Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* and the Strange Question of Trans-Subjectivity

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At the end of Shirley Jackson’s novel, *The Haunting of Hill House*, the protagonist, Eleanor Vance, who has been sent away from the apparently malign house out of fear for her sanity, turns “the wheel [of her car] to send [it] directly at the great tree at the curve of the driveway” resulting in her death. As she is turning the wheel, a thought, almost in the form of an affirmation, crosses Eleanor’s mind: “I am really doing it, I am doing this all by myself, now, at last; this is me, I am really really really doing it by myself.” Since this sounds like an intention, we are puzzled when, in the “unending crashing second before the car hurled into the tree,” Eleanor’s next thought casts a strange light on the previous reflection: “Why am I doing this? Why am I doing this?”

In light of the overdetermined assertion that she is “really really really doing it,” Eleanor Vance’s last question seems perplexing because it also reveals that the speaker does not know the ground, the reason, or the purpose of her apparent suicide. Likewise, her final double interrogative—“Why am I doing this? Why am I doing this?”—implies more disturbingly that this “unknowing” also means that we may be dealing with more than one “consciousness” and that the notions of volition and intention are, therefore, being called into question. In other words, if we were to use Nicolas Abraham’s theory of the phantom to describe the event—a phantom is a psychic gap “left within us by the secrets of others”—it could be said that Eleanor Vance’s suicide is mysterious not only because she appears divided within herself but also because, in terms of the phantom, she seems to be “possessed not by [her] own unconscious but by someone else’s.” The question is: whose? In *The Haunting of Hill House*, this indeterminacy is uncanny because the phantom formation “works like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject’s own mental topography.” One could say, therefore, that Eleanor Vance’s final moments are also uncanny because they illuminate the workings of a novel that ubiquitously evokes the phenomenological question of alterity *par excellence*: “Whose thoughts are these inhabiting my inner world?”

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The question throws a strange light upon subjectivity as it is hypothesized in *The Haunting of Hill House*, a novel in which the tropes of haunting, telepathy, and clairvoyance remind us that there is more to alterity than the shattering of the *autos*. In Jackson’s novel, these tropes lead us to reconsider what we mean by subjectivity for, beyond the question of consciousness, they also destabilize what Sonu Shamdasani refers to as the “*singular notion of the ‘unconscious’* that has dominated twentieth century thought,” especially via Freudian psychoanalysis. The tropes of telepathy and clairvoyance in the novel lead us towards the same ontological and epistemological aporia that appeared at the turn of the century over the influence of spiritualist debates and the question of thought-transference on the rise and practice of psychoanalysis. If anything, this aporia is epitomized in the rift between Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung over what Freud called “the black tide…of occultism.” In fact, Jackson’s novel draws upon the history of unresolved social, cultural, and psychological tensions fueling the ubiquitous apparitionist/non-apparitionist debates of the 19th century, including questions of the veridicality of ghosts and spirits, of the authenticity of mediums and the efficacy of para/psychology to determine the relationship between psyche and matter in competing models of the unconscious with respect to the “occult” status of the mind.

At the turn of the century, social, cultural, and psychological interest in telepathy, hypnosis, and survival after death was paralleled in the reception of new communications technologies such as the telegraph and the telephone, which appeared like other paranormal phenomena, to defy the limitations of time and space and contributed to what Pamela Thurschwell refers to as “wider conceptualizations of the borders of individual consciousness.” Alongside communications technology, other aspects of scientific investigation also fueled the debates. For example, the discovery of Roentgen rays in the 1890s likewise showed “the potential for science to discover previously unknown forms of energy, which added to hopes that science might eventually uncover the even more subtle types of mental and spiritual energy that purportedly underlay communication with spirits.” In fact, the issue of what “separates one mind from another and what separates the living from the dead” was of primary interest not only to the turn-of-the-century Gothic, but also to psychoanalysis and, in the latter case, contributed to the rift between Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.

On the subject of telepathy, Freud’s resistance is telling. François Roustang argues that “everything that Freud wrote on this subject was in order to exorcise the reality of thought-transference in his life and in his invention, psychoanalysis.” Conversely, contemporary psychologists like William James and Carl Jung were, according to Roderick Main, not only “deeply interested in psychical research [but]… had made close observations of mediums; they were willing as Freud was not, to consider the phenomena that emerged in these contexts in a non-pathological
light.”

Although Freud remained profoundly ambivalent about “occult” phenomena throughout his career, Jung’s personal experiences of the paranormal, in conjunction with his collaboration with physicist Wolfgang Pauli, led him to formulate the theory of synchronicity—an acausal connecting principle derived in relation to modern physics, in which “matter and mind are not differentiated as in the assertions of classical science.”

If there was any resistance on Freud’s part to this model of the relationship between psyche and matter it was due, in part, to the fact that, as Christopher Hauke argues, “psychoanalysis thought it could proceed with the objectivity of a classical science even though its object of investigation, the unconscious-conscious psyche, was itself also the very tool of that investigation.”

In light of Freud’s attempted exorcism of the reality of thought transference from psychoanalysis, it could be argued that what actually haunts Hill House is a certain interpretive model that still delimits what we can say about the “supernatural” or, for that matter, about the sentence of objects, for these conditions, as Geoffrey Hartman says, are “accepted as … functional belief[s] only in fiction” but are “considered dysfunctional in terms of mental health unless demystified by [Freudian] psychoanalysis.”

Given that Jackson’s novel appeared in the decade in which Freudian analysis became popularized in America, it is telling that such “dysfunctions” remained operative in medical discourses. For example, in 1947, only a decade before the publication of Jackson’s novel, neuro-psychiatrist Jan Ehrenwald in *Telepathy and Medical Psychology* puts it this way:

Since Freud first called attention to observations of this kind, a great deal of evidence has been adduced confirming the striking similarity between primitive mentality and the thinking of neurotic patients of the obsession-compulsory type. This similarity is indeed so remarkable that it is apt to show the whole problem of alleged supernatural phenomena in a new light and to confirm the suspicion that it is not so much the problem of telepathy or paranormal cognition, or whatever it be termed, that calls for closer investigation, as the very sanity of those asserting its existence.

The question posed in and by Jackson’s novel is not only how to think of the possibility of forms of non-human consciousness or “supernormal phenomena,” but also how to think cogently about the relationship between telepathy, clairvoyance, haunting and the unconscious without resorting to psychopathology or, to use the case of Eleanor Vance, without re-enacting what Henry Sussman refers to, in his discussion of the governess in Henry James’ very similar story of haunting, *The Turn of the Screw*, as “the wish to write [the protagonist] off … as a repressed hysteriac.”
In this paper, I argue that telepathy, clairvoyance, and the sentience of objects are tropes that combine in Jackson’s novel to challenge certain classical models of human consciousness and subjectivity and, therefore, of psychoanalytic interpretation, by dramatizing the Lacanian notion of “knowledge in the real.” As Slavoj Žižek tells it, “knowledge in the real” is more than “a means of illustrating [metaphorically] a certain feature of psychic reality.” The term also alludes to the fact that modern physics, when dealing with subatomic particles—“repeatedly encounters phenomena that seem to suspend the principle of local cause, i.e., phenomena that seem to imply a transport of information”20 as a form of “knowledge.”21 If *The Haunting of Hill House* engages us in the “knowledge of the real” it is because the novel presents us, in Kuhnian terms, with a paradigm shift regarding the nature of the conscious and unconscious psyche. This ontological and epistemological shift is disturbing because, to use Barbara Eckman’s thoughts from another context, Jackson’s novel encourages us to move from a notion of conscious and unconscious psyche located in individual human brains, to a conception of multiple consciousnesses, some human, others inhuman; some located within human psyches, others located outside, in nature and even elsewhere; some humanly personal and immediately known, others inhuman, impersonal, and only indirectly known by human consciousness. This imagining of multiple consciousnesses in the world, released from their Enlightened imprisonment within human brains, brings threat as well as promise. It may fragment the world and our experience far more radically than the Kantian or intrapsychic subject-object split.22

In Jackson’s novel, the tropes of clairvoyance, telepathy, and the sentience of objects threaten what Christopher Hauke calls “our dyadic, exchange-based experience”23 because they question the notion of a unitary subject and, thus, the perception that individual human brains house only a personal conscious and unconscious psyche. Likewise, in positing the existence of multiple consciousnesses, the tropes also challenge what Christopher Hauke refers to as “the hard and fast division between mind and matter.”24

In *The Haunting of Hill House*, we find that these displacements remain perpetually in play. If there is to be any tracing of consciousness or unconsciousness, of intention or volition, the question of “whose?” is endlessly deferred, especially with regards reading and interpretation. In the end, we may still arrive at an impasse regarding the veridicality of telepathy, clairvoyance, and the sentience of objects; and we may not resolve the mystery of Eleanor Vance’s suicide, but we will have reconsidered the limits of the classical psychoanalytic model of subjectivity with respect to the view that “psyche is restricted to the skull” and that “when experienced outside this container, … psyche must always be a
delusion, an error that must be ‘withdrawn’ back inside.”

This exploration will be neither a return to animism nor to “magical thinking”—although Freud might think so—nor will it be an attempt to “prove” the existence of the paranormal. Instead, we will have explored the psychodynamics of Shirley Jackson’s novel through Jung’s thoughts on the relationship between psyche and matter—that is, synchronicity (which has its roots in modern physics). In Hill House, synchronicity amounts to “meaningful coincidences” and strange parallels—the kinds that arise in response, as Roderick Main puts it, “to [a] person having reached some kind of psychological impasse.” Of course, in Hill House, the impasse will often be our own.

One compelling example of this impasse is typical of the novel’s uncanny ethos regarding telepathy and clairvoyance. After the group, including Theo and Luke Sanderson and headed by Doctor John Montague, has been in residence at Hill House for a few days, Eleanor Vance is awakened by what she perceives is the sound of her invalid mother knocking on the wall to summon her. But we already know that Eleanor feels—at least unconsciously—that she is responsible for her mother’s death because she did not respond on the night in question to her mother’s knocking. We might be right to conclude that the noise Eleanor hears is a manifestation of her guilty conscience—a “projection,” perhaps—if it were not for the fact that Theo hears it, too. In fact, both women are profoundly frightened by what Eleanor thinks of as “a hollow bang, as though something were hitting the doors with an iron kettle, or an iron bar, or an iron glove” (128). Oddly enough, in spite of the magnitude of the noise, neither Doctor Montague nor Luke Sanderson hears anything. When they arrive upstairs, Doctor Montague says “neither of us heard any sound up here…It was perfectly quiet.”

Even more curious is the fact that when Eleanor hears the sound coming closer, she thinks to herself that “the oddest part of this indescribable experience was that Theo should be having it too” (129). Why should Eleanor think this? If we remember that Eleanor was brought to Hill House because she has the power of telekinesis—though she has no memory of it, by the way—it seems likely that the sounds resonating in the hall could be an aural manifestation of her guilty conscience regarding her mother. We might even buy into the notion that the sound is produced by Eleanor’s telekinesis—even if she is not aware of it—which would explain why Theo is able to hear it, too. But since only Eleanor and Theo hear the explosive crashing—and not Luke and Doctor Montague—we have to ask not if it is taking place, but where.

To approach this question, let us recall that Doctor Montague brought Theo to Hill House because of her “incredible skill” in extra sensory perception. Given that Theo’s reputation is based on her success in telepathically identifying cards
“held up by an assistant out of sight and hearing” (8), we can assume that, just as in the parapsychological laboratory, positive results do “not diminish if the subjects attempting the ESP or PK tasks [are] separated from the target objects by even great distances in time and space.” What this means, in Jung’s terms, is that we are dealing with “a psychically conditioned relativity of space and time” and that, as Jung argues, “perceptions [here] occur as if in part there were no space, in part no time.”

Although the noise heard by Theo and Eleanor is experienced by both women as being veridical, I’m arguing that if the sound is generated in and by Eleanor’s unconscious bad conscience—to the extent she experiences it as external to herself—then Theo’s experience of the event can be seen as a result of a shared, yet equally unconscious link with Eleanor. In other words, while Theo’s response to the sound validates and corroborates Eleanor’s experience of a terrible noise, Theo can be seen to experience Eleanor’s moment of synchronicity—“the coincidence of a psychic state … with a simultaneous, objective, external event that corresponds to the psychic state or content” (Jung 97 Main) — as if it was her own consciousness, since the efficacy of telepathic exchanges, according to researchers, does not necessarily require that one be conscious of taking on the thoughts of others. Indeed, as William James has pointed out, the work of Frederick Myers, who coined the word “telepathy,” leads us to consider that “the invisible segments of our minds are susceptible, under rarely realized conditions, of acting and being acted upon by the invisible segments of other conscious lives.”

This “action” is not always determinable, however. For example, in Telepathy and Medical Psychology, Jan Ehrenwald draws attention to the fact that in laboratory experiments in telepathic exchanges, telepathy does not necessarily mean clear and unmediated communication between minds:

How can the experimenter preclude the possibility that his subject might tap the agent’s mental content at a different level … or … that the percipient might be side-tracked upon some mental content of his own, instead of that of the agent.

There can be no doubt that telepathic leakage originating from unconscious wishes or expectations of either the experimenter or of any other person concerned with the tests may easily modify their outcome and even determine results in a decisive way.

If the issue is one of guilt—as it seems to be in Hill House—the story gets even more complicated and ghostly. As Roderick Main points out, it was Jung who “recognized that states of mind, such as bad conscience, can sometimes express themselves synchronistically in the thoughts and feelings of another person” or even through “the arrangement of events in the environment.” In the case of Hill...
House, what is interior seems to be exterior and what is exterior also seems to be interior.

Although we seem privy to Eleanor’s thoughts throughout the novel, we are never sure if she is aware of thinking them or, paradoxically, if they even belong to her. For example, when Eleanor is watching Dr. Montague and his wife, who has joined the group at Hill House and when she wonders “how long [Mrs. Montague] is going to stay,” Theodora leans over to Eleanor and whispers in her ear, “I wonder how long she is going to stay?”(184). Even if this is a “coincidence”—or, perhaps, especially if it is—it tells us something about the uncanny phenomenology of mind proposed in Jackson’s novel. In another context, this sort of model of mind is described by Georges Poulet, who puts it this way: “I am the subject of thoughts other than my own. My consciousness behaves as though it were the consciousness of another.”38 The question is, at Hill House, whose “consciousness”—or, for that matter, whose “unconsciousness”—prevails if thoughts are transferred between subjects? Indeed, since Doctor Montague is aware that Eleanor is attracted to him—and that he at times encourages her dependence on him—it’s possible that the thought crossing Eleanor’s mind regarding the length of Mrs. Montague’s stay is actually his own in hopes that his wife will not remain long at Hill House; after all upon her arrival, he kisses her “obediently” (180) and, moments after Theodora whispers in Eleanor’s ear, he says to Mrs. Montague, “And how long will you be able to stay?”(184). What makes for the uneasiness in this complex situation is not just that Mrs. Montague is unwelcome at Hill House but that, as François Roustang remarks elsewhere,

> Thought-transference appears … as a constitutive element of the “double.” The exchange of thoughts or psychical processes between one person and another increases, so that progressively, like a pattern that appears when the lines and traces are sufficiently numerous, one becomes the replica of the other, and it is no longer known who is who.39

In Jackson’s novel, the patterns are complicated by the fact that Eleanor’s personal history is paralleled or doubled in the history of Hill House: that is, one of the Crain sisters who inherited the house died of pneumonia but, recalling Eleanor’s experience of ignoring her mother, “there were stories later of a doctor called too late, of the old lady lying neglected upstairs while the [companion, a village girl] dallied in the garden with some village lout” (78).

The pattern is complicated again when Doctor Montague tells the story of Hill House, revealing that the companion eventually committed suicide. Eleanor is dismayed and says “‘Killed herself?’ … ‘She had to kill herself?’”(80). Her use of the imperative “had” draws attention to the cognate verb “to have” and its
connotations of possession; it also that the companion was under a burden or obligation to kill herself, as if her death, like Eleanor’s at the end of the novel, was not entirely of her own doing. Indeed, Doctor Montague confirms this obligation when he says, “It was accepted locally that she had chosen suicide because her guilty conscience drove her to it” (80). Montague’s account invites us to speculate upon the correspondences between Eleanor’s guilt, the companion’s, and the history of Hill House. In this instance the correspondence (a necessary term here) between minds is disturbing when we realize that Doctor Montague uses the word “drove” to describe the companion’s compulsion to commit suicide and that, later on, Eleanor literally drives her car into a tree. Eleanor’s suicide seems even stranger when we recall how, at the beginning of her journey, Eleanor receives directions to Hill House from Doctor Montague in a letter that she reads “as though he had been guiding her from some spot far away, moving her car with controls in his hands” (23). And Eleanor is not the only one to feel driven. When Luke describes Doctor Montague’s response to first seeing Hill House, he says, “I thought he was going to send the car into a tree” (75). Although these parallels appear to play upon “the psychoanalytical notion of drive, or more properly the Lacanian distinction between its aim and its goal,” they perhaps more importantly call attention to the uncanny circulation of thought which can be ascribed to no one in particular. In other words, these metaphantasmic patterns make us unsure of who is who or, for that matter, what is what, because in addition to the lines and traces between characters, we must also consider the uncanny architecture of Hill House, a dwelling which, in so many ways, is strangely (pre)occupied with itself and appears as a sentient and equal partner in these psychic events.

A legacy of Poe and Hawthorne, the sentient house belongs to the Gothic tradition, often serving as “antagonist in the haunted house tale” From “The Fall of the House of Usher,” to The House of the Seven Gables, from Bly House in James’ The Turn of the Screw to Jackson’s Hill House, the sentient house in the Gothic reveals how the “law of the oikos (house, room, tomb, crypt)” is, as Derrida remarks, always already that of heimlich/unheimlich. In The Haunting of Hill House, the trope of the sentient house reminds us of the coercive logic of spatial metaphors that ground the production of all meaning. As Mark Wigley points out, “architecture is not simply one metaphor among others. More than the metaphor of foundation, it is the foundational metaphor.” The architectural principle of Hill House—the fictional house—is conversely also that of the house of fiction: it is the uncanny scene of writing that lends itself, in and as literature, to tracing and displacing the classical distinctions between interiority and exteriority, between consciousnesses and unconsciousnesses, between psyche and matter. Jackson’s novel accomplishes these displacements by drawing us into the scene of telepathy that is described elsewhere by Nicholas Royle as being “a name for literature as a discursive formation.” In other words, to enter, by way of reading, the scene of
telepathy is to find oneself in interpretive relationship with a text that seems as eerily prescient as the fictional house with which Eleanor Vance, Doctor Montague, Luke Sanderson, and Theo find themselves at odds.

In *The Haunting of Hill House*, the trope of the sentient house and the scene of telepathy illuminate the ontological and epistemological complexity alluded to by Shirley Jackson who, in an interview, once said “No one can get into a novel about a haunted house without hitting the subject of reality head-on.”\(^4\) In Jackson’s novel, “hitting the subject…head-on” might refer to what literally happens to Eleanor Vance, but it also means setting a collision course with classical models of reality and perception. This subject means hypothesizing, as Jung does in his discussion of modern physics’ relationship to psychology, the possibility of an “unconscious, i.e., objective reality … [that] behaves at the same time like a subjective one—in other words, like a consciousness.”\(^47\) Jung hypothesized the parallels “between psychic and psychophysical events”\(^48\) and argued “that psychic energy influences living or inert objects in such a way that, as though ‘animated’ by a psychic content alien to them, they are compelled to represent it somehow or other.”\(^49\)

In light of this view, parallels between psychic and psychophysical events produce uncanny effects at Hill House—one example being the writing on the wall that reads “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME” (146). The writing on the wall is literal and figurative, ominously significant and allusive. Even if Eleanor denies authorship, the writing suggests that, like the final moments in the car, we may be dealing with what Hippolyte Tain in 1878 called the “simultaneous presence of two parallel and independent sets of ideas, of two centres of action.”\(^50\) We could say that instead of raising the question of authorship, the trope of the writing on the wall points us towards the Lacanian notion of the unconscious as “not only *that which must be read*, but also, and primarily, *that which reads*.”\(^51\) To read the writing on the wall in Jackson’s text is doubly uncanny because that writing acts as a framing device to collapse the distinction between the literal and the figurative and, to use in this case Shoshana Felman’s remarks about *The Turn of the Screw*, to pull “the outside of the story into its inside by enclosing in it what is usually outside it: its own readers,”\(^52\) namely, Eleanor, Theo, John Montague, Luke Sanderson—and me. The trope thus offers us a way to think about how the con/fusion between house and occupants parallels that between the reader and Jackson’s convoluted text; in other words, it describes and produces a correspondence between psychic and psychophysical events. We get a sense of this correspondence when we realize that whatever is said about negotiating the layout of Hill House can also be said of reading Jackson’s text: “Every angle … is slightly wrong. … It is … a masterpiece of architectural misdirection.” (106). These
parallels are strange because they draw attention to Hill House—the structure and the novel—as being what Nicholas Royle refers to in his discussion of telepathy and literature, “the site of a certain fold, of cutting or interruption” that “may appear, on occasion, as … a sort of reader-response criticism in reverse.”

Parallels such as these challenge classical explanatory models with their pseudo-objective assumptions of “a hard and fast division between mind and matter.” Indeed, the novel hypothesizes a view of reality that is nearer to what Nathan Schwartz-Salant refers to in his psychoanalytic work as an “interactive field” — “a space with its own processes … beyond the three-dimensional notion of container-contained focused on the projective and introjective processes” and “is akin to a fourth dimension.” In Jackson’s novel, Hill House is uncanny for its occupants because it becomes the site of this inexplicable “interaction” between psyche and matter. The strangeness of this space is alluded to by Eleanor who asks, “What happens when you go back to a real house? … I mean—a—well—a real house?”(107). If Eleanor poses the question of the “real” in terms of the house, its uncanniness arises because this “space” is also the interactive field in which we must come to terms with the idea of synchronicity—in which, as Barbara Eckman puts it, “seemingly inanimate physical reality exhibits characteristics similar to psychic states.”

The idea of synchronicity throws light on the interaction between Hill House and its occupants. It also draws attention to the uncanny phenomenology involved in reading Jackson’s novel which appears to be paralleled in the trope of reading in the text, whether it be another’s mind or the writing on the wall. In light of this constellation, Georges Poulet’s reflections on reading suggest what is at stake regarding the uncanny architecture of Hill House—in relation to its occupants but also for the novel’s reader. What Poulet says of a book could just as well be said of Hill House and its occupants: “You are inside it; it is inside you.” Similarly, in Fantasm and Fiction, Peter Schwenger describes this interaction as being one in which “otherness is no longer outside, in the material pages of the book; it constitutes itself ‘inside’ the reading subject. … But because the fictional world has come into being through the experience of interiority, the outside inhabited by [the objects of the fictional world] is also interior: they are what Poulet has called ‘subjectified objects.’” For the reader of Jackson’s novel, as for the occupants of Hill House, there is a moment of vertiginous recognition regarding this exchange when Doctor Montague says of the house, “It watches every move you make” (85). The point is that the phenomenology of reading illuminates the meaningful coincidence of psyche and matter in Jackson’s novel; not because this interaction describes, as Barbara Eckman argues in another context, “a projection of psychic intention onto dead matter” but rather because it illustrates an “equivalence or conformity” between the two.” To enter the realm of “subjectified objects” that is
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The Haunting of Hill House is to discover that the distinction between readers and texts is as arbitrary as that between psyche and matter.

In a letter to a colleague congratulating him on an essay on synchronicity, Jung’s remarks can give us insight into the psychodynamics of Jackson’s novel: “how does it come about that even inanimate objects are capable of behaving as if they were acquainted with my thoughts?” To be acquainted with Jackson’s text is to find that, like the characters, we have entered a scene of reading that is the scene of telepathy, of which Lacan might say, “the unconscious is outside.” This displacement might account for the fact that, in the novel, Eleanor’s thoughts often seem to merge with the narrator’s observations and vice versa, resulting in what Steven Schnieder refers to as “the confusion and conflation of subjective and objective experience.” What this amounts to, according to Schneider, is that we are “left more or less in the dark as to whether the strange and troubling phenomena experienced by the protagonist […] are … subjective in nature (because they are products of their psyche) or whether they are … objective (rendering them supernatural in origin).”

In the dark of Jackson’s novel, the t(ro)topography delivers us into the uncanny phenomenology of Hill House in which the house of fiction and the fiction of the house interpenetrate. The dilemma facing its occupants appears to be our own as well: is the house really haunted or is Eleanor just imagining things? In The Haunting of Hill House, the tropes of clairvoyance and telepathy dissolve the either-or dichotomy to lead us into uncanny territory for they anticipate the model of subjectivity that is alluded to elsewhere by Derrida when he claims that it is “difficult to imagine a theory of what they still call the unconscious without a theory of telepathy. They can neither be confused nor dissociated.” Neither confused nor dissociated but, in the novel, telepathy and the unconscious are complicated by the sympathetic relationship between psyche and matter. This constellation is disturbing and even disorienting because, to use Geoffrey Hartman’s terms, it threatens to return us to “a magical universe, with currents of sympathy running along esoteric channels—the very world described as primitive in Totem and Taboo.” Indeed, this is the “very world” that was disavowed by Freud at least since his break with Jung and Sandor Ferenczi. It is the world, as Freud argues, of “primitive men and neurotics …who attach … an over-evaluation…to psychical acts.” Given the privileging of Freud’s materialism over Jung’s so-called mysticism regarding the science of the mind, the problem of “psychical acts” remains a matter of psychopathology.

As with any psychopathology, the “problem” involves some sort of reading, and demonstrates the way that, to use Thomas Laqueur’s terms, “systems of
knowledge determine what can be thought within them” (13). In the case of science, William James put it this way:

phenomena unclassified with the system are [seen as] paradoxical absurdities, and must be held untrue. … No part of the unclassified residuum has been usually been treated with a more contemptuous scientific regard than the mass phenomena generally called mystical. Physiology will have nothing to do with them. Orthodox psychology turns its back upon them. Medicine sweeps them out; or, at most, when in an anecdotal vein, records a few of them as “effects of the imagination”—a phrase of mere dismissal.

Dismissals such as these extend to literary analysis for as Geoffrey Hartmann explains, it is Freud who “has made it hard for us to value interpretations not based on the priority of a [certain] psychological factor.” More specifically, according to Hartmann, when it comes to interpretation, it is Freud who has made it difficult to avoid describing “the role played in mental illness by what Freud calls, in his critique of ‘the omnipotence of thoughts, the over-evaluation of mental processes as compared with reality.’ In Hartman’s view, this interpretive model is significant since it concerns “a failure to draw a certain type of experience into that special dialogue established by [Freudian] psychoanalysis”—a failure that occurs in spite of—or perhaps because of—Freud’s fort-da relationship with the paranormal and telepathy.

In my view, Jackson’s novel ameliorates this failure by suggesting that if anything is being haunted, it is actually the house of psychoanalysis. As François Roustang points out, “psychoanalysis wants to be irrevocably on the side of science and therefore rejects what it cannot account for.” In the case of The Haunting of Hill House what cannot be accounted for takes the form of telepathy and clairvoyance, of the mysterious coincidence between psyche and matter, and demonstrates that the “failure” of which Hartman speaks is better understood as a denial which often has its roots in the fear of ridicule or the threat of career-death in spite of the fact that, as William James puts it, “the phenomena are there, lying broadcast over the surface of history.” For example, in the preface to his monograph, Telepathy and Medical Psychology, neuro-psychiatrist Jan Ehrenwald in 1947 remarks that it was pointed out to him “that whoever wants to expound his views on matters of psychical research would be best advised first to state his credentials.” Similarly, in the preface to his more recent literary analysis of the appeal of occult thought in modernist poetry, Timothy Matterer’s remarks are cautionary when, echoing the orthodox Freudian party line, he states that “interest in the occult may be labeled intellectually suspect or the sign of a budding neurosis.”

In Freud’s case, orthodoxy is conservatively and anxiously directed towards the phenomena of thought-transference which, according to Roustang, “entails a
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type of relationship that exceeds the limits of analysis” and which made Freud
nervous because he observed “that he provoked an imbalance, a deformation, an
excess, and that what then came to light in speech was of the order of the primitive,
the archaic, the erotic.”76 The Haunting of Hill House demonstrates that the order of
such provocations really are uncanny in that they compel us to link the act of
reading and literature to parapsychology, where the prevailing subject is telepathy.
If we were to return to the mystery of Eleanor Vance’s final moments, we would
realize that all along we have been talking not only about the uncanniness of
reading in light of telepathy but also, if I can say it, of being read by Jackson’s
novel which, right to the end, poses the questions asked by Nicholas Royle
regarding the relationship between literature and telepathy— “Who is reading?
What is being read and how?”77 If these questions are questions about reading, they
are also about subjectivity—or, better yet, what I’d like to call trans-subjectivity—
and, in a certain way, they return us to previous questions of intention and volition
posed in the beginning of this discussion on telepathy and alterity. In light of
William James’ remark that “in her phenomena as we immediately experience
them, nature is everywhere Gothic, not classic,”78 we arrive at the threshold of
trans-subjectivity which is suggestive of a relationship not only between “subjects”
but also between psyche and matter.

In the spirit of this arrival—which is also a certain return— I would like to
reflect briefly upon the scholarly implications for taking a Jungian approach to the
study of literature and film as an alternative to the classical Freudian model as it
has been wielded by critics over the last century. In Jung and the Postmodern: The
Interpretation of Realities, Christopher Hauke asserts that Jungian psychology is
more relevant now than ever before because Jung, as a cultural theorist, writes “in a
way that valorizes subjective experience as a legitimate approach to concerns of the
wider, collective culture and to ‘scientific’ culture in general” (1). In this regard,
Jung studies offer scholars an intellectual, emotional, and, perhaps, spiritual
alternative to materialist and positivist modes of interpretation which have
promulgated a concept of “reality” devoid of what Jung called “living value”—the
aspect of unus mundus which is inextricably bound up, as Jung says, with “as much
feeling as thinking; as much intuition as sensation.”79 What this means for literary
and film studies is nothing less than a paradigm shift in interpretation that would be
commensurate with a view of reality as it is revealed through Jungian analysis
(dual meaning intended) and quantum physics. According to Christopher Hauke,
the implications are profound for, as he says,

the shift in consciousness required to accept the view of reality
revealed by aspects of psychotherapy phenomena [synchronicities,
etc.,] — and those of quantum physics—is as great, as [Nathan]
Field points out, as that required in former times when humanity had to shift from a geocentric, flat-earth view, to one that was heliocentric and which saw the earth as a sphere—despite its persisting ‘common-sense’ flatness. (263)

In this context, a reading of Shirley Jackson’s novel in Jungian terms brings us not only to the threshold of a house haunted by the spectre of Freud but also to a house haunted by the phantom of a mode of literary theory that since the rise of “English” as an academic study has attempted, until recently, to define itself in terms of the classical subject/object division in the guise of the reader/text opposition. In this regard a reading of Jackson’s novel in Jungian terms calls into question the “institution” of literary studies which, prior to Derrida’s interventions, naturalized the reader/text opposition by valorizing the text/world dichotomy grounded in classical science. To read “otherwise”, however, is to bring the reader to the threshold of what I’ve been calling, for purposes of literary and/or film analyses, trans-subjectivity; a term which gestures towards an understanding of interpretation more in line with Jung’s view of the psychoid: “neither exclusively matter nor mind; rather … both” as David Peat puts it. In this context, as far as a reading of The Haunting of Hill House is concerned we might say in closing that if a Jungian reading of Shirley Jackson’s novel is uncanny it is because it draws us inexorably into experiencing what Jung meant when he said in a letter to Wolfgang Pauli about the “observing process”: “if you look long enough into a dark hole you perceive what is looking in.”

Works Cited

Notes

1 The author gratefully acknowledges that financial support for this research was received in part by a grant funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and by Wilfrid Laurier University Operating Funds.
2 Shirley Jackson, The Haunting of Hill House (New York: Penguin Group, 1959), pp. 245-246. All further quotations will be taken from this edition. Page numbers will follow in parenthesis. Note also that the title of the novel has been more recently changed to The Haunting presumably to make the novel’s connection with Jan de Bont’s 1999 film The Haunting more explicit and, perhaps, reach an audience unfamiliar with Jackson’s work.

For those unfamiliar with Jackson’s novel, it traces the experience of Eleanor Vance, a thirty-two year old woman who, having cared for her invalid mother until her death, finds herself part of a team of paranormal investigators, lead by one Dr. Montague, an anthropologist who is also a scholar of the occult. Montague is looking for evidence of paranormal activity at Hill House and enlists three others to help him in his investigations: Theodora, a woman who demonstrates telepathic abilities, Luke, the heir of Hill House, and
Eleanor who has been isolated for much of her adult life. At Hill House, which has an unsavoury reputation, the four—but especially Eleanor—begin to experience various forms of haunting and it is never clear if the haunting is “real” or if it is a product of the characters’ minds. As the protagonist, Eleanor seems especially vulnerable to the haunting and the reader soon realizes that what haunts Eleanor Vance is not only what might be at Hill House but also a guilty conscience following the death of her mother, for which she blames herself. The novel traces what might be seen as the disintegration of Eleanor’s sanity but can also be seen as an exploration of psychic processes, including a meditation on clairvoyance and telepathy as elements to consider in subjective experiences. Once at Hill House, Eleanor seems at times “possessed” and the reader is never sure if she is possessed by her own thoughts, her guilty past or by the unacknowledged wishes of others: perhaps, all of these, as Jackson’s novel draws the reader into an engagement with the question of the nature of reality. At the novel’s end, Dr. Montague decides that, for her own safety, Eleanor must be sent away from Hill House even though she resists. Escorted out of the apparently malign house, Eleanor takes to her car and instead of leaving Hill House, drives it straight into a great tree in the driveway, thus killing herself but strangely, at the last minute, wondering why.

1 Nicolas Abraham, “Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud’s Metapsychology,” in The Shell and the Kernel with Maria Torok, Trans./Ed. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press), p. 171.
2 Abraham, p. 173.
3 Abraham, p. 173.
4 The question comes from John Forrester’s “Psychoanalysis: Gossip, Telepathy and/or Science?” in The Seductions of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan and Derrida (New York/Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 252.
5 “Telepathy” is a word coined by F.W.H. Myers, a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge and a founding member of the Society for Psychical Research in London in 1882. In The Society for Psychical Research: its rise & progress & a sketch of its work, Edward T. Bennett, Assistant-Secretary to the Society (1882-1902) reports that “at the first General Meeting of the Society, held on July 17th, 1882, Professor W.F. Barrett read the ‘First Report on Thought-Reading’ written by himself, Mr. Gurney, and Mr. Myers. The object of the Report was to place on record the first instalment [sic]of the evidence as to whether ‘a vivid impression or a distinct idea in one mind can be communicated to another mind without the intervening help of the recognized organs of sensation.’... A second Report by the same writers was read at a Meeting of the Society held in December, 1882 [with regards to thought-transference experiments]. These consist of ‘Thought-Transference Drawings, done thus: A. makes an outline sketch of a simple geometrical figure, or of something a little more elaborate. B. sees this sketch, and carrying it in his mind, goes and stands behind C., who sits with a pencil and paper before him and draws the impression he receives from B. All ordinary precautions are taken, and, except in a few trials, no contact between any of the parties was permitted’ (see Edward T. Bennett, The Society for Psychical Research: its rise and progress & a sketch of its work [London: R. Brimley Johnson Adelphi W.C., 1903], pp.13-14). See Appendix I for examples of sketches.
6 Sonu Shamdasani, “Automatic Writing and the Discovery of the Unconscious,” in Spring: A Journal of Archetype and Culture, Vol. 54, June, p. 109 (my emphasis).
7 Freud cited in Linda Donn, Freud, Jung: Years of Friendship, Years of Loss (New York: Collier, 1988), p. 150.
10 Pamela Thurschwell, Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920 (New York/Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.2.
11 Deborah J. Coon, “Spiritualism” in The History of Science and Religion in the Western Tradition: An Encyclopedia, ed. Gary B. Ferngren (New York/London: Garland Publishing: A Member of the Francis Taylor Group, 2000), p. 556.
12 Thurschwell, p. 2.
13 François Rouxstang, Psychoanalysis Never Lets Go, (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 50.
14 Roderick Main, ed. “Introduction” in Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal (Princeton, NJ/London: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 5.
15 Christopher Hauke, Jung and the Postmodern: The Interpretation of Realities (London/Philadelphia: Routledge, 2000), p. 250.
16 Hauke, p. 245.
17 Geoffrey Hartman, “The Interpreter’s Freud” in Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader 2nd ed., ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood (New York: Longman, 2000), p. 384.
18 Jan Ehrenwald, Telepathy and Medical Psychology (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1947), p. 25.
19 Henry Sussman, “James: Twists of the Governess” in The Turn of the Screw: A Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed. Ed. Deborah Esch and Jonathan Warren (New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), p. 231.
20 Slavoj Žižek, Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture (Cambridge, Mass./London: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 45.
21 Žižek, p. 46.
22 Barbara Eckman, “Jung, Hegel, and the Subjective Universe,” p. 94.
23 Hauke, p. 261.
24 Christopher Hauke, Jung and the Postmodern: The Interpretation of Realities, p. 263.
25 Lee Worth Bailey, “Skull’s Lantern: Psychological Projection and the Magic Lantern” in Spring: An Annual of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought, 1986, p. 73.
26 See Jung’s discussion of the young woman patient and the scarabaeid beetle in “On Synchronicity” in Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal, ed. Roderick Main, (Princeton, NJ/London: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 97.
27 Speaking of “meaningful coincidences,” in “Shirley Jackson and the Haunting of Hill House,” Paula Guran describes how the author had decided to write a ghost story after reading about a group of nineteenth century parapsychologists who studied a haunted house and, afterwards, made a report to the Society for Psychical Research. Jackson thought that their reports were “dry” and “not the story of a haunted house” but the story of “several earnest, … determined people, with their differing motivations and background.” As Guran reports, “Jackson wanted to create her own version of a haunted house and so began her research in which, she later claimed to have found a picture of a California house she believed was suitably haunted-looking in a magazine. She asked her mother, who lived in California, to help find information about the dwelling. According to Jackson, her mother identified the house as one the author’s own great-great-grandfather, an architect who had designed some of San Francisco’s oldest buildings, had built” <http://www/darkecho.com/darkecho/horroronline/jackson.htm > .
28 Roderick Main, “Introduction” in Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal, ed. Roderick Main, (Princeton, NJ/London: Princeton University Press, 1997), p.9.
29 See Lee Worth Bailey, “Skull’s Lantern: Psychological Projection and the Magic Lantern” in Spring: An Annual of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought, 1986, pp. 72-87.
30 Roderick Main is paraphrasing Jung’s argument in “Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle” in Collected Works, vol. 8, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 435. See Main in “Introduction” in Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal, ed. Roderick Main, p. 15.
31 Carl G. Jung, “Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle” in Collected Works, vol. 8, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 435.
17 Castricano

32 Carl G. Jung, from “The Soul and Death” in Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal, ed. Roderick Main, p. 144.
33 Carl G. Jung, “On Synchronicity” in Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal, ed. Roderick Main (Princeton, NJ/London: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 97.
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36 Roderick Main, ed. Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal, p.15.
37 Carl G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, Rev. ed. Ed. Aniela Jaffé. Trans. Richard and Clara Wilson [New York: Vintage Books, 1989, p.123-124.
38 Georges Poullet, “Criticism and the Experience of Interiority” in Reader-Response Criticism from Formalism to Post-Structuralism, Ed. Jane P. Tompkins. Trans. Catherine and Richard Macksey (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 44.
39 François Roustang, Psychoanalysis Never Lets Go, p. 51.
40 Slavoj Žižek, Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture , p. 5.
41 The word “metaphantasmia” appears in Charles L. Crow’s “Howells and William James: ‘A Case of Metaphantasmia’ Solved” and is a term “for shared phantasmic experience used in psychic research”(American Quarterly, Vol. 27, No. 2 (May, 1975): 169-177, p. 173.
42 See Dale Bailey, “The Sentient House and the Ghostly Tradition: The Legacy of Poe and Hawthorne” in American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), p. 21.
43 Jacques Derrida, “Living On: Border Lines,” Trans. James Hulbert in Harold Bloom et al., eds., Deconstruction and Criticism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 76.
44 Mark Wigley, The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida’s Haunt (Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 19.
45 Nicholas Royle, Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 25.
46 Quoted in an Interview with Paula Guran at http://www.darkecho.com/darkecho/darkthot/jackson.html.
47 Carl G. Jung, “On the Nature of the Psyche,” in Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal, ed. Roderick Main, p. 125. It is relevant to this discussion to point out that the principles of modern physics are central to Carl Jung’s theory of the psychological relationship between mind and matter in that they draw attention to the significance of the “subjective” observing mind.
48 Carl G. Jung, “Synchronicity” in Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal, ed. Roderick Main, p.101.
49 Carl G. Jung, “Letter to Gebhard Frei, January 17, 1949” in Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal, ed. Roderick Main, p. 160.
50 Cited in Sonu Shamdasani, “Automatic Writing and the Discovery of the Unconscious,” p. 111.
51 Shoshana Felman, Writing and Madness: (Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis), trans. Martha Noel Evans, Shoshana Felman with the assistance of Brian Massumi, ((Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 164.
52 Shoshana Felman, Writing and Madness: (Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis), p. 169.
53 Nicholas Royle, Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind, p. 7.
54 Christopher Hauke, Jung and the Postmodern: The Interpretation of Realities, p. 263.
55 Cited in Christopher Hauke, Jung and the Postmodern: The Interpretation of Realities, p. 260.
56 Barbara Eckman, , “Jung, Hegel, and the Subjective Universe” in Spring: An Annual of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought, 1986, p. 92.
Even before Freud, professional and public opinion regarding the paranormal was contentious as can be seen in an 1869 review by William James of a book on spiritualism: “the present attitude of society on this whole question is as extraordinary and anomalous as it is discreditable to the pretensions of an age which prides itself on enlightenment and the diffusion of knowledge. We see tens of thousands of respectable people on the one hand admitting as facts of everyday certainty what tens of thousands of others equally respectable claim to be abject and contemptible delusions; while other tens of thousands are content to stand passively in the dark between these two hosts and in doubt...”(William James, in William James on Psychical Research, p. 21).

Geoffrey Hartman, “The Interpreter’s Freud” in Modern Criticism and Theory, p. 384 (italics in original).

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