—it is possible to see evidence of the “optical unconscious” at work. Through its mechanisms we discover that covert visual worlds are mirrored in the “hiding place of our waking dreams” (243).

While Benjamin first introduces the concept of the “optical unconscious” in “A Small History of Photography,” emphasizing its role in overcoming temporality through establishing a continuum between past, present and future moments, in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”<sup>110</sup> he expands on its meaning—grounding it more firmly in psychoanalytic theory and the camera’s ability to isolate behaviors and uncover unconscious motives—and extends its application to film. With the publication of Freud’s *Psychopathology of the Everyday Life* in 1901, Benjamin claims “things have changed” (“Work” 235). Earlier in the essay Benjamin cites that it was “around 1900”—nearly simultaneous with the publication of Freud’s book—that the proliferation of photographic technology causes “the most profound change in their impact upon the public” (219). Benjamin sees photography and psychoanalysis as parallel developments that enrich and extend our field of perception deep into the interior: “The

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<sup>110</sup> Hereafter abbreviated as “WAAMR.”

camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis” (“Work” 237). Freud’s technique “isolated and made analyzable things which had heretofore floated along unnoticed in a broad stream of perception” (“Work” 235-6).

In chapter 5 of *The Psychopathology of the Everyday* (“Mistakes in Speech”), Freud describes “the task of discovering from the accidental utterances and fancies of the patient the thought contents, which, though striving for concealment, nevertheless intentionally betray themselves”—these “accidental utterances” are the “Freudian slips” that breach the surface level of conversation with messages from the unconscious mind (54). Likewise, the camera substitutes “an unconsciously penetrated space” with one that can now be “consciously explored” by the naked eye (“Work” 235-6). Benjamin describes the “optical unconscious” as a visual version of the “Freudian slip.” For example, in the “Small History” he suggests that while we have a general notion of what is involved in the act of walking, “we have no idea at all what happens during the fraction of a second when a person “*steps out*” (243). This phrase, which Benjamin italicizes, suggests, like Freud’s “slip” (Freud’s term is *Versprechen*),<sup>111</sup> a departure from an expected text or itinerary—a lapse, stumble, fall or misstep through which the body inadvertently displays some unconscious thought or motivation. It is through the camera’s “unconscious

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<sup>111</sup> *Versprechen*, which translates literally from German as a mis-speech is derived from the verb *sprechen* (to speak) and the prefix *ver* which implies something is wrong or mistaken and has a similar function to the English prefix “mis”; the German noun *Versprechen* translates as promise or pledge, adding another layer to Freud’s term, which can be read as both a mis-speech and an avowal, a meaning lost in the English translation “slip.” A.A. Brill, an American psychiatrist who was the first translator of Freud’s *Psychopathology of the Everyday* into English in 1914, translated *Versprechen* as “slip of the tongue.” Freud also used the invented word *Fehlleistungen* as a more general term to apply to all slips; this word is formed from the compound of *fehl* (false, wrong, inappropriate) and *Leistung* (performance, achievement, something done). Brill also translated *Fehlleistungen* as “slip,” though James Strachey, whose 1924 translation of the *Psychopathology* (in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Freud*, Vol. 6 1904/1924) became the standard English text, translated this word as “parapraxis” (“para” meaning abnormal or incorrect + praxis).

optics”—its properties of enlargement and slow motion—that photography “reveals the secret” of stepping out (“Small History” 243).

But Benjamin’s notion of stepping out is really more parallel to Freud’s more general term for the “slip”—*Fehlleistungen*—an invented word that has more physical connotations than *Versprechen*, such as an inappropriate action or performance. When the body lets go, the camera might capture slight movements invisible to the human eye. In “WAAMR” Benjamin elaborates on how photography can isolate a behavior “like a muscle of the body”:

Even if one has a general knowledge of the way people walk, one knows nothing of a person’s posture during the fractional second of a stride. The act of reaching for a lighter or a spoon is familiar routine, yet we hardly know what really goes on between hand and metal, not to mention how this fluctuates with our moods. Here the camera intervenes with the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. (“Work” 237).

This description brings to mind the studies in human and animal locomotion performed in the 1870s and 1880s by scientist Etienne-Jules Marey and photographer Eadweard Muybridge, which revealed that there are gaps or hidden spaces in what is perceived as continuous fluid motion. Muybridge, for example, demonstrated in a series of phase photographs that there is a point in a horse’s gallop—imperceptible to the naked eye—in which all four of its hooves are off the ground. It is in such recovered moments—fragments isolated by the camera and rendered visible within a technologically expanded temporality—that Benjamin seeks the optical unconscious.

## **Technology & the Unconscious: Freud's Optical Metaphors**

While Benjamin compares the camera's role in revealing the unconscious as parallel to that of psychoanalysis, Freud uses photography and other visual technologies as metaphors to describe both the functioning of the psyche and the unconscious. In Freud's first articulation of his theory of the unconscious, in the final chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), he employs a complex extended analogy that uses the microscope and the camera as models for understanding the psyche's functions: "I shall remain on psychological ground, and I propose simply to follow the suggestion that we should picture the instrument which carries out our mental functions as resembling a compound microscope or photographic apparatus, or something of the kind. On that basis, psychical locality will correspond to a point inside the apparatus at which one of the preliminary stages of an image comes into being" (SE 5:536). Freud admits his analogy is imperfect, though he insists it provides a useful tool for visualizing mental functions; and indeed, because he lumps together attributes of different visual technologies—such as his reference in the quote above to "compound microscope or photographic apparatus"—his analogy requires some unpacking.

As Freud develops his analogy, he compares the "psychical apparatus" to specific functions of different visual technologies. For example he describes the physical locations at which "the preliminary stages of an images comes into being" as corresponding to "ideal points" inside the telescope and microscope, regions in which he says "no tangible component of the apparatus is situated" (SE 5:536). He further argues that the mental apparatus is like a compound telescope because it contains a number of systems or agencies—which he identifies as the unconscious, preconscious and conscious systems—that work in concert with one another like "the various systems of lenses in the telescope" (SE 5:536). While one system receives

perceptual stimuli, another transforms that information into permanent “memory-traces”—a function that is analogous to photography. “Memory-traces” originate in the unconscious system but can be made conscious through dynamic interactions between the systems that allows passage from the unconscious to the preconscious (dream-thoughts) and conscious (SE 5:538).

While Freud does not make the connection to photography explicit, it is implicit in the context of the extended metaphor. He begins this metaphor with a reference to the “photographic apparatus”—which describes the structure and function of the psyche—and ends it with the “memory-trace,” whose passage from unconscious to conscious can be expressed in terms of a photochemical developing process. Edda Hevers, in her article “Picturing the Unimaginable: Freud & the Visual Unconscious,” argues that Freud came to understand the transformation of latent thoughts into images less in the terms of light passing through lenses with refractive qualities and more in terms of a dynamic process of attraction and repulsion between membranes (4). She notes that throughout the development of his theory, Freud spoke of the process in photochemical terms at least up to 1920, citing a comment Freud made to Sándor Ferenczi: “...I believe the way, in which the light works on a plane and in which the photochemical substance on top of it is sensitized mainly by the picture plane, could be exemplary for changes in the neuropsychological apparatus. The changes are really effects (as you imagined) between the systems” (qtd. In Hevers; 4, 15).

Significantly, Freud continues to build on the metaphor of photography as he further develops his theory of the unconscious. In his *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (“General Theory of the Neuroses,” 1917), Freud draws a more direct parallel between the photographic image and the unconscious, describing the transformation of an unconscious thought into a conscious one as a negative to positive process: “...just as a photographic picture

begins as a negative and only becomes a picture after being turned into a positive” (SE 16:295). Elsewhere, in *Moses and Monotheism* (1938), he compares the process by which impressions are embedded in a child’s “psychical apparatus” before it is “completely receptive”—a special state of memory he classifies as “unconscious”—to a “photographic exposure that can be developed after any interval of time and transformed into a picture” (SE 23:126). The unconscious, like photography, is a latent medium—with the difference that time acts as the developing agent: the impression recorded by the child’s psyche, like a photographic image snapped and forgotten, may not be processed for years, until it manifests itself as an instinct “reawakened by some new precipitating cause” (SE 23:127). These analogies not only inscribe the psyche and the unconscious within the language of technology, but they also associate the photographic image with the “return of the repressed” and the unconscious mind.

### **The Return of the Dead: Photography and the Uncanny**

Freud’s essay “The Uncanny” (1919) provides a conceptual bridge between the unconscious and photography. Like the aspects of photography discussed earlier in this essay that provoke feelings of wonder, astonishment, superstition and unease, the uncanny exploits ambiguities, providing an experience that exists on the border of the latent and the manifest, tangible and intangible, familiar and estranged, knowable and the unknown. While Freud does not discuss or mention photography specifically, the primary sources he identifies for uncanny experiences—particularly the notion of the double, the factor of repetition, belief in magic and the omnipotence of thought, and attitudes toward death and a persistence of belief in the afterlife—have strong links to the discourse around photography. This section will explore the question: what is “uncanny” about photography? What is it about the medium of photography



that inspires Kracauer's "shiver" and Barthes' shudder? While neither Benjamin nor Barthes use the term "uncanny," both write lucidly and profoundly about experiences provoked by photography that resonate with Freud's theory.

Freud begins his investigation of uncanny experiences by exploring the semantic variations of the German *Unheimlich*—a term associated with things that arouse fear, dread and horror—which literally translates as “unhomely”—and its opposite *heimlich*, which translates as “belonging to the house” and “familiar.” While there is no exact equivalent in English, Freud chooses “uncanny”: uncomfortable, uneasy, gloomy and haunted (as in haunted house). Freud is especially interested in the inherent ambiguity of the antonyms *heimlich* and *unheimlich*; while *heimlich* can mean something familiar and intimate, it can also mean something secret, hidden or concealed, such as in examples from Grimm's dictionary: “*heimlich* parts of the body” or *heimlich* (or mystic) knowledge (SE 17: 225-226). He notes that this ambiguity exists even in the English pairing “uncanny” and “canny,” in which the latter may mean not only “cozy,” but also “endowed with occult or magical powers” (SE 17: 225). What fascinates Freud is how the definition of *heimlich* coincides with its opposite *unheimlich*. He cites a line from Schelling, quoted in the Sanders definition of *heimlich*, which he argues provides an important insight into the meaning of *unheimlich*: “‘*Unheimlich*’ is the name for everything that ought to have remained...secret and hidden but has come to light”<sup>112</sup> (qtd. in SE 17: 224). In this sense, Freud concludes: “What is *heimlich* thus comes to be *unheimlich*” (SE 17: 224). The uncanny is at once something simultaneously unfamiliar and familiar; something concealed and revealed—it is the return of the repressed: “something which is secretly familiar...which has undergone repression and then returned from it...” (SE 17: 245).

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<sup>112</sup> Freud's italics.

While Freud anchors his analysis of uncanny in a work of fiction—a reading of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “The Sand-Man”—the primary preoccupations of the story are ocularcentric—focusing on visual technologies and expressing anxieties about vision. Freud identifies the central theme of the story, which recurs at critical moments: “it is the theme of the ‘Sand-Man’ who tears out children’s eyes” (SE 17: 227). The plot chronicles the recurring anxieties and breakdowns of the protagonist Nathaniel, whose fears originate in his mother and nurse’s foreboding tales of the Sand-Man—a fearsome character who throws sand into the eyes of children and then steals their eyes. Following a traumatic childhood event in which the lawyer Coppelius catches Nathaniel eavesdropping and threatens to drop red hot coals into his eyes, the boy believes he has identified the dreaded Sand-Man. Coppelius is also later implicated in the mysterious death of Nathaniel’s father. Years later Nathaniel believes he has recognized his old nemesis reincarnated as Giuseppe Coppola, an optician from whom he buys a spy-glass. Nathaniel uses the telescope to spy on a Professor Spalazani’s beautiful daughter Olympia, with whom he falls in love. Olympia is an automaton whose clock-work has been made by the professor and whose eyes have been made by Coppola—the Sand-Man. Nathaniel witnesses the two men quarreling, which results in the optician Coppola ripping out Olympia’s wooden eyes. Coppola throws the bloody eyes at Nathaniel, from whom he claims they were “stolen,” which induces a fit of madness in the young man. After his recovery, Nathaniel climbs to the top of a tower with his betrothed, and after looking through his spy-glass flies into another fit of madness in which he tries to kill his fiancée. Among those who have gathered on the street to witness the spectacle are the lawyer Coppelius, whose return, likely witnessed by Nathaniel through his spy-glass, may be the cause of the young man’s fit. Recognizing Coppelius as the Sand-Man,

Nathaniel cries out his last words, quoting the optician Coppola—“Fine eyes—fine eyes!” before he plummets to his death on the paving stones.

According to Freud, what is most powerful and most uncanny about the tale is the intense anxiety generated by “the idea of being robbed of one’s eyes” (SE 17: 230). Freud traces the origin of the intense anxiety around the loss or damage of the eyes to the displacement of the infantile castration complex, which Freud eventually links to separation anxiety (Hevers 11). For Freud, the uncanny is linked to a loss or absence, and the harrowing “silence, solitude and darkness” produced by infantile anxieties from which human beings are never truly free (SE 17: 252). While looking through the telescope should bring clarifying precision to Nathaniel’s vision, instead each view produces a blackout, which leaves him utterly in the dark. Hevers concludes that what is most critical in “The Sand-Man” is not what Nathaniel sees in the telescope, but rather what he fails to see: “Not to see, seems to lead to seeing the same, again and again, so forcefully that one has the feeling of colliding. Where we perceive something as uncanny we have to see something at all cost where actually there is nothing. And this at a place where there should be something—the absence of which we can’t bear to realize” (Hevers 12). That strange sensation of absence and presence—of loss—“proceeds from something familiar which has been repressed” (SE 17: 247). What is repressed is trauma, which derives from the Greek word “to pierce” (Hevers 13). The uncanny, then, can be expressed as a hole—a blank spot. It is at once a failure of vision, but also, like Barthes’ *punctum* it is a prick, sting, speck, cut, or little hole that provides a small window onto the “subtle *beyond*” (*Camera* 59).

Freud follows his reading of “The Sand-Man” with an analysis of the most prominent uncanny themes. Freud observes that the theme of the double—“the doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self”—is pervasive in uncanny literature (SE 17: 234). He cites the work of

Otto Rank, who makes connections between the double and reflections in mirrors, shadows and guardian spirits, the belief in the soul and fear of death, and further speculates that the notion of the immortal soul may be the original body double (SE 17: 235). Freud theorizes the invention of the double “as a preservation against extinction”—like the images of the dead that the ancient Egyptians made of lasting materials—and an expression of the primary narcissism that dominates the mind of the child and primitive man (SE 17: 235). However, when the stage of primary narcissism has been overcome, Freud argues the double “reverses its aspect” and transforms from an “assurance of immortality” to a “harbinger of death” (SE 17: 235). In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes observes a similar paradoxical function of photography, in which “Every photograph certifies a presence,” while at the same time this profound testimony to the “that-has-been” is always paired with “this-will-be” or the prophecy of a future death—“a catastrophe which has already occurred”: “Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe” (87; 96). Freud further argues that “double,” which originates as a defensive projection to protect the ego from information that threatens its survival, becomes “a thing of terror”—a disassociated, adversarial aspect of the ego responsible for censorship, criticism, and, in pathological cases, delusions of being watched (SE 17: 235, 236). The “extraordinarily strong feeling of something uncanny” generated by the notion of the double can only be accounted for, according to Freud, because the double originates at a very early mental stage, which though surmounted, can resurface as an ego-disturbance (SE 17: 236). Freud also groups the strange effect of “meeting one’s own image unbidden and unexpected” with the uncanny effect of the double; he cites two anecdotes from Ernest Mach, who relates the startling effect of realizing that the face in the mirror is his own, as well as his dismay at discovering that

a dislikable-looking intruder who invaded his sleeping compartment was in fact his own reflection in a mirror (SE 17: 248).

Though Freud gives no examples of the phenomenon of the double that involve photography, Barthes offers in a passage of *Camera Lucida* a reflection on the odd, dissociative sensation when viewing photographs of himself that “‘myself’ never coincides with my image,” which he recognizes as “the advent of myself as other” (12). Barthes’ description captures what is uncanny about encountering one’s own likeness in a photograph:

...each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture (comparable to certain nightmares). In terms of image-repertoire, the Photograph (the one I intend) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter (14).

For Barthes, what is uncanny about viewing his own photograph—and every photograph—is always “this imperious sign of my future death (97).

Freud identifies repetition as another factor responsible for producing uncanny phenomena. He recalls, for example, being overcome by a sense of the uncanny after wandering the streets of an Italian town only to discover that he inexplicably arrives again and again at the same intersection. Repetition—“the unintended recurrence of the same situation”—can result in a sense of helplessness similar to that of dream states and in which “the idea of something fateful and inescapable when otherwise we should have spoke only of ‘chance’” (SE 17: 237). When, in another example from Freud, we encounter the number 62 several times in a single day—a coat check number, an address, a hotel room number or again a train compartment—we feel this

chain of coincidences to be uncanny and are likely to ascribe some secret meaning to it (SE 17: 237-238). Barthes describes the photograph as “the tireless repetition of contingency”—always expressing a singular set of circumstances (5). Every photograph is the product of contingency—the coalescing of a number of discrete elements into particular alignment at a specific moment. Henri Cartier-Bresson—whose photographs often capture what is surreal or uncanny in the banality of the everyday—has described this as “the decisive moment.” Nicholson Middleton argues in his essay “Photography & the Uncanny” that when a photographer waits for the right moment for the composition to come together a certain unconscious logic is in play; every photograph is an instance in which “chance becomes fate.”<sup>113</sup> However, as Middleton observes, a photographer’s “found object”—unconsciously looked for—becomes a “lost object regained”: “chance becomes a false definition if the concept of the compulsion to repeat is applied” (2.5). Freud concludes, “whatever reminds us of the compulsion to repeat”—proceeding from instinctual impulses more powerful than the pleasure principle—is “perceived as uncanny” (SE 17: 238). The photograph is uncanny because it is the technological realization of the compulsion to repeat, as Barthes writes: “What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially” (*Camera* 4).

Another category of uncanny experience outlined by Freud relates the persistence of primitive beliefs in the form of magical or superstitious thinking. Freud argues that the uncanny occurs “either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed” (SE 17: 249). These “primitive beliefs” are residues of “the old, animistic universe,” which Freud says continue to survive in the belief in spirits, magical powers, the evil eye, or

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<sup>113</sup> See Part Two of Nicholas Middleton’s discussion of photographic chance as it relates to the uncanny in “Photography & The Uncanny”: 2.2.

what he describes as the “omnipotence of thoughts” or the belief in “‘presentiments’ which ‘usually’ come true” (SE 17: 240). As discussed earlier, Benjamin, in the text “A Small History of Photography,” ascribes photography with “magical value”: discussing the mercurial quality of early daguerreotypes; linking the photographer to the tradition of the auger and the fortune teller; and theorizing the medium’s power to breach the space-time continuum and to expose the unconscious. Barthes, too, says that photography is not a *copy* of reality, but “an emanation of *past reality: a magic, not an art*” (*Camera* 88). Tom Gunning has used the term “technological uncanny” to describe the astonishment and wonder that accompanies new technologies, like photography, which are often associated with “magical operations” (“Renewing” 38). While this sense of astonishment—triggered by a changing relation to the world—may be eroded by exposure and familiarity, Gunning argues that these initial feelings are not totally destroyed, but are preserved beneath learned rationality. The cycle of reception from “wonder” to “habit” is not one-way, Gunning theorizes, rather, it is a circuit that allows for “aesthetic de-familiarization” and “re-enchantment”: “wonder can be worn down into habit; habit can suddenly, even catastrophically, transform back into shock of recognition” (“Renewing” 38, 32). The “technological uncanny” persists, like the uncanny experiences Freud traces to animism and the omnipotence of thoughts, because of the “the traumatic surfacing of allayed fears and anxieties, as well as the uncanny re-emergence of earlier stages of magical thinking”—especially those associations rooted in childhood impressions (“Renewing” 38).

Freud observes that for many people the uncanny experiences of the highest degree relate “to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts” (SE 17: 241). He attributes the persistence of certain thoughts and feelings about death to “the strength of our original emotional reaction to death and the insufficiency of our scientific knowledge about it”

(SE 17: 242). No human being, says Freud, really grasps mortality, and moreover, the unconscious has little use for the concept. Citing the persistence of religions that dispute individual death and promote belief in the afterlife, as well as the ubiquitous posters advertising lectures that will provide instruction on how to communicate with the dead, and even scientists who conclude that such contact might be possible, Freud argues that beliefs about death in his era have not evolved much further beyond those of savages. Though checked by the mechanisms of repression—a necessary stage if primitive feelings are to recur in the form of uncanny experience—“the primitive fear of the dead is still so strong within us and always ready to come to the surface on any provocation” (SE 17: 242). Gunning observes that the technologies most strongly associated with the uncanny—the photograph, the phonograph, and the motion picture rather than the refrigeration or canned food—are all technologies that preserve human traits such as expression, movement or voice. These technologies are uncanny not only because they challenge mortality, but also because their very disembodied ghostliness offers “an uncanny foretaste of death.” (“Renewing” 40). Photography, argues Gunning, allows “a re-animation of the ontological instability of all mimetic representation”—an instability he says finds its most extreme expression in the genre of spirit photography (12). According to Gunning, the uncanniest technologies are those that blur the line between life and death. Photographs are uncanny because, as Barthes expresses, every photograph “certifies, so to speak, that the *corpse* is alive, as corpse: it is the living image of a dead thing” (*Camera* 79). Freud’s “return of the repressed” and Barthes’ “return of the dead” are united on the ontologically murky plane of the photograph.



## Conclusion

Every photograph is haunted because it confronts us with an ontological crisis. This crisis is not unlike the one with which Breton describes in his novel *Nadja*, a text in which both photographs<sup>114</sup> and ghosts proliferate. Breton begins *Nadja* with the question “Who am I?” Drawing on a French proverb, Breton says the answer lies in knowing “whom I ‘haunt.’” By “haunt,” Breton means, “makes me, still alive, play a ghostly part, evidently referring to what I must have ceased to be in order to be *who* I am” (11). For Breton, the image of the “ghost” represents “the finite representation of a torment that may be eternal” or “an idea of irreparable loss, of punishment” (12). Like Freud’s uncanny, the photograph returns us to a primal trauma we wish to repress—a confrontation with our own mortality. In every photograph, an instant bound by time and contingency, we encounter our double, the ephemeral or ghostly part of ourselves, the part which is-already-dead or about-to-die. When Breton asks Nadja—the woman he haunts throughout the novel and who haunts him—the question, “Who are you?”, she answers, “A soul in limbo” (71). Through the photograph we discover ourselves, like Breton’s Nadja, as souls in limbo. When a photograph moves us, it is perhaps because it can bring an acute awareness that each moment we are suspended between this world and the next. X-rays are uncanny because they make this realization explicit.

If photography has the power to haunt, it is because of its *fin-de-siecle* in-between-ness. Photography occupies a zone between the superstitions and dreamscapes of the waning nineteenth century and the technological and scientific innovations of the ascendant twentieth century. Likewise, photography breaches the same boundaries as the mystery story between the visible and invisible, knowable and unknown, life and death, and conscious and unconscious. Not

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<sup>114</sup> *Nadja* is illustrated with a series of photographic plates that include scenes of Paris as well as portraits of people and photographs of objects. The photographs are integral to the story, and Breton refers frequently to these images.

only does photography strain these boundaries, it makes them transparent. The X-ray reveals photography's power to see past surfaces, exposing innermost hidden layers. With this revelation, everything is potentially exposed to view by photographic technology, from the snapshot that exposes an indiscretion, to the X-ray that reveals the shrapnel embedded in a hand, or the spirit photograph of departed loved one that gives us a glimpses of a hidden dimension. And while a photograph of a human thought was never obtained, it did, given the startling pace of scientific discovery and the serious experimentation devoted to this end, seem imminently achievable at the end of the nineteenth century. Tucked away in houses lined with plush and wrapped in layers of clothing, the Victorians found themselves, nonetheless, uncomfortably vulnerable to exposure. One of photography's most haunting aspects, then, might be said to be the shiver it gives us when we consider that we all, to some degree, lead transparent lives. In vulnerable moments we feel ourselves (and the spaces we occupy) to be as transparent as glass—or as a ghost. Benjamin describes the haunting sensation such transparency brings, likening it to a walk through the glass enclosed arcades:

The dread of doors that won't close is something everyone knows from dreams. Stated more precisely: these are doors that appear closed without being so. It was with heightened senses that I learned of this phenomenon in a dream in which, while I was in the company of a friend, a ghost appeared to me in the window of the ground floor of a house to our right. And as we walked on, the ghost accompanied us from inside all the houses. It passed through all the walls and always remained at the same height with us. I saw this, though I was blind. The path we travel through arcades is fundamentally just such a ghost walk, on which doors give way and walls yield (*Arcades* 409)

In a historical moment when American culture elevates privacy's importance and Americans begin to demand an expansion of its definition, photography renders it an already-obsolete concept—a phantasmagoria that casts its shadows into the next century.

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