2. *Ghostwatch* and the Advent of the Network Society

> "Who do you trust? Do you trust the information you're being given? Do you trust… Is that person really an expert?"
> *Richard Lawden, Ghostwatch: Behind the Curtains*

> "[T]he collapse of the media is by definition a collapse of the social."
> *Jeffrey Sconce, Haunted Media*

2.1 The Ghost Story as a Critique of Society and its Media

On October 31, 1992, BBC One broadcast *Ghostwatch*, the live investigation of a suburban home supposedly haunted by a poltergeist. The famous TV interviewer Michael Parkinson, one of the BBC's most trusted faces, hosted the event from the comfort of a BBC studio and was aided by television presenter Mike Smith as the studio's telephone operator. Television presenters Sarah Greene, Smith's wife and one of the nation's most popular hosts of children's television shows, and Craig Charles were live at the house in Northolt, supported by a well-equipped camera team. The team of four – all well-known TV personalities at the time – were further supported in their venture by the paranormal researcher Dr. Lin Pascoe, who joined Parkinson and Smith in the studio.

At first, *Ghostwatch* appears to be exactly what the television viewer would expect: for the first half of the program, nothing unusual happens; then, a few "hauntings" follow – but these are quickly debunked

as being the work of one of the two children living in the house. The entire investigation is seemingly a wild goose chase based on an elaborate hoax planned by the residents – mother Pamela Early and her daughters Kim and Suzanne. Suddenly, however, the tables turn: as the investigatory team researches the house's gruesome history, they begin to observe manifestations that cannot be explained. Simultaneously, more and more viewers call the studio hotline to report that they are witnessing increasing transmission interferences or are even experiencing inexplicable phenomena in their own homes. During the program's final minutes, Dr. Pascoe realizes that the live investigation triggered a massive séance, due to the large number of television viewers, thereby allowing the malevolent poltergeist "Pipes" to grow stronger than ever before and to travel through the tuned-in television sets. While Suzanne Early and Sarah Greene are dragged out of sight by Pipes at the house, the studio reports violent poltergeist manifestations throughout the entire country. Finally, Pipes invades the studio itself, tearing the place apart and possessing Michael Parkinson. The playful, family-friendly live show turns into a horrifying catastrophe.

Of course, *Ghostwatch* was *not* a live broadcast, but rather a prerecorded, carefully scripted television film. However, a significant number of viewers did not detect those clues that indicated the true nature of the program.[1] Soon, the BBC was flooded with accusations of the program inducing post-traumatic stress disorder and, in one case, even causing a teenager to commit suicide (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 77; Leeder 2013: 174). It took several years for the uproar to dissipate; even in 1995, the Broadcasting Standards Council – a subdivision of the Independent Television Commission who was responsible for the monitoring of the moral content of television programs in the UK – stated: "The BBC had a duty to do more than simply hint at the deception it was practicing on the audience. In *Ghostwatch* there was a deliberate attempt to culti-

1 In this respect, *Ghostwatch* garnered reactions similar to Orson Welles' 1938 radio adaptation of H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* as well as the found footage film *The Blair Witch Project* (dir. Daniel Myrick/Eduardo Sánchez, 1999).

vate a sense of menace" (qtd. in Lawden 2013: 33).[2] Consequentially, the BBC banned *Ghostwatch* from being rebroadcast in the UK. Nonetheless, the mockumentary quickly achieved cult status, inspiring the short story sequel "31/10" penned by Stephen Volk (2013 [2006]), the making-of documentary *Ghostwatch: Behind the Curtains* (dir. Rich Lawden, 2012), as well as a 2013 companion book of the same name.

Ghostwatch uses the Gothic mode to thematize the relationship between television and its reception, as well as the transformation of society and its media at that time. The show plays with the ambiguous meanings of the term "transmission": it is not only images and sound that are communicated, but also viral ghosts. Pipes is the supernatural media virus that grows more powerful with each person tuning in to the program. The mockumentary is still firmly grounded in the logic of the mass society; yet, it also anticipates issues of interconnectedness that pertain to the imagination of today's network society in many ways, most dominantly by depicting those anxieties regarding trust and trustworthiness in times of seemingly unchecked media content, as well as the evolution of uncanny media, increasingly invading the space of the home and everyday life while becoming ever more complex and uncontrollable. Volk has referred to *Ghostwatch* as "a critical analysis of TV through the prism of a ghost story" (Volk qtd. in Leeder 2013: 176). The BBC broadcast questions the media, their function, and their cultural reception by narrating one of the most conventional Gothic tales – the investigation of a haunted house – with a terrifying twist. *Ghostwatch* reflects on the influence of mass media such as television in a changing society through this subversion of expectations, where the ghost is *not* bound to a specific house, but is instead able to infect and exploit

2 While the controversy surrounding *Ghostwatch* remains unique until this day, this incident was not the first time that the BBC was criticized for the morality of its programming. The early postwar production of television ghost stories in particular came under attack, claiming that viewers might be negatively affected by the images of fictional horror and death (Wheatley 2006: 30). For more information on this, see Chapter 1, "Showing less, suggesting more: the ghost story on British television," in Wheatley (2006).

those technologies that were supposed to empower the paranormal detectives.

This chapter concentrates on three Gothic tropes that are used and modified in the film by approaching the mockumentary as a representation of the supernatural media virus: its self-reflexive focus on media technologies, the haunted house, and the paranormal researcher. While the broadcast features many more conventions of the Gothic, these closely interrelated tropes resonate with the key features of virus narratives found in *Ghostwatch*, thereby yielding insight into the supernatural media virus' vector, environment, and host population, respectively.

The following subsection explores the broadcast's self-reflexivity and mediality. *Ghostwatch*'s self-reflexive concern with its own mediality finds expression through the excessive display of technologies, as well as the blurring of fictionality and factuality. Self-reflexivity is a key feature not only of Gothic fiction in general, but of Gothic television specifically. Television provides the "ideal medium" for this type of narrative, given that television is a domestic medium, and since the Gothic is predominantly concerned with domestic themes (Wheatley 2006: 1). As Helen Wheatley explains, Gothic television constantly reminds its viewers "that this is terror/horror television which takes place, and is *viewed*, within a domestic milieu" (ibid: 7, original emphasis). *Ghostwatch* not only utilizes this self-reflexive parallel between its domestic story content – the haunted house – and the domestic reception context – the audience watching the program from their living rooms – but further destabilizes its own narrative medium by portraying the television itself as the source of ultimate horror. The broadcast suggests that viewers watching the program at home are not safe from this perilous medium, given that television is the viral vector of the supernatural media virus.

In order to examine the self-reflexivity of both *Ghostwatch* and its sequel "31/10" in detail, the section builds on Dorrit Cohn's "signposts of fictionality" (1990) and provides a discussion of another, equally controversial narrative: Orson Welles' 1938 radio adaptation of H. G. Wells' *The*

War of the Worlds (1897).[3] Scholars have discussed Welles' radio drama extensively, in contrast to the scant attention paid to *Ghostwatch*. These insights can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the *Ghostwatch* phenomenon, taking the medium-specific affordances of each broadcast into consideration. In particular, the parallels of both narratives in terms of story, format, and their surrounding controversy indicate that each new broadcast medium induces similar fears.

The chapter's final section, "Gothic Conventions in Times of Increasing Interconnection," centers on the tropes of the haunted house as well as on the occult detective. *Ghostwatch* modifies the haunted house tale by portraying a ghost that is not confined within the house, but which can move beyond these confines. This trope is tied directly to the preceding feature: it is because the researchers do not understand the impact of modern media technologies that the investigation goes awry. In the age of television, households are no longer isolated units; instead, they are linked to the outside world at all times. The Early household is merely the initial environment of the supernatural media virus from which the infection spreads. The house, therefore, functions as a symbol of society at large: once the virus emerges at some point within the network, it is expected to spread everywhere as a result of the growing connectivity enabled by news and communication media.

The occult detective or paranormal researcher, Dr. Pascoe, corresponds to the biologists and medical experts researching a disease in outbreak narratives, as discussed by Dougherty and Wald: she collects information pertaining to the case, she uses up-to-date methods and her specialization's technologies, and she attempts to contain the threat. In the end, however, she fails to eliminate the ghost and instead aids in the spread of the infection. Her portrayal and her function to the narrative resonates strongly with the narrative scheme of dangerous disease outbreaks.

3 In order to avoid confusion, I refer to Wells' novel in italics and to Welles' radio broadcast in quotation marks.

2.2 Blurring Fact and Fiction: Uncanny Mass Media

Ghostwatch displays its awareness of the Gothic tradition that it draws upon from the very beginning of the program. The film opens with a voice-over given by Michael Parkinson in the role of the rational, matter-of-fact host:

> The program you're about to watch is a unique live investigation of the supernatural. It contains material which some viewers may find to be disturbing. No creaking gates, no Gothic towers, no shuttered windows. Yet for the past ten months this house has been the focus of an astonishing barrage of supernatural activity. (*Ghostwatch* 1992)

After a brief video offering a glimpse at the goings-on at the house in question, the broadcast moves to the BBC studio itself which has been lavishly decorated for the Halloween-themed occasion: dark colors, a fireplace flanked by carved jack-o'-lanterns, the portrait of a bedsheet ghost, and some other mock-Gothic bric-a-brac (see Fig. 2.1). It is through this voice-over introduction and the visual representation of the studio that the viewer can already gather information about the kind of show that *Ghostwatch* intends to be: perhaps a bit scary, but not all that serious. This expectation is shattered once the well-known and beloved television presenters of the "live" broadcast are either possessed, killed, or are otherwise imperiled.

Volk's short story "31/10," first published in 2006 and set exactly ten years after the BBC broadcast, flags its status as a Gothic tale in a similar manner. A new investigatory team, consisting of people that were either involved in the original investigation, such as Volk himself, or were otherwise somehow affected by the show in 1992, is sent into the BBC studio that has been abandoned ever since it was invaded by Pipes. Whereas the original initiators of *Ghostwatch* are reluctant to participate in this new investigation, the BBC hopes to satiate viewers' "wolfish hunger for so-called reality TV after three mega-successful series of *Big Brother*" and thereby to increase its ratings (Volk 2013 [2006]: 222). Entering the studio on the same date and at the same time that the broadcast was transmitted ten years previously, things appear to be

Fig. 2.1 The Gothicized BBC studio

Source: *Ghostwatch* (1992)

calm and ordinary at first. The Halloween decorations from the original broadcast are still present; however, the elapsed time of ten years has added a certain sense of authenticity in the form of cobwebs (ibid: 227). After roughly an hour – corresponding to the timing of the original *Ghostwatch* investigation – the team is confronted with Pipes and the ghostly remnants of Suzanne Early and Sarah Greene. The short story once again takes place in a haunted house, namely the abandoned studio, and portrays a paranormal investigation. Like the original broadcast, it foregrounds the complex technologies used in the investigation, thereby displaying a self-reflexive interest in both media and mediality. The most obvious parallel, however, is the ambivalence regarding the narrative's ontological status. This effect is achieved by featuring (mostly) real-life people as fictional characters, such as author Stephen Volk as the autodiegetic narrator. In the story, Volk tells his readers how the lives of those people involved in the investigation changed after Pipes broke loose from the studio; it is even claimed that the public appearance that Sarah Green made in order to reassure the audience

that *Ghostwatch* was, in fact, a television hoax, was performed by a look-alike in order to conceal the true horror that took place (ibid: 224). The short story self-reflexively comments on the aftermath of the broadcast through this narration of "what truly happened," purporting that the only true hoax about the program was the claim that it had been a pre-recorded, scripted television film. Like *Ghostwatch*, "31/10" blurs the line between fact and fiction, albeit not as elaborately as the broadcast did.

The mockumentary is much more successful at hiding its fictional status than Volk's short story. Every text has certain markers that identify it as fiction or nonfiction; these are what Cohn calls "signposts" (1990: 800). Cohn focuses exclusively on the signposts of fictionality that exist on the textual level of an object, such as the bi-level story/discourse structure, narrative modes such as the presentation of consciousness, and the separation of author and narrator (ibid). "31/10," for example, attempts to undermine this latter point, given that both the author and the narrator are Stephen Volk. Obviously, however, the narrator is possessed and presumably killed at the end of the tale; therefore, author and narrator must represent two distinct instances. Moving beyond Cohn's focus on fictionality, it is equally useful to consider the signposts of factuality, and to take contextual and paratextual indicators into consideration as well (Nünning 2009a: 25). Doing so reveals why the 1992 broadcast is much more successful at hiding its true ontological status than "31/10" is. While *Ghostwatch* bears several of Cohn's signposts of fictionality, it glosses over these textual, paratextual, and contextual clues by referring to the conventions of nonfictional television.

Like any other film, *Ghostwatch* ends with closing credits that list the cast and crew involved in its creation; these involvements were even disclosed in television and radio guides made available beforehand (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 77). The very fact that the show was broadcast on Halloween might have tipped viewers off. Such clues, however, are paratextual and contextual details, respectively, and are easily missed. Of course, viewers turned to the television pages and magazines such as *Radio Times* more often in the 1990s than they might do today. Still, not every television consumer carefully reads a program guide ahead of tuning into a show. Likewise, only those viewers who waited for and

carefully read the closing credits could recognize *Ghostwatch* as a television film. Instead, these hints are occluded by exploiting the viewer's broader contextual knowledge and expectations, namely by featuring well-known television personalities from nonfiction formats, among other things.

Ghostwatch was not the first program to blur the divide between fact and fiction, but was instead inspired to some extent by Welles' infamous "The War of the Worlds" radio drama (Lawden 2014: 7).[4] This radio broadcast allegedly caused a similar stir more than five decades previously and is regarded as a fascinating phenomenon even today.[5] Like the BBC film, the radio broadcast pointed out its fictional nature several times. For instance, Welles' addressed his audience repeatedly throughout the broadcast, telling them that they were listening to a dramatization of Wells' science fiction novella. Yet, the broadcast was accused of misleading unsuspecting radio listeners, nonetheless.

Originally an 1897 tale penned by H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* tells its audience about a Martian invasion of Earth; it is merely due to the aliens' susceptibility to terrestrial microbes that their invasion ultimately fails – however, this occurs only after wreaking havoc on Earth with their advanced warfare technologies. Narrated as a retrospective first person narration of the attack, the novel is presented as a factual

4 Now that a complete, official transcript of the documentary *Ghostwatch: Behind the Curtains* has been released, I quote directly from the transcript when discussing the documentary.

5 The supposed panic caused by the radio broadcast has been debunked. As Sconce writes: "Indeed, civilization is completely destroyed by the half-hour break in *War of the Worlds* – even the most gullible listeners could have ended their fright simply by looking out the window" (2000: 116). The decisive factor in the mythologization of the event was probably that the broadcast caused just enough panic for it to be subsequently exaggerated in newspapers (Johnston 2015: 88). This does not, however, diminish the impact of the broadcast. In *Found Footage Horror Films*, Alexandra Heller-Nicholas even goes so far as to claim that the broadcast laid the groundwork for the defining features of the contemporary found footage horror film (2014: 37).

account given by an unnamed Englishman who witnessed the invasion from beginning to end.

In his 1938 radio adaptation of the novel, Welles not only copied Wells' story, but also borrowed and expanded upon its style, transposing the retrospective written account by a witness into a present tense emergency radio broadcast, thereby using the conventions of nonfiction radio. Significantly, this broadcast revolves not only around the destruction of human civilization, but also around the destruction of the media (Sconce 2000: 114): while the regular program is merely interrupted by news bulletins initially, the broadcasting system itself begins to fail as the population of New York City succumbs to the invasionary force. Initially, on-site reports are merely cut off mid-sentence as radio connections are lost; eventually, the entire station falls into silence as the last journalist has been suffocated by toxic smoke. This silence is only briefly interrupted by an amateur transmission: "2X2L calling CQ. 2X2L calling CQ…New York. Isn't there anyone on the air? Isn't there anyone on the air? Isn't there anyone…2X2L" ("The War of the Worlds" 1938). The call is never answered; radio, so it appears, has gone dead.

Ghostwatch utilizes a narrative form and story similar to that of the "The War of the Worlds" broadcast. In the 1992 mockumentary, the destruction of the media is a central theme, with the broadcast becoming increasingly faulty and fragmented. In the end, society collapses as the medium is completely destabilized. It is precisely this particular conception of their respective narrative media that makes these two broadcasts comparable: the radio and television, respectively, are not merely used for narration, but instead their very nature and relationship with society are called into question during the storytelling process. Both broadcasts feature similar narrative formats. Both are framed as journalistic reports. As such, they build upon very particular media conventions. As Sconce explains in his discussion of Welles' broadcast, it is only because the audience has some preconception regarding the medium's working mechanisms that such a narrative achieves its full effect:

> The terror could be realized only if the listener understood how electronic news gathering and dissemination operated, realized the social

> significance of disrupted network transmissions, and, above all else, invested in the radio's new sense of presence as both a national authority and a means of social surveillance. (Sconce 2000: 112)

In other words, it is only when listeners – or viewers in the case of *Ghostwatch* – have some knowledge and expectations about how the medium is supposed to work that the portrayal of its breakdown appears to be authentic. Each story is told through a narrative medium that is associated mainly with nonfiction contents and exploits what may be referred to as these media's signposts of factuality.[6] The fragmented, seemingly unplanned structure of "The War of the Worlds" not only thrives on radio's characteristics of simultaneity and presence – "disaster as an instantaneous, mass experience" (ibid) – but furthermore places the story in a familiar, authentic setting and includes expert interviews. It is thus precisely because "The War of the Worlds" is *not* a polished, well-structured, and seamless narrative that it evokes a feeling of authenticity.

Similarly, *Ghostwatch* adheres to the conventions of television's live reportage through four key strategies: first, by featuring renowned television personalities predominantly associated with nonfiction programs and "experts" such as Dr. Pascoe, who are impersonated by mostly unknown, and hence unrecognizable, actors. Second, the broadcast follows a seemingly spontaneous and unplanned plot. As the making-of documentary reveals, *Ghostwatch* was written deliberately to defy the conventional narrative structure of a 90-minute movie (Lawden 2014: 8, 24). Indeed, the narrative is extremely slow and unspectacular for the first half of the movie – as the unsuspecting audience might expect from such a program. Third, the mockumentary copies styles and conventions of TV that were becoming more popular at the time. As Volk explained in an interview on BBC 5 radio, "drama was starting to resemble documentary" through the use of, for instance, handheld cameras to create the illusion of realism (Chiles 2017). Last, viewers

6 Of course, television has long since established itself as a formidable narrative medium, especially with regard to the ongoing transmission of TV series; nonetheless, however, the core of programming is comprised of news reports, talk shows, reality shows, documentaries, and so on.

are twice removed from the action at Foxhill Drive for large parts of the film: first, by staring at their own television set at home, and, second, by watching the on-site team through another set of screens situated in the BBC studio. Paradoxically, it is precisely this visibility of the mediation process that gives the broadcast its aura of immediacy, while reminding the audience that they are safely watching the goings-on from their living rooms. Together, these four aspects function as signposts of factuality and gloss over those clues that might otherwise reveal the mockumentary's fictional nature.

It is vital to consider the broader historical context in which each of these broadcasts and their narrative media are placed. "The War of the Worlds," transmitted via US radio at the end of the 1930s, is grounded firmly in the logic of mass society, characterized by its infrastructure composed of communities or "masses." These are relatively large, homogeneous, and localized collectives (van Dijk 2012: 43). Broadcast media are the predominant type of media in mass societies. As the number of available media is relatively low compared to today's standards, every household and/or community can usually access only a few of these types of media: a small number of radio and television channels; a limited selection of local and national newspapers (ibid: 45). These media attempt to cater to as many people as possible at the same time; hence, the name "*broadcast* media." The interruption of regular program by news updates was not unusual at the time. Living in the aftermath of the Great Depression and facing the reality of a probable American involvement in the looming war in Europe, Welles' drama reached its listeners at a time of significant cultural unrest (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 40). The play's topical focus struck a nerve of the time, centering on an invasion by a superior and ruthless military force. Its presentation fit the nature of its broadcast medium perfectly.

Ghostwatch similarly portrays some form of invasion, although the threat here is not some external alien force, but rather an entity that has already infiltrated the domestic space of the living room: television. What should be a peaceful suburban house is terrorized by the spirit of a child molester and murderer, and it is through the television transmission of Pipes' assaults that the poltergeist liter-

ally invades living rooms throughout the entire country. Like radio, television is a broadcast medium. However, the BBC mockumentary indicates how a "broadcast mentality of one-to-many communication" (Jenkins/Ford/Green 2013: 7), in which a small number of official, authorized, and trustworthy media instances produce media content for the masses, is beginning to crumble in the network society. Whereas mass media used to be organized vertically, with a few authorities such as the BBC determining which contents would be broadcast, the network society increasingly introduces horizontal structures of media sharing.

The real threat in *Ghostwatch* is not a military attack, but rather media violence and its effect on families in general and on children in particular: watching such violence on television will invite it into the viewer's home. This suggestion hinges on the perception of a television audience as a passive collective, where networks such as the BBC control what viewers watch. In his analysis of the broadcast and its cultural impact, Rich Lawden expands on this idea of television as a manipulative force and as a gateway to mindless consumption:

> The show/programme/film remains a historical touchstone – a perfectly-preserved time capsule which epitomises our culture at a certain point in time. It is the closest to *TV: The Movie* that we'll ever likely get to see – a fair and vivid depiction of the hideous machinations that so often give birth to detrimental, throwaway media, which in turn, attempts to squeeze every last drop of processed emotion for vast, remorseless consumption. Cunningly, *Ghostwatch* was also a stark warning of what was then, just appearing over the horizon: low-rent documentary programming – the worst of Reality TV. Pointless, asinine diatribes that seem only to serve in manipulating participants and viewers alike, both trapped in an increasingly apathetic, virtual community. (Lawden 2013: 198-200)

Ghostwatch is a self-reflexive commentary on the waning control of media authorities such as the BBC. The short story "31/10" goes into detail about how such a broadcast is supposedly conceived and planned by the network: trying to copy the success of shows such as *Big Brother*, putting

young and inexperienced producers in charge, and moving ahead with the plans without the explicit consent of the people involved (Volk 2013 [2006]: 222-223). Both *Ghostwatch* and "31/10" suggest that the BBC fails in its function as a trustworthy gatekeeper, repeatedly spreading the violent poltergeist to the living rooms of its viewership. The BBC mockumentary does not merely depict the destruction of media, as "The War of the Worlds" does, but instead portrays the media themselves as turning into the source of danger.

This divergence illustrates a significant difference in plot conventions regarding the radio and the television: whereas the radio was conceived predominantly as a medium that could enable the communication between two worlds in popular fiction – the world of the living and the spirit world; Earth and alien civilizations; and so on – the television was instead imagined as an uncanny mediaspace within which ghosts reside (Sconce 2000: 127). In Welles' broadcast, the radio establishes a link between listeners at home and the sites of Martian attacks, confronting human civilization with the "reality" of two clashing worlds. *Ghostwatch*, on the other hand, explicitly portrays the television set as a gateway to the spirit world, with the poltergeist Pipes using it as a viral vector and exploiting its presence in most households to attack and possess human beings. Thus, a major difference between both programs is that the BBC broadcast builds upon a literal understanding of television "transmission": the ghost traveling through an entire nation as a viral electronic signal.

The controversies surrounding both narratives illustrate the inextricable bond between a medium and its social context. It is this powerful relationship that constitutes the source of fear in each text. As Sconce writes:

> The broadcast's power as a source of panic and as an enduring parable of media studies resides in its ability to evoke a usually disavowed connection between the order of media networks and the ordering of the social body. […] *War of the Worlds* continues to fascinate by reminding us of the repressed potential for panic and disorder that lies just behind the normalizing functions of media technology […]. As it stands,

> the play remains the most famous public lesson in an uncomfortable political reality: the collapse of the media is by definition a collapse of the social. (2000: 117)

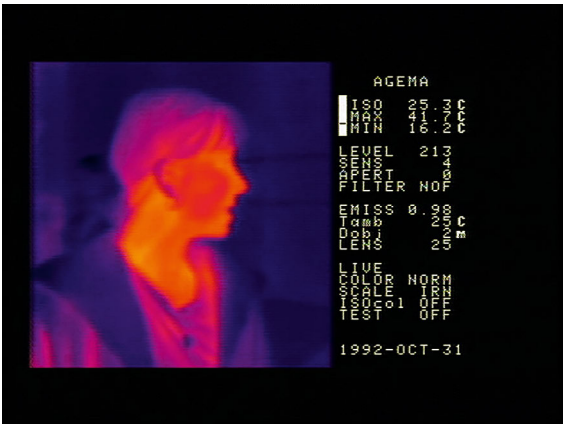
The radio provided an ideal narrative medium for Welles' project due to its status as a medium fit for information dissemination. Building on Jean Baudrillard's concept of "noncommunication," which points out how some media deny any reciprocal exchange of information, Sconce explains how vivid the broadcast made the unidirectionality of the information flow and, thus, became "a cogent reminder of the American public's inability to intervene in anything through the mass media" (ibid: 113). It is only in the terrifying moment of the medium's failure that this unidirectionality is revealed.

Ghostwatch, while portraying the breakdown of both the media and the social body in a similar way, does not adhere to this model of unidirectional communication, at least not completely. Unlike Welles' broadcast, viewers are not incapable of intervening in the goings-on – they simply realize, all too late, what influence their viewership has had. The simple act of tuning in to the program affects how the events play out; theoretically, if nobody were to watch the program, then Pipes would remain confined to Foxhill Drive. Television ratings, it is suggested, are the most powerful means of controlling the medium. Unquestioningly and even voyeuristically gawking at the misfortune of the Early family yields a similar fate for society as a whole. Television is so efficient as a viral vector in *Ghostwatch* because of the viewing practices that have built up around it.

The social practices and the unquestioned beliefs regarding media technologies are foregrounded in the broadcast through the investigator's heavy reliance on modern technology. The complex camera technologies that are used to capture and make visible the ghost in the house are explained at length: multiple cameras have been mounted to the walls in each room; a thermal imaging camera is employed; an alarm system has been set up that reacts to sudden drops in temperature. Likewise, the BBC studio has similarly sophisticated devices to review the material gathered by the on-site team. There is: a large video

wall comprised of twelve screens; a reel-to-reel tape machine for audio recordings; a light pen used to write on a small television's CRT display, with the edited images being directly projected onto the wall of screens (see Fig. 2.2-2.5). As it appears, the idea behind the investigation is that the more and the better the technologies used in the ghost hunt, the higher the chances of success are.

Fig. 2.2 Thermal imaging camera



Source: *Ghostwatch* (1992)

However, the poltergeist Pipes utilizes these technologies for his own purposes, endangering both the investigatory team and the viewer at home. At first, his meddling with the transmission results in the broadcast becoming increasingly riddled with glitches and interferences. He inserts false footage into the transmission in order to keep up the appearance that everything is normal at the house, even as the spirit prepares to invade the entire nation via its television sets. All too late, Dr. Pascoe realizes that the live transmission from Northolt has somehow been tampered with. Face aghast, she exclaims: "It's in the machine. […] We've created a séance. A massive séance" (*Ghostwatch* 1992). At this point, any control over the "sophisticated technology,"

Fig. 2.3 A peek into "Ghostwatch"'s on-location outside broadcasting (OB) truck

Source: *Ghostwatch* (1992)

which might have empowered the investigators, is already lost. In "31/10," the ghost performs the same trick a second time: while the investigators in the haunted BBC studio hear a loud banging noise, the team at the safe control room cannot pick up these noises through their microphones (Volk 2013 [2006]: 235). Once again, these technologies work to the advantage of the malignant spirit, rather than for the investigators. *Ghostwatch* suggests that those pervasive technologies that should aid us and improve our lives may instead be autonomous agents outside of human control by resonating with the technological determinism implicit in Castells' elaborate theory of the network society, as well as more general, mundane anxieties regarding today's technologized life. The narratives examine these media technologies in general and television in particular as uncanny media, both haunted and haunting.

Consequently, the supposedly secure reception space of the living room comes under attack. The cameras do not capture the ghost, but

Fig. 2.4 Reel-to-reel tape machine at the BBC studio

Source: *Ghostwatch* (1992)

Fig. 2.5 Video wall and mobile television set with light pen

Source: *Ghostwatch* (1992)

instead set it free. This possibility was hinted at previously by Kim Early, the younger of the two sisters, but none of the researchers took her warnings seriously. As the interferences with the broadcast increase and things at the house become increasingly strange, Kim exclaims that "Pipes wants to see everybody" while pointing directly at the camera (*Ghostwatch* 1992). While both the investigators and the audience think of television as a one-way channel, merely allowing viewers to see the ghost, it soon turns out that Pipes can use this vector to look back at his audience. The safe distance between viewer and poltergeist, established by the multiple levels of mediation, collapses.

This idea of "looking back" through the camera can be interpreted in two ways. First of all, it voices a criticism of the passive, mindless voyeurism enabled by television. When the Earlys are first introduced, it is revealed that the family has been called out as liars by the media and the children have been harassed at school. Arguably, the BBC ghost investigation first and foremost zooms in on the media attention surrounding the Earlys, making money out of their misery, while it may also be a sincere attempt to help the family and to research the existence of ghosts. This investigation, however, opens up a window that works both ways: not only do viewers watch the misery of the Early family, but they also invite similar misfortune into their own homes by letting Pipes "see" them. In this broadcast, the mindless "couch potatoes" – the stereotypical image of passive television viewers – become hosts to the virus, facilitating its spread throughout the nation by unquestioningly tuning in their TV set.

This already hints at the second implication of the ghost looking back through the camera, asking for a reconsideration of media in the age of growing digitalization and connectivity: the broadcast problematizes the notion of media technologies as vertical informational one-way streets. As Murray Leeder puts it in "*Ghostwatch* and the Haunting of Media": "*Ghostwatch* […] flirts with questions about whether the camera is simply documenting something that eludes the naked eye, or whether it is facilitating the haunting through its very presence" (2013: 177). The camera empowers Pipes by allowing him to surveil everybody who is sitting in their supposedly safe, comfortable living room in front of

the television, and furthermore by enabling him to spread through the medium's broadband network into those domestic settings.[7] Significantly, *Ghostwatch* plays with the fourth wall by blurring fact and fiction, and by conflating its narrative medium and the vector of the supernatural media virus,[8] thereby implicating the audience in this dangerous ghostly transmission as well.

By foregrounding its own mediality, *Ghostwatch* poses central questions regarding the function and reception of media in society. Significantly, the mockumentary was shown only a few years after the implementation of the 1990 Broadcasting Act; in many regards, the *Ghostwatch* controversy resonated with worries that accompanied that particular piece of legislation. The 1990 Broadcasting Act opened up ownership of ITV companies to the highest bidder; the guiding principle was that competition and increased consumer choice could be stimulated through deregulation. Even if the impact of the 1990 Broadcasting Act had not yet truly hit home, television was in turmoil when *Ghostwatch* was broadcast in 1992. While the Act granted an expansion in viewer choice and marked the beginning of satellite television, fears of decline in entertainment and news standards, commercialization, and Americanization in particular abound.[9] Eleven million viewers – circa 19% of the nation's population at the time – watched *Ghostwatch*

7 In his discussion of narratives of the "haunted TV," Sconce discusses how the television has oftentimes been envisioned as both a means of surveillance and as a gateway to another realm: "The unique electronic presence bound to this new medium suggested that even after a program was over and the receiver was turned off, the television set itself still loomed as a gateway to oblivion simply by sitting inert and watchful in the living room" (2000: 166). A typical example for this is the film *Poltergeist*: the television set here functions as a portal to the world of the dead. A nonsupernatural example is George Orwell's novel *1984* (1949), which features a bi-directional television screen. These devices, called "telescreen" (2008 [1949]: 4), enable the ruling Party to surveil their subjects, while also working as conventional television, broadcasting propaganda.

8 It is due to this conflation that *Ghostwatch* only "works" properly when viewed in a specific way: at home in front of the television.

9 For a detailed account of the history of the 1990 Broadcasting Act, as well as the resulting media dynamics, consult Barnett (2011).

on Halloween 1992 (Woods 2017). Of course, it is impossible to say how many of these were truly duped by the mockumentary. Nonetheless, these high viewership numbers illustrate the show's immediate impact. *Ghostwatch* embodied the fears of the effects of the 1990 Broadcasting Act: a reduction in quality and loss of trustworthiness. As Volk explains in the documentary, one of his main motivations in writing the script was the issue of trust and believability: "*Who do you trust? Do you trust the information you're being given?* […] *Is that person really an expert?*" (Lawden 2014: 39, original emphasis). Likewise, producer Ruth Baumgarten revealed in an interview how one inspiration for the mockumentary was the language of the news coverage of the First Gulf War, which catered to the audience's growing wish for dramatic storytelling. According to Baumgarten, *Ghostwatch* explores "what happens if this appetite […] becomes unhinged and if you can't trust the news anymore" (Chiles 2017). At the time of the broadcast, television had become an omnipresent medium; *Ghostwatch* questions the uncritical belief in those things that are being transmitted by proving that merely watching something happen on television does not necessarily make it real and that the line between fact and fiction is easily blurred. Instead, truth and knowledge are complicated, oftentimes ambiguous things that evade a definite interpretation.

In particular, the role and influence of the BBC, perhaps the nation's most-watched and best-respected broadcaster, is being scrutinized:

> The BBC makes and shapes us as a nation in a way no other institution can. For many it is an ever-present companion; from breakfast time to bedtime, from childhood through to old age, there it is telling us about ourselves and the wide world, amusing and entertaining us. (Aitken 2007: 1)

This trustworthy authority comes under attack, as Pipes transgresses beyond the boundaries of the house on Foxhill Drive and into the apparently safe space of the studio. The reception of the broadcast indicated how audiences react to such an authority abusing the trust invested in it.

2.3 Gothic Conventions in Times of Increasing Interconnection

Ghostwatch was broadcast during a time of profound societal changes: the transition from mass to network society. The mockumentary should, therefore, not be regarded as a critique of mass media exclusively, but also as an anticipation of the potential effects of growing connectivity and interactive media. The relationship that this medium has with a changing society is the reason why television is such an efficient viral vector for the supernatural media virus in *Ghostwatch*.

The larger collectives of mass society are made up of smaller groups. The nuclear family is a central social unit in the mass society, which, in turn, is embedded in the larger collective of the local community. *Ghostwatch* features several of these embedded groups: on the smallest level, there is the Early family living at the haunted house on Foxhill Drive. The Earlys, in turn, are part of the Northolt community in North London – a small suburban town on the outskirts of the largest metropolis of the country.[10] During the broadcast, well-acquainted neighbors gather at the house to observe the investigation, eager to offer their own stories with both the house and the family on camera. On the topmost level, there is the collective of the BBC audience, which stands in for the British nation at large. The top-down broadcast media, which are typical of mass society, are a central aspect in constructing such collectives. However, there is no or only a limited opportunity for the reader, listener, or viewer to react to the information received. Thus, the broadcast media of mass society create what Catherine Covert has referred

10 Significantly, almost all of the fictions I discuss in this book take place in urban settings, usually in one of the largest and most significant metropolises of the respective country: *Ghostwatch* is set near London, parts of *House of Leaves* take place in Los Angeles, the Japanese installments of *Ring* and *Kairo* feature sprawling images of Tokyo, whereas the American adaptation *The Ring* is set in Seattle. The only exception to this focus on urbanity is the adaptation *Pulse*. The relationship of an urban setting to imaginations of the network society is explored in greater detail in Chapters Four and Five.

to as the "atomized mass" (1984: 210): large communities consisting of isolated, alienated individuals.

This one-to-many type of communication is not abolished completely, but is at least softened up in the network society, where the communities and networks are not governed by physical proximity and where they can be highly heterogeneous (van Dijk 2012: 43). These media are increasingly interactive, allowing consumers to react to the content received in different ways. Thus, information travels in multiple directions in the network, disassembling the clear hierarchies of collectives and information control present in the mass society.

In *Ghostwatch* – as in most haunted house tales – the house on Foxhill Drive functions as a symbol for society and prevalent societal topics. The house haunted by a malevolent spirit is a staple element of Gothic fiction – it is no accident that Craig Charles jokingly refers to the investigation as "England's answer to Amityville" (*Ghostwatch* 1992).[11] The poltergeist Pipes viciously haunts the Early family in what should be a peaceful suburban home, directing his attacks specifically at the two girls. It appears as if the key to these ghostly manifestations at Foxhill Drive – and in particular, why most of the hauntings concentrate on the Early daughters – is to be found in the dark past of the house, something befitting the conventional Gothic tale and the haunted house story in particular. Whereas Dr. Pascoe initially believed that she had gathered all of the essential information, it is through information conveyed by the Northolt community as well as the calls of several audience members at the studio that these horrifying secrets are revealed. Finding out the truth about the house is a collective effort, where viewers

11 Some examples of the haunted house tale include Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), Jay Anson's *The Amityville Horror* (1977), and Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977), to name only a few. Most of these fictions focus on families or similarly tight-knit groups and give shape to societal issues regarding gender, class, and race, to state only some examples. For an in-depth discussion of haunted house narratives, consult Bailey (1999) and Mariconda (2007).

of the broadcast "talk back" at the program they are watching by calling the studio. The investigation of the haunted house itself is, in this way, an example of how the one-to-many communication structure is disassembled in the network society.

The first clue is provided when the Earlys' neighbors explain how children have disappeared or even died under horrific circumstances at the local playground; it is at this same playground that a butchered, pregnant dog had been found recently, with its fetuses scattered all over the place. It soon turns out that these tales from the playground are only the tip of the iceberg. As the events at the house itself grow more and more suspicious – Suzanne's face has been severely scratched, while she does not have fingernails long enough to inflict the damage herself – a woman calls, describing how her mother would scare her and her siblings when they were little if they did not behave well: "Mother Seddons will come to get you" (ibid). She goes on the explain how she found out only later that Seddons really existed in the Victorian era, and that she lived in the area that today would be Foxhill Drive. Seddons was a "baby-farmer" who would drown the children she took in (ibid). The theme of infanticide, already introduced with the story of the butchered dog, is developed further.

Shortly after this call, the situation at the house in Foxhill Drive escalates and the television transmission is increasingly riddled with glitches: ominous cat screams can be heard from the boarded-up storage space beneath the staircase; a mirror suddenly drops onto the soundman; Suzanne screams: "He's touching me. He's hurting me. He's hurting me. Get off me. Get away, get off me! No, go away!" (ibid); suddenly, the entire screen turns black, and the words "NORMAL TRANSMISSION WILL BE RESUMED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE" appear (see Fig. 2.6-2.7). Apparently, the link to the on-site team has been lost. However, the interruption lasts only a few seconds; the image cuts back to Foxhill Drive, where everything seems to be normal once again – no traces of the unsettling images transmitted only seconds previously are to be found.

It is during this seemingly calm phase that another person calls with further information about the backstory of the house and about Pipes.

Fig. 2.6 Glitches disrupting the broadcast as the manifestations at the house increase until…

Source: *Ghostwatch* (1992)

The anonymous caller reveals that in the 1960s, some of the previous tenants sublet a room to a psychologically unstable man called Raymond Tunstall. As the caller explains:

> I worked as a social worker when he came out of the psychiatric hospital. He had several convictions for molestation, aggravated abuse, abduction of minors. He should never have been let anywhere near any community. He was a very disturbed man in my opinion. […] From the time he moved to Foxhill Drive, he developed paranoid fantasies. He used to tell me there was a woman on the inside of his body, taking over his thoughts and actions, making him do things he didn't want to do. He started to wear dresses. The delusions got so bad; there was only one way to escape them. He took his own life. (ibid)

This last clue adds a distinctly sexual nature to the horrifying events, implying that the poltergeist's interest in the girls may originate in Tun-

Fig. 2.7 …the television signal collapses completely

Source: *Ghostwatch* (1992)

stall's history as a child molester.[12] However, the call also reveals that Tunstall himself was possibly haunted and possessed by Mother Seddons, the baby farmer. The anonymous person further claims that Tunstall hanged himself under the stairs and that his corpse was partially devoured by his pet cats. Taken together, these historical details hint at why the house on Foxhill Drive appears to be a paranormal hotspot that attracts and accumulates ghostly manifestations, and why Pipes'

12 The cross-dressing killer is a figure well-known from horror films such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Murder!* (1930) and *Psycho* (1960), Roman Polanski's *The Tenant* (1976) and Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), based on Thomas Harris' novel of the same name. Like these films, *Ghostwatch* uses the trope of cross-dressing to denote otherness and perversion. As must be emphasized at this point, the figure of the transvestite criminal is an extremely problematic trope that oftentimes conflates transvestism with transgenderism, and furthermore vilifies persons engaging in transvestism and/or identifying as transgender. In addition to his deviant gender presentation, Tunstall's monstrosity is further emphasized by his pedophilia.

attacks are focused especially on the Early children. So far, this seems to be a conventional investigation of a haunted house; the only thing that is somewhat unusual is the fact that the researchers are crowdsourcing the knowledge from their audience by enabling them to call the studio.

However, this ghost is *not* restricted to the house, or at least not anymore; Pipes becomes spatially unbound through all of the cameras and recording devices installed at the house. Significantly, the mysterious incidents at the playground indicate that the poltergeist has never been as restricted to one locality as is typical of such tales. Yet, Pipes can only extend his reach beyond the immediate community through the massive amounts of recording and transmitting devices, establishing a link between Northolt, the BBC studio, and the viewers in their supposedly safe homes. Had the researchers carefully interpreted this information, as well as Pipes' behavior and backstory, they could have discovered the risk of setting free the supernatural media virus before the critical event. The more people watch the program, the more powerful the ghost becomes and the farther he travels. In the end, it is not merely the Early family that is haunted, but supposedly the entire nation. The closed-off, atomized units of the mass society, as well as its top-down hierarchies, are not applicable to *Ghostwatch*; smaller units, such as the house, can have a great impact on larger units. The supernatural media virus, infecting all tuned-in television sets, thrives in the emerging interconnected social structure that is no longer comprised of singular, isolated groups of people. *Ghostwatch* portrays the dissolution of the nuclear family as the core symbol of the mass society and of its communities: not only is the family lacking a father/husband,[13] it is also no longer a contained, discrete unit, as their hauntings concern everybody who is watching the investigation.

Further subverting the typical societal structure of the mass society, *Ghostwatch* destabilizes the idea of top-down broadcast media and

13 As in most haunted house tales, gender and family roles both play significant parts in *Ghostwatch*. However, a discussion of these aspects would go beyond the scope of this chapter.

deconstructs the one-to-many communication model. Instead of being a means of unidirectional, vertical communication in which a respected, official channel provides its audience with suitable programs, television in *Ghostwatch* suddenly allows for the dangerous, uncontrolled multidirectional flow of information – or ghosts – through the connections provided by a horizontal network. As the BBC transmits its programs to television sets all over the country, tuned-in homes such as that of the Early family transfer something back to the studio. Every tuned-in household both feeds into and reinforces the "massive séance" created by the broadcast. By adding this twist to the tale of the haunted house, *Ghostwatch* draws an image of a mediasaturated society that no longer consists of atomized masses, but rather of increasingly networked communities. The structure of the mass society, comprised of discrete groups of varying sizes, is slowly giving way to the individualized, yet interconnected network society. It is this environment of growing interconnectedness that Pipes exploits in his function as a supernatural media virus, implying that the larger and tighter the network, the more dangerous and untrustworthy the mysterious things traveling through these links.

The mockumentary further explores these false assumptions regarding media communication by means of another trope typical of the Gothic, namely the occult detective. Significantly, *Ghostwatch* establishes a narrative scheme remarkably similar to that of the outbreak fiction through this figure and fuses it with a deep fascination with the impact of media technologies. As Pipes exploits the television's broadcast capabilities to recreate the spiritualist ritual of a séance, the rules of spiritualism and electronic transmission become blended.[14] While the pairing of detective fiction – marked by rationality and

14 Volk has admitted in an interview that one of his inspirations for writing *Ghostwatch* were the Fox Sisters (qtd. in Leeder 2013: 176). In what came to be known as the "Rochester Rappings," Kate and Margaretta Fox claimed to be able to communicate with ghosts by knocking on the walls. Possibly, the name of the fictional street where the Earlys live, Foxhill Drive, pays homage to this milestone of spiritualism. For more information about the Fox Sisters, see Chapter 1, "Mediums and Media" in Sconce (2000).

nonsupernatural crimes – with the trappings of spiritualist thinking seems contradictory, the trope of the psychic investigator emerged in its current form as early as the mid-19th century. As Chris Willis explains:

> [T]he rise of the fictional detective coincided with the rise of spiritualism. Both began in the mid-nineteenth century and were widely popular in Britain from the turn of the century until the 1930s. Both attempt to explain mysteries. The medium's role can be seen as being similar to that of a detective in a murder case. Both are trying to make the dead speak in order to reveal a truth. (2000: 60)

This coinciding of detective fiction and spiritualism has permitted the hybridization of both genres. Srdjan Smajić even goes so far as to claim that "detective fiction always had one foot in the occult," and that, in specific, it always bore a "repressed family resemblance with ghost fiction" (2010: 136).[15] As Smajić continues to explain, detective fiction was finally able to fuse with occultism due to the "scientification" of spiritualism: as late-Victorian science began to turn towards phenomena imperceptible to the human senses alone, it also drew attention to spiritualism as a field that had been examining these invisible phenomena for a long time already (ibid: 137). Thus, modern scientific methods and research were adapted to spiritualism.

15 Early examples of the psychic detective are Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's Dr. Martin Hesselius, the physician appearing throughout the short story collection *In a Glass Darkly* (1872), Dr. Abraham Van Helsing in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and Algernon Blackwood's *John Silence, Physician Extraordinary* (1908). M. R. James often modified the trope in his ghost stories, casting a somewhat naïve academic, chancing upon a mysterious, antiquarian object in the role of the occult detective. On television, the occult detective achieved fame through figures such as Carl Kolchak, the journalist who appears in the US television movies *The Night Stalker* (1972), *The Night Strangler* (1973), and as the ABC TV series *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* (1974-5), as well as FBI agents Dana Scully and Fox Mulder in the television series *The X-Files* (1993-2002, 2016, 2018). The short story "31/10" specifically refers to *The X-Files*, likening the investigation of the haunted studio to those of Mulder and Scully in the series (Volk 2013 [2006]: 227).

This coupling of science and spiritualism is on full display in *Ghostwatch* as well: "Tonight, television is going *ghost hunting* in an unprecedented *scientific experiment* where we hope to show you for the first time *irrefutable proof* that ghosts really do exist" (*Ghostwatch* 1992, my emphasis). The role of the psychic detective is here taken on by the entire BBC team, with Dr. Pascoe leading the investigation. She personifies the scientification of spiritualism as a parapsychologist with standardized research methods and a barrage of technological devices at her hands.

The trope of the paranormal investigator is taken a step further by pairing it with the idea of a viral ghost. A closer look reveals that the narrative structure of the broadcast can be compared to the three-step scheme – initial outbreak, activation of specialists, and (failed) aversion of threat – of the outbreak narrative as described by Dougherty as well as Wald.[16] In a strict sense, the broadcast is not about a haunted house, but rather about the *investigation* of that house. The initial infection has already occurred, with the haunting of the innocent family already in full swing. Befitting their name, the Earlys are merely the first of a large number of people to be infected by the viral ghost – they are this outbreak's index cases. Viewers are introduced to the goings-on at the second stage of the outbreak narrative: specialists are activated in order to document, and hopefully to contain, the danger. Dr. Pascoe is the disease expert or epidemiologist leading the attempts to eliminate the infection. Following what may be called a "trace, study, neutralize" motto typical for epidemiological narratives (Schmitz 2020a: 205), this investigatory team attempts to prove the existence of the invisible danger, identify its origin, and finally eliminate – or rather, exorcize – it.

16 Just as the ghost story could easily be blended with the detective story, so too do epidemiological narratives – whether fictional or factual – often borrow from the conventions of the detective narrative. Epidemiologists become "disease detectives"; as Wald explains, the 1950s even saw the formation of the Epidemiological Investigation Service (EIS), which called public attention to the dangers of disease transmission by publishing articles in broadcast media with provocative titles such as "The Case of the Camp Sewage" or "The Case of the Carrot Salad" (Wald 2008: 23-24).

Ghostwatch explicitly introduces biological terminology befitting the outbreak narrative when describing the ghost infestation at the house. When Craig Charles discusses the hauntings with the local priest, he asks him whether or not he believes that evil places exist. To this the priest responds: "I think that, just as we are the products of our mothers and fathers and their mothers and fathers, I think that places, somehow, inherit the genes of their past too" (*Ghostwatch* 1992). The house on Foxhill Drive is, therefore, likened to a biological entity, a product of its genes – deciphering these genes of its history is a vital step in finding a cure for the ghostly disease. By employing metaphors derived from genetics and biology, the film once again implies that minute scientific research with advanced technologies can uncover the true and definite origin of the harmful spirit, can isolate it, and thus can contain it.

However, it is only through this scientific intervention that the danger is finally unleashed; the prime time, live investigation transmitted on the BBC has triggered a large-scale séance, allowing the poltergeist to become truly viral. Had it not been for this live footage from the location, there could not have been such a séance and Pipes would never have been given the ability to infect homes all over the nation. As is the case with all forms of disease, virulence depends on a society's organization and technological progress; viruses can provide useful information regarding its host population's structure (Parikka 2007: 289). The culture of the 1990s, in which television occupied the seductive "epicenter" of society (Castells 2010b: 361), provides the ideal environment for a supernatural media virus such as Pipes.

These parallels between spiritualism, detective fiction, and the outbreak narrative emphasize the intersection of *Ghostwatch*'s supernatural elements and its scientific, technology-driven investigation, while further foregrounding the profound, large-scale, and potentially dangerous effects of media technologies in modern society. If outbreak narratives are the result of a growing fascination with the complex mechanisms that determine a disease's spread – where it travels, the channels through which it moves, and how quickly it disseminates –, then the BBC mockumentary expresses a similar obsession with the pervasiveness of media and the content they communicate. At the same time,

Ghostwatch illustrates that both these media and the emerging network society are complex and obscure: neither Dr. Pascoe, one of the leading paranormal researchers, nor the media professionals at the BBC could have anticipated the effect that the live investigation would have. The crisis of this virus outbreak could not be averted.

Ghostwatch's portrayal of a supernatural media virus is comparatively weak in comparison to the narratives that are discussed in the following chapters. For instance, the virus' hosts – in this case, the television audience facilitating the séance – are represented as passive recipients by and large. They are not active agents in the spread of the virus, but instead only influence it unknowingly by means of their remote control. Likewise, Pipes has only little control over his audience's conduct, whereas some of the supernatural media viruses examined elsewhere in this monograph enforce a certain behavior in their hosts. Additionally, *Ghostwatch* does not feature a physical corruptive manuscript that is passed on from one infected host to another as *Ring* and *House of Leaves* do. While it is implied in "31/10" that the second investigation of Pipes, this time at the BBC studio, once again facilitates the supernatural media virus' dissemination, the infection hinges on grand, singular events of dissemination, rather than on a continuous spread of contagion.

That notwithstanding, *Ghostwatch* qualifies as an early example of the supernatural media virus that specifically foregrounds the transition from mass to network society. In particular, its self-reflexive treatment of media and mediality is insightful in examining the trope's development. The poltergeist Pipes exploits the characteristics of both the broadcast medium television as its viral vector and an increasingly interconnected society as its environment, deconstructing the idea of broadcast media and the top-down, one-to-many communication model in the process. Information no longer travels in one direction exclusively in this changing media environment and it is not necessarily being provided by a trustworthy authority either. Today, these issues of unchecked media content and the questionable reliability of media producers are more important than ever. *Ghostwatch* anticipates some of the key topics and anxieties regarding growing interconnectedness and the advent of the network society.