

THE CREATION AND MAINTENANCE OF MEANING
IN THE PERFORMANCE OF PLACE

A Thesis

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by

Amanda Nicole Murray

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Abstract
of
THE CREATION AND MAINTENANCE OF MEANING
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by
Amanda Nicole Murray

The study of supernatural belief has been a constant in the fields of both folkloristics and anthropology but has rarely been addressed in a modern, Western setting. This lack of attention can be ascribed to many social and academic factors, not the least of which is the general attitude of disdain many hold toward the study of supernatural belief in our own society. Ghost tours—tourist attractions which center around houses, buildings, and neighborhoods that are reputed to be haunted—represent one way in which such continuing belief in the supernatural can be examined.

This project, based on the observation and participation in several ghost tours throughout Northern California and Western Nevada in 2015, examines how ghost tours employ legend reenactment in order to create a sense of place among tour goers. The legend narratives these tours present are constructed by ghost tour guides from research, personal experience, and the experiences of previous tour participants.

It was found that in the course of a ghost tour participants are often called upon to participate in the performance of legends about the places being visited. Such acts of “performing place” are a means in which haunted places are continuously imbued with supernatural meaning both by and for their visitors. The popularity of these performances

is a testament to the persistence of supernatural belief among modern Americans despite academic assumptions that such beliefs are remnants of an ignorant past.

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PREFACE

What is contained within the pages to follow is the result of years of research and writing, as well as collaborative effort between myself, my informants, my advisor, and to no small extent the places to which I traveled. At its heart, this thesis is a work meant to address the supernatural and our relationship with it as something other than a shameful secret. It is also representative of my own lifelong quest to understand what it is to *be* a believer. Belief is a difficult thing to observe, and an even more difficult thing to describe, and this thesis proves that point in many ways.

Anthropology is a practice that is centered on ideas of liminality, around the idea of leaving home, experiencing the strange, and then coming back changed. While I may not have geographically left home, as my fieldwork took place to a large extent in places with which I had some familiarity, in going to and participating in these tours I was forced to leave my own familiar mindsets and observe the people around me not as myself, but as an anthropologist. Though, arguably, this is impossible to do.

While the places discussed in this thesis are not far or foreign, they are definitely strange. They are haunted, populated not only by the spirits of the dead, but also by the stories of the living. In visiting them in a supernatural context, I did leave my home. I left the everyday behind for the possibility of the numinous and, when I returned to the everyday world, I was changed. Perhaps not by supernatural experience, but by the experience that comes when one has spent long hours of time in an unfamiliar mindset,

surrounded by strangers, in a place that may be familiar in the daylight but puts on a different mask in the night.

Fieldwork always changes us. It cannot fail to. It does this because it demands of us to look at the world differently, to disengage and re-engage our surroundings and the people in them not as ourselves, but as anthropologists. This project challenged me to act outside of my own comfort zones, and to take those things that many would consider to be silly and pointless and find depth and significance in them. It then challenged me to show others what I had observed and challenge them to look beyond the superficial. While this was my goal, it is up to the reader to decide whether or not it was met.

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to see this project finished but who I know was proud of all I had and have accomplished. I would also like to thank Jenny Bosick, my mother-in-law (of sorts), in whose house I lived during much of my time in graduate school while my own mother was ill. Finally, I would like to thank my fiancé, Nicholas Gonzales, for his love and support through the entirety of my graduate school career. I will always appreciate his silent suffering and his desire to make me laugh through the pain.

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Chapter One

The Stories We Tell Ourselves

This project was inspired by one little girl's obsession with ghosts and the supernatural. As a child, I was fascinated by tales of the dead and drawn especially to the lurid and morbid tales of the flamboyant and often royal ghosts that stalk the halls of opulent castles and manor houses in Europe. The ghosts of America, while less romantic, were equally mesmerizing, caught as they were in places such as dilapidated plantations, historical landmarks, and backwoods ruins. My obsession has led me to many strange books, and those books in turn led me to many strange, isolated, and haunted places—places that I have never set foot in even in adulthood but, nevertheless, take up a significant part of my mind and whose images and tales lay dormant there.

I also inherited from my father a love of places. New places and old places, far places and near places; the nature of the place did not matter so much as the journey to it and the experience of it. I was drawn to old buildings and their histories, even when the buildings no longer stood or, even better, stood in a state of mysterious and alluring disrepair. On the same block as my childhood home in Northern California lay a house in a state of decay. It was surrounded by so many eucalyptus trees that the sun never touched its grounds and protected from the predations of neighborhood children and teens by a chain-link fence and the occasional guard dog. To my knowledge, no one had lived in that house in the time that we lived nearby, nor did I know who owned it. It looked as though it had been built near the turn of the century, though it was far starker than the Victorians

and Craftsmans one might think of. It had been years, perhaps decades, since the curling and cracking wooden siding had seen paint. The screens that covered the windows were blackened with age, and none of the windows allowed even the slightest glimpse inside. I remember standing outside telling myself stories and wondering what, exactly, was the nature of that house. I am sure that my parents, being second-generation inhabitants of our hometown, told me something of its history, but whatever tidbits of knowledge they offered have been lost in favor of the far, far more delicious idea that the house had terrible secrets to hide.

Even now, that house stands out in my mind, though it no longer stands on that street corner near my childhood home. It was long ago razed to build a small strip-mall, and all of its mystery and the mild terror are but a memory. The eucalyptus trees still stand, shading the new building just as they did the old, although there are not so many of them. But that house will always be, to me, the quintessential haunted house—mysterious, ruined, and ever-present. Many people have encountered such places, both in childhood and adulthood, and it is those places and their stories that lie at the center of this project.

The stories that we tell ourselves and others about haunted places and other supernatural phenomena take many forms, and our interactions with such places are equally polymorphic. While my own interests in the paranormal found their foundation in books, creepy buildings, and television series like ‘Unsolved Mysteries,’ other people engage with the paranormal in other ways, some of which are far more direct and performative. Many of these methods of paranormal engagement we have all either experienced personally or seen portrayed in movies, television, books, comics, and a myriad of other popular media.

One of the most common ways in which people engage with the supernatural is through what has come to be known in folkloristic literature as the ‘legend trip.’ While the term is unfamiliar to most, the practice is almost instantly recognizable to anyone raised in the Western supernatural tradition once it is described.

Imagine a group of young people. These people can range across genders, and from adolescence to young adulthood, but for our purposes the group is made up of adolescent girls. These girls have been left mostly unattended, likely during a sleepover or another occasion that mixes a lack of adult supervision, the thrill and terror of *knowing* that one is unsupervised, and the mysterious and supernatural qualities of night. One girl suggests that they tell each other ghost stories—a common occurrence among people of all ages—and the other girls agree. Perhaps they sincerely yearn for the thrill of horror these stories bring or, perhaps, for the thrill that comes with scaring others. Maybe they simply wish to avoid being called ‘chicken.’ Whatever their individual motivations, the girls begin to tell stories. Eventually, one girl tells a story about a local place that is known to be haunted. While this, too, is common, in this particular re-telling the girl says that the ghost of who is haunting the place can be summoned through a certain set of actions. The ghost could be a scorned bride, drawn to young women dressed in white who happen to walk under the tree where she hanged herself at 3:13 in the morning. Or perhaps a drowned child who always appears to those who come to the well in which he drowned and say his name three times. Whatever the nature of the ghost, or its associated ritual, the nature of the game changes when one of the girls suggests that they go to that place, perform the ritual, and see what happens.

While in most cases we can assume that the girls do not, in fact, slide on their coats and shoes and sneak out of the safety of the home in order to visit this place, in this case the girls are particularly adventurous. They dress themselves, grab whatever light sources they can find, and sneak out of the house to visit the place, perform the ritual, and to see if the stories are indeed true. And so, they travel in the near-darkness—street lights are near-impossible to avoid—to this supernatural site. We will say it is the tree where the scorned bride is said to have hanged herself. One girl—the one who professes the most courage—is dressed in white, and it is she who will perform the actions that will summon forth the ghost. The other girls have, wisely, refrained from wearing any white so as not to be mistaken by the ghost and draw her unwanted attentions. The girl in white walks under the tree at the designated time, looking for some sign that she has indeed successfully invoked something from beyond.

Though the girl in white sees nothing, one of the other girls claims to see a woman walking toward them, out of the shadows. She is dressed all in white, and a rope hangs around her disjointed neck. The girls all scream and run, though none so fast as the sacrificial girl, back to the safety of the well-lighted house that one of them calls home. They discuss what they saw in hushed and frantic voices, and the next day at school they tell those they know—in echoes of those hushed tones—their conclusions about the legitimacy of the haunting. And the story lives on.

Similar scenes are often portrayed in popular media, along with scenes of groups of people using Ouija boards, seances, and profane or sacred rituals to conjure the supernatural. Of course, the dire consequences of such actions which are portrayed in the

media are not reflective of the consequences we see in reality, which are never more serious than a few nights' lost sleep. Still, our fascination with the supernatural permeates our daily lives more often than we care to admit or are even consciously aware of. I myself have experienced the discussion of supernatural events in person, most recently in my own workplace, in the payroll office of a tribal casino in Northern California.

I was sitting at my desk one afternoon, surrounded by my three co-workers. The supervisor from the casino's gift shop came in to discuss something, but I concentrated on my own work until I noticed that they had begun discussing some strange happenings that they all had witnessed in the casino. Though the casino is isolated, sandwiched between a large city and a small town, it is the opinion of my co-workers that ghosts haunt the grounds. The gift shop manager described hearing unexplainable noises coming from the bakery when he worked in the accounting office, which lies directly below. The noises were so loud he thought that one of the dough-kneading machines had gotten off-balance, and he called upstairs to see if they could re-balance the machines and stop the noise. He was told that they were not making bread that day, and the dough-kneaders were not on.

Another co-worker in the payroll office described seeing a woman in an old-fashioned dress walking down the executive hallway, only to disappear at the end of it. This was corroborated by another co-worker, who had not observed the ghost herself but had seen my co-worker's reaction to seeing it. The gift shop manager also added that he often heard strange noises in his new office while he was alone. They came to the conclusion that the spirits were probably those of the pioneers who had settled the area and had perhaps lived on the land the casino was built on many, many years before. Although

the entire exchange lasted only a few minutes, it was a stellar example of how people not only share their experiences of the supernatural, but also how supernatural stories are processed by groups of people in order to fit the patterns of common cultural narratives, such as ghost stories.

Though ghosts and haunted places had always fascinated me, I had never thought of undertaking any kind of academic study of them—aside from a flirtation with wanting to be a parapsychologist in middle school, the result of reading far too many urban fantasy novels—until I came to a realization that whether or not one thinks that the existence of ghosts can be scientifically proven, they are what I refer to as a cultural fact. The belief in the existence of ghosts and hauntings is so widespread and people's reaction to their perceived presence and actions can be so dramatic that, for all intents and purposes, they are real. This first observation was closely followed by a second revelation, and that is that ghosts are almost invariably associated with places.

Examining such an observation, the first question one must ask is why? Why are ghosts and place so inextricably linked? And, more importantly to academic concerns, how can one examine the process by which ghosts and places *become* linked? And how are these associations maintained, once they are made? It was not until I encountered the idea of the legend trip in the literature regarding folklore of the supernatural that I discovered the means by which this process could be studied. A legend trip, briefly speaking, is a ritual in which a site that has some sort of supernatural significance is visited by a group of people usually ranging from adolescents to young adults. These individuals then invoke the forces that reside there through ritual action—such as turning three-times counter-clockwise

while saying a spirit's name—and, once some indication is given that the invocation worked, flee in a whirlwind of terror to a safe place, where more often than not the events of the evening are discussed.

The legend trip, however, would prove to be a problematic window into this world for several reasons. First, the legend trip is ephemeral and, thus, impossible to predict. It is a folk phenomenon which manifests itself as quickly as it dissipates, a strange offspring of late nights, legends, and active imaginations. One could spend years among the same group of adolescents and never witness a single legend trip. Second, one would have to find a group of adolescents to observe and that might be, while not impossible, extremely difficult. Third, the presence of a significantly older researcher would change the ritual in way that would taint whatever actions were taken by the subjects being observed and, as a result, render any data gathered useless.

Faced with these problems, I was forced to look for another means by which to observe the interactions among spirits, the people who conjure them, and the places in which they are conjured. It was then that I realized that the organized ghost tour would be a suitable substitute for the legend trip in order to observe this interaction, though the two are by no means the same. The systematic study of ghost tours offer predictability in terms of performance while echoing the legend telling associated with the legend trip. This allowed for the reliable and regular observation of the performances of the tour guides and the collection of data. It was decided that my field research on this topic would center around ghost tours, their creators, and the audiences that flock to them.

Methodologically, when this project was first conceived, my fieldwork was designed to be carried out in two different ways. The first type of data collection is what could broadly be described as participant-observation, in which I would attend ghost tours and take notes on their performance. The second was to be the survey phase, in which I would administer and collect surveys from both the ghost tour participants and the tour guides themselves in order to gain a well-rounded viewpoint of what both the performers and their audiences experienced during a ghost tour, as well as their individual motivations.

To begin with, I located ghost tours through the internet, and considered them for the project based on their physical location—broadly, Northern California – along with any financial restrictions that would prevent my attendance. The tours I chose are, for the most part, in the San Francisco Bay Area, ranging from as far south as San Jose, California to as far north as Sonoma, California. The farthest tour from the Sacramento area was in Virginia City, Nevada. Additional fieldwork was done at commercial haunted houses in Sacramento, California.

Once the ghost tours were determined to be viable candidates for fieldwork, I contacted the tour guides or companies via email and asked for permission to attend and to take surveys. If tour guides did not respond immediately to the initial inquiry, I spoke with them the first time I went on the and made arrangements to attend a future tour and collect surveys. However, due to the public nature of the tours, I was able to use all observations of tour performances for the purposes of this research. The number of times each tour was attended is listed in Appendix A.

Aside from a single occasion, I gave surveys to tour participants at the beginning of the tour. The time available for participants to fill out their surveys ranged from 5 – 20 minutes, depending on when the tour guide arrived at the rendezvous point and when the individual participants arrived. The environments in which surveys were given ranged greatly, with most participants filling out their surveys on the street while waiting for the tour to start. Rarely were participants able to sit down and fill out their surveys. Ultimately, time constraints and convenience were both contributing factors to my not being able to use the surveys as a useful source of data. The use of open-ended questions was necessary to garner useful answers; however, the limited time available made it difficult for participants to answer the questions fully or easily. Had I used more simplistic yes or no questions to collect data, I might have collected more data overall, but such data would not have been very useful for the purposes of this project. Therefore, I have rejected survey data in favor of the data collected from participant-observation.

A ghost tour is a performance in which there is a storyteller and an audience. However, unlike similar public performances, ghost tours are performed in a variety of venues and often while moving. Thus, they present a set of challenges to the participant-observer. The first challenge is of city noise. Ghost tours rarely take place away from city centers, and thus are exposed to the regular noises of the city. In the range of my experience these sounds included honking car horns, wind, groups of talking people moving around and through the tour, belligerent or drunk individuals, music, and so forth. Such environmental factors could make hearing the storytellers difficult, and often interrupted the flow of the performance.

Another challenge to the participant-observer is the movement of the group. The tour guide leads the group, but there were occasions in which it was difficult to maintain pace, especially in the famously hilly San Francisco. This resulted in not being able to hear much of the conversation in between stops, where stories were told and information was given. To address this issue, I attempted to attend each tour multiple times. Happily, for the most part tour guides only performed stories while standing in a single place and not while walking. On occasion a tour guide would relate to me while we were walking a story that they did not include on their tour.

The third challenge was the audience. The size and age demographics of the audience had several effects on the performance given by the tour guide. One of the most frustrating aspects of gathering survey data was that, during the season in which it would be most interesting to gather such data—namely, Halloween—many tour guides asked me specifically to refrain from doing so, as the group would be far too large and it would take up far too much time. This resulted in my being unable to gather data at the times of the year in which those who were the most interested in supernatural phenomena would be participating in the tours. Additionally, when there were children present in the audience, tour guides would often censor or drop their more sordid stories entirely. This occurred most notably on the San Francisco Ghost Hunt, where the tour guide directly admitted to me without prompting that he had refrained from sharing some information because of the presence of children in that night's audience.

Finally, the major issue that I faced in gathering data was the lack of availability of tour guides. Most tour guides have full time jobs outside of their work as performers, and

their own families as well. It was difficult—well-nigh impossible—to schedule any time to talk to them about their tours outside of designated tour times. This was because they were often in a rush to get to the tour, as well as a rush to get home. Most also did not respond to follow-up inquiries about interviews. Therefore, most of what I know about how they constructed their tours comes from the tour performance itself.

At its core this thesis is a study of how we believe and the effects that our beliefs have on the way we view our world. The study of belief is difficult not just in the field but also in a more general academic sense. It is important to note that focus on belief in the supernatural in contemporary society has been stigmatized in the social sciences almost since the beginning of the discipline. This is because, for a very long time, one of the keystones of the social sciences was the assumption that supernatural beliefs held by contemporary people were survivals of earlier times. These beliefs are further derided because they are often held by those people outside those social classes that normally produce scholars.

As a result of this confluence of academic and social factors, anthropologists and folklorists who wrote about contemporary supernatural belief in the past both stressed the need for the preservation of such beliefs, while simultaneously deriding those beliefs and the people who held them, at least by implication. It is the objective of this thesis to present contemporary belief in the supernatural in a neutral manner, but also in a way in which the reader can recognize the practice of these supernatural beliefs in themselves and those around them. When our own beliefs are presented to us in such a way, it is difficult to

deride or devalue them. It is my hope that, in reading this thesis the reader comes to a greater understanding of the beliefs of their home community as well as their own.

The chapters to follow are an exploration of the construction of meaning and the performance of place in the context of the ghost tour. The schools of thought represented come from many academic fields: folkloristics, anthropology, geography, performance studies, and linguistics. It is important to note that, while performance studies, linguistic anthropology, and folkloristics have examined setting and performances *in* place, the creation or evocation *of* place through performance is not a topic that has been widely discussed from the standpoints of cultural or linguistic anthropology, performance studies, or folkloristics. While Chapter Two presents the research that informed my own analysis of the data, it also represents a selection of the current research on the topics of place, performance, and legend. Chapter Three presents my own observations and findings, as well as descriptions of the tours that I have taken over the course of my fieldwork. Chapter Four, the conclusion, represents a synthesis of the research I have done and of my own fieldwork.

Chapter Two

Place, Meaning, Belief, and Legend

The human experience of the world is an amalgam of the narratives that we tell ourselves and our communities, as well as the stories that our communities relate to us in their turn. Legends, traditional narratives told as true, are unique in that they encourage us to question the very realities that we have constructed. We tell legends not to destroy our conceptions of our world, but to make room for belief within the worlds that we have constructed. A history lesson may tell us why a building exists, who built it, what it is made of, how long it has stood, and myriad other facts. A legend causes us to reevaluate that same building and ask ourselves if what we have seen and what we have been taught is, indeed, all there is to know. This is especially true of supernatural legends.

Once a person has knowingly entered a space believed to be haunted they are forever changed, even if only in a small way. As a person who has entered or been in the presence of many spaces reputed and reported to be haunted, I can attest to this fact. Though the expectation of experience is a core aspect of the performance of place, the *experience* of haunting itself is something very different from the *expectation* of that experience. Though actual experiences of haunting are in my estimation quite rare occurrences on ghost tours, people attend them for that one-in-a-million chance that one might witness the otherworldly and actually be touched by someone or something from beyond. They attend to become part of the legend or to incorporate the legend into their lives.

The association of places and the spirits of the dead is maintained through what I have chosen to refer to as the performance of place. The performance of place is the evocation of certain aspects of shared beliefs and concepts for the purpose of experiencing place. The evocation of the supernatural *in situ* allows people to not only create belief in the supernatural, but also to maintain those beliefs already associated with certain meaningful places. These beliefs are voiced through legend, with the performances of the ghost tour acting as many separate instances of legend reenactment woven together into a single narrative. This paper will discuss how people use the performance of place in order to create and maintain meaning in places which are thought to be supernatural, specifically in the context of ghost tours.

Place and Meaning

Place and legend, in the case of both ghost tours and legend trips, are two concepts that are inseparable. When a place is performed in such a way as to invoke its supernatural associations, it is impossible to extricate the meanings that have created the place from the legends that have fed into those meanings. Therefore, an understanding of both place as a theoretical concept and legend as a genre of folklore are necessary to fully comprehend the performance of place.

The process of interaction with any given location results in that location being imbued with meaning by those who are interacting with it. Frequent interaction with a location by people will not only result in that location becoming meaningful, but will also result in that meaning being constantly re-negotiated and re-constructed. This imbuing of

a location with meaning creates what we will refer to as a 'place.' Though the idea seems esoteric, in truth we are all very familiar with this process. As social beings we constantly and consistently interact with places, imbuing them with personal and shared meaning. For example, although we attend school from the ages of five to eighteen, in the United States our high school years are given priority in terms of impact on our life narratives. Whether our memories of high school are wonderful or terrible, they hold personal and cultural significance. And, though we may not consciously realize it, this particular segment of the narrative of our lives is defined entirely by the place in which it is constructed. The high school as a place is a nexus of hundreds, if not thousands, of very personal and important narratives. The meanings that any given high school is given by those who have attended, are attending, or will attend it are just as, if not more, diverse. Additionally, after one has left high school one's conceptions of that particular time period are irrevocably defined by that place and all of the meanings that it has been given (Gould 1997; Milligan 1998).

Meaning is inherent to place as a concept, and many sets of meanings may be ascribed to a place by the individuals and groups to whom it has importance. These sets of meanings are what allow places to become channels through which human beings interact with the physical world around them, and part of their effectiveness lies in the fact that many meanings can be expressed by a single place at once. The grand majority of places one visits on a ghost tour, whether the tour is given in Napa or San Francisco, have meanings and uses far beyond the supernatural. Many have what is in essence a secret identity as haunted places, existing as both mundane and strange depending on who is interacting with the place and for what purpose (Cresswell 2008; Lane 2001).

Interacting with Places

Buildings, monuments, and other structures play key roles in the ability of a place to generate and regenerate meaning, and it is the peculiarities of a site which allow actors to initially perceive its importance. While buildings and structures, such as houses and businesses, fall fairly easily and without complaint into the realm of the mundane, those places which do not are isolated in our perceptions due to a perceived strangeness. This may be due to the appearance of the place, its location, or even a feeling that one gets in its vicinity. It can even be all of these things. For example, Stonehenge is a particularly famous place which draws tourists from all over the world. But why? It is an isolated rock monument standing in the middle of a moor in England. Yet we are drawn to it, perhaps because of its air of mystery and incomprehensible age. Though it is thought to be a ritual complex of some kind, the truth of the matter is that we cannot ever know for certain why such effort was put into building it. While it is tempting to assume that the monument was built where it was because of some numinous quality that was sensed even by ancient Britons, there is no way to prove that. Still, one cannot deny that the place has an attraction, even thousands of years after it has been abandoned. Public perception of it as a 'special' place has ensured this (Tilley 1994).

The collective memory of a community often focuses on places and things that are always present and with which the members of that community interact with on some level. Like legend, collective memory is a guide to the present as well as a means to understand, process, and even reinterpret the past. Martha Norkunas, focusing on the sites present in her hometown of Lowell, Massachusetts, bears witness to the fact that places evoke

numerous stories among locals because the places and the stories they elicit are intertwined (Norkunas 2002). While it may be easy to say that the meaning any place has is simply a cultural creation laid over a material thing or a place, meaning is not simply a blanket laid over an object or place, but rather a net in which the object or place is included. Any place's meaning is formed through the physical interaction of people with the place itself. Thus, places are revealed as being "an emergent effect of the engagement between a human subject and the materiality of a site" (Watson 2003, 157).

Sacred places themselves are tied inherently to ritualistic behavior, most likely because physical engagement with a place is essential to experiencing its numinous qualities. Participants in ghost tours may or may not ascribe any kind of supernatural meaning to the places to which they are introduced during the performance itself. Yet, in the course of a ghost tour the participants interact with the subjects of the tour, i.e. the places themselves, to greater or lesser extents depending on how the places are presented to them by the tour guides, how accessible they are to interaction, and their own choices to act as either passive or active performers. These circumstances, as well as the choices of all actors involved, shape the meanings that are created in these places and which the actors take with them when the tour ends (Lane 2001).

The interactions which occur with any given place are limited only by the constraints set by those individuals interacting with a site. The meaning created by these experiences informs all other interaction and, thus, all other meaning produced. In order for actors to interact with a space in such a way as to create meaning for themselves and the place itself, the actors must be aware of the proper ways to act in the context of the

place. During a ghost tour, one must be made aware of the supernatural aspects of a place either implicitly through its inclusion on a ghost tour, or explicitly through the narratives related, in order to properly experience these supernatural qualities. This ability to experience can be and often is subtle, a slight change of one's interpretation of seemingly innocuous events such as being hit by a cold draft or feeling like one is being watched (Tilley 1994).

It seems almost ridiculous to assert that there is a 'proper' way to act when one is in a haunted place, but a deeper analysis of the types of supernatural narratives and imagery that we are all to some extent exposed to throughout the course of our lives leads us to a very different conclusion. The truth is that we are all at least somewhat socialized to act in certain ways when confronted by the supernatural, whether in the context of a constructed haunted house during the Halloween season or real home purported to be haunted. Of course, depending on our upbringing, the reactions which are considered appropriate when confronted with such things may range from voicing outright skepticism to screaming in terror. While this may seem to be a range of emotional reaction so wide as to be almost meaningless, this is not the case. Either reaction occurs because of a confrontation with a belief, whether or not the reaction validates said belief. This is perfectly in line with the purpose of legend as a folklore genre, which will be discussed later.

The meaningfulness that a place accumulates over time is a complex social construct, woven of many different experiences from many different actors and groups of actors. While the nature of these meanings may not be easily discernable, their existence is fairly easy to detect, as illustrated by our discussions of high school and Stonehenge. Places

shape the experiences of those who interact with and within them and, while a given person might only interact with a site a single time, this does not disrupt the accumulation of meaning in these places. In fact, the knowledge that many hundreds, if not thousands, of people have interacted with a site in a similar context and had similar experiences acts in much the same way. The previous knowledge that any individual holds in regards to a type of site gives it meaning for that person on a general level. Over time, continued interactions within a site may either change or strengthen the meanings that site holds (Milligan 1998).

Human beings conceive of their world in terms of places in much the same way that they construct narratives of their lives. Those places that are important to us act as plot points in our conception of our world, small pockets of meaning that act as personal and social anchors for our stories. How many of our stories start in our homes, schools, workplaces, or hometowns? When we engage in tourism, we return not just with souvenirs and pictures, but with stories of our travels. Place is inherent to stories and to our lives, and supernatural legends are no exception to that rule.

Legends and Memorates

Folklorists have agreed on several distinguishing features of the legend as a traditional genre of storytelling. According to folklorist Linda Degh, it is generally agreed that one of the most important distinguishing features of the legend is that it portrays itself as truth, whether or not evidence exists to support or deny it. Legends as a genre attempt to create a believable version of reality as experienced by a single person, are anchored by familiar places and/or personages, and are presented to their audiences by their tellers as

first-hand experiences. We have all likely been present during the relation of legend in normal conversation, whether or not we recognize this at the time of the performance. Interestingly the legend, unlike many other folklore genres, can be related by a teller without the teller recognizing that they are *not* relating an incredible, but true, story. The presentation of the legend as fact is such a hallmark of the genre as a whole that often people perform legends without in fact noticing that they are doing so.

Once, when I was at work, my co-workers began discussing how stupid people are. This was—and is—not an uncommon topic of conversation in our office, but in order to illustrate her point during this particular interlude, another co-worker began telling the story of the woman who put her dog in the microwave to dry it off and ended up killing it. This story appears in Jan Harold Brunvand's well-known collection of urban legends, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, under the title "Hot Dog!" Brunvand states that the microwave oven variant of this specific legend began appearing in the mid-1970s, and it was fascinating to see the legend related as fact by my co-worker (Adonyeva and Olson 2011; Brunvand 1981; Degh 2001; Tangherlini 1990).

Legends often take a historical tone, using localized aspects of history to legitimate the content of the narrative. Legends may be historicized by any number of small details. For example, the 'old-fashioned' clothing that spirits wear is often a very large part of identifying them as not being living, breathing people. People quite often use this identifier in combination with old photographs and portraits to positively identify a spirit as being a specific individual, especially when it comes to identifying the ghosts of historical figures or celebrities such as Abraham Lincoln and Marilyn Monroe. Such believed historical

authenticity reflects human experiences and conceptions of the past, allowing for those who hear the legend to argue either for or against its legitimacy. However, it is important that while the legend is presented as truth, there still be some room for ambiguity. Otherwise, the meaning of the legend cannot be the subject of debate. The elements of the supernatural or bizarre that are inherent to the genre allow for this ambiguity despite the mundanity of the characters and places presented (Degh 2001; Tangherlini 1990).

In legend, the mundanity of the real world is transformed into the extraordinary by the intrusion of the numinous in the everyday lives of ordinary people. Because the legend is presented as truth, the events related by the legend teller must be embedded in the rules and restrictions of the everyday life of the community. These rules must then be broken in order for the events related in the legend to be recognized by those hearing it as being out-of-the-ordinary. Unlike tales and myths, whose settings and plots are often fantastical in nature and have little or nothing to do with the real world, the commonplace settings of the legend genre allow for debate about the underlying nature of our contemporary reality. The trend in legend narrative in which the objectively real world comes into often destructive contact with the otherworld reflects the fact that mankind has historically felt that these two worlds are constantly at odds with each other, and humans are caught in the middle of this conflict. This otherworld is so omnipresent in human worldviews and human storytelling that it cannot be separated from the real world. Contact with the otherworld, or a sense of contact, is most common—and ‘easy’—in the liminal spaces that are created when people participate in pilgrimages, legend trips, and ghost tours, as well as other ritual and performative acts. This contact is most easily sought, in its own turn, in places that are

already considered in some way liminal, such as haunted places (Degh 1994; Degh 2001; Koven 2007; Oring 2008).

Every narrative for which believability is a required component is based on a memorate, or a first-person narrative of an experience. Memorates are much like anecdotes except that they relate supernatural, rather than mundane, experiences to the listener. These stories are personal, and like legends are told as if they were true. However, unlike the legend the memorate is far more likely to have happened to the listener, instead of being presented as if it did and also be true, in the sense that the listener is relating a supernatural experience that they had. These experiences are not dramatic, and the narratives they inspire are short. However, like legends they portray the invasion of the numinous and/or strange into the lives of everyday people. Gillian Bennett, in her book *Alas! Poor Ghost: Traditions of Belief in Story and Discourse*, gives dozens of examples of such personal supernatural accounts, collected from elderly women in a community in Manchester, England. The stories she collected related experiences such as having prophetic dreams, seeing apparitions of loved ones after bereavement, and other such personal miracles. One could say that, while legends present the beliefs of a community in the public sphere, the memorate presents these beliefs within the home and family (Bennett 1999; Degh and Vazsonyi 1974).

Like legends, memorates act as support for beliefs. They are also affected by social expectation and, thus, are traditional forms of storytelling. According to folklorist Lauri Honko, they also share many motifs with legend as a genre. The relation of memorates reveals to the researcher those moments in which supernatural tradition is manifested,

giving a social context for the beliefs held by individuals in a community. Unlike the teller of a legend, the teller of a memorate may not grasp the supernatural nature of their experience until after the fact, during the process of retrospective re-examination which leads the teller of a memorate to interpret the events of their experience in a supernatural light. This re-examination may include input from their social group, not unlike the process of discussion and debate that takes place after the relation of a legend. While it is common to say that all legends imply an underlying memorate, I think it more correct to say that every legend implies a collection of memorates which represent the beliefs that support the legend itself (Adonyeva and Olson 2011; Degh 2001; Honko 1964; Mullen 1971).

The Role of Legends and Legend Reenactment

Legend, as a genre of folklore, is distinguished by its ability to make us confront contradictions to our beliefs in a group setting. This process allows us to forge old narratives into new narratives using a constant stream of new evidence harvested from encounters with the supernatural, whether they are sought out or not. The process of debating and disputing a legend is its very reason for being. Such debates allow us to formulate answers to difficult questions based on collective beliefs about what is possible. The conclusions drawn from such debates by the participants either support old assessments of what makes up reality or they do not. If they do, then the participants' perception of reality and, thus, the nature of reality itself can be said to have been changed. These changes often have roots in the ritualistic behaviors associated with legend reenactment (Degh 2001; Ellis 2001).

Ostension, the literal acting out of a legend, creates a liminal space in which the normal rules of society and traditional categories of all types are suspended much as they are in the settings presented in the legends themselves. In contemporary society, people often lack access to rituals that offer supernatural experience and as a result use their own knowledge of tradition to create experiences which offer access to liminal states of being as a substitute for rituals which are often referred to as rites of passage. We no longer have community rituals that move us from the mundane world to the sacred one, due to any number of cultural factors including constantly changing peer groups, locations, the decline of religious belief, and so forth. Thus, in order to experience the liminal people are often called upon to create their own rituals and, thus, their own gateways to experience. Those sites that are perceived as being special, such as haunted places, are often the sites of such substitute rituals. They act as places of reference, marking the perceived boundaries between the known and the unknown. Ghosts often dwell in such places, highlighting absences with their own presence, calling into question the approved narrative and disrupting our conception of the world. Humans leave behind them an unseen veil of hidden significances wherever they choose to dwell and to build communities. The existence of ghosts in a place mark it as familiar while, at the same time, marking it as strange and attracting those who wish to perform rituals of their own making (Ellis 2001; Kinsella 2011; Tucker 2007).

Legends act as symbols for the collective beliefs and experiences of a community. The performance of legends also helps support their believability—and thus their effectiveness—because of the communal nature of legend telling and narrative negotiation.

In an examination of an Irish folkloric figure known as Biddy Early, Richard Jenkins discusses how collective memories and “vernacular narratives” are reproduced as much by the audiences that hear them as by the narrators who relate them. In this sense, narratives are always diachronic, as they always exist both in the context in which they were told—inside the memory of audience members—and in the context in which they are related again, which may be mere days or entire decades later. This may account for why legends in particular are constantly changing and yet always seem the same (Jenkins 2007; Mullen 1971; Tangherlini 1990).

In Linda Degh and Andrew Vazsonyi’s discussion of ostension and legend, they point out that not only can facts—e.g. experiences—be turned into narratives, but narratives can also be transformed back into experience through the process of legend re-enactment, a form of ostension. Holidays such as Halloween and Friday the 13th are days which invite the general public to visit those places that are associated with legends and re-enact those legends in order to activate supernatural forces. This activation or evocation allows participants to have supernatural experiences. Re-enactments such as this are often begun through the telling of a legend, which will often result in a large group of usually young people getting into a car and driving to a place believed to be haunted as described in the introduction (Degh and Vazsonyi 1983).

It should be pointed out that although people may be taking part in the same ritual, this does not indicate similar or same levels of belief in the ritual among those people. Differing levels of belief are often observable in all kinds of public and even private ritual. For example, when people are called to lower their heads in prayer at an event, people who

do not do so can often be observed. One of my friends admitted to looking around at such times so he could, “Scope around for other nonbelievers.” Though I have observed—and even performed—this behavior, I have never observed an individual *breaking* the ritual for other participants by disturbing their prayers. Thus, while taking part in a ritual, people may be suspending levels of their own belief or disbelief in order to be effective participants. We can see the differences in levels of belief become points of debate in the quest to answer the greater questions about the nature of the supernatural raised by the telling and re-enactment of legends (Miska 1995).

Legend Trips

The legend trip—one such kind of re-enactment—is a process in which a legend narrative with a ritual component is related to a group of people. Those to whom the legend is told then decide to go to the site which is associated with the legend to perform the ritual in an attempt to engage with supernatural forces. Sites of such legends are usually located on the periphery of communities. Once at the site, the participants re-enact the legend—complete with the ritual elements—in order to evoke the supernatural forces that are associated with the place and, thus, have supernatural experiences. After the legend re-enactment is completed and the ritual itself has been performed, the participants will then retire/flee to another place to discuss what occurred. The sites of these legend re-enactments are identified due to their closeness to the stereotypically haunted house or building, as influenced by popular culture and tradition. These places are usually old, worn

down, abandoned, and isolated from the community and are otherwise no longer associated with the living or their reality (Tucker 2007).

All participants in legend trips are to some degree spectators, watching the unfolding drama of the supernatural events that their actions have made to occur. The purpose of a legend trip is not to entertain the participants, but to allow the participants to cross the boundaries of the real world and enter the liminal one. The often rural and lonely locations of these sites may have several legends associated with them, even in a single community. Participants in legend trips may simply seek generic sites that fit the details of the legend related to them without that place being associated with any legends specifically (Ellis 2001).

Legend trips center around stories and legends that are shared among people who have traveled, or are traveling, to a particular place. As ostensive reenactments, they test the truth of the legends around which they revolve by reenacting the events of the legend and examining the perceived results of that reenactment. The re-telling or reenactment of a legend narrative serves to support the entirety of the legend genre, especially those narratives that make claims as to the existence of supernatural beings or phenomena. The legend trip is marked by an introduction to the supernatural phenomenon by someone who has visited the site previously, as well as the fulfillment of the requirements of the legend *in situ*, and a discussion/narration of the events that occurred once that requirement has been fulfilled. If proof is found, it often replaces the previous legend's account with the account of the legend trip, at least in the minds and perceptions of those who participated (Bird 1994; Kinsella 2011; Oring 2008; Tucker 2007).

It has been stated that the main purpose of re-enacting and relating legends is to provide evidence for belief. This, of course, means that new evidence must be constantly manufactured. When legends are told, they are subjected to processes of “communal re-creation.” Legend and belief have a symbiotic relationship with each other: without the beliefs that drive their creation legends would not exist and, without the legends to support belief, the beliefs themselves would die. Timothy Tangherlini (1990) also suggests a connection between legend and folk belief, in which a legend reflects the folk beliefs of the community in which it exists and is perpetuated. He agrees that legend narratives both feed into and support belief, especially in the case of beliefs in the supernatural.

In localized legends, a physical structure often is the center of the local legend complex, or collection of local legends. These sites are often on the outskirts of the community, are otherwise unusual or noteworthy, and are often local and infamous for supernatural or legendary happenings. They are often the type of places that raise questions for the observer that cannot be easily answered, such as the house in my hometown which so captured my imagination. Once stories are firmly connected to such ambiguous sites, the narratives and places they are connected to are no longer separate. The at times frightening encounters people have in such places add to the legend complex of the community, and it is in the context of such sites that the meaning of the legend told about them becomes the clearest (Bennett 1989; Bird 1994; Degh 2001).

In Kinsella’s book *Legend-Tripping Online: Supernatural Folklore and the Search for Ong’s Hat*, the author relates a ghost-hunting trip he participated in at Waverly Hills Sanatorium, a hospital in Kentucky which once housed the victims of tuberculosis in a time

before antibiotics had made such places obsolete. As many as 63,000 people are thought to have died in this place, and numerous legends have sprung up in regard to the hospital. These legends include not only tragic tales of the ghosts of consumptives, but also narratives describing medical abuses and sadistic doctors. The sanatorium is now on the National Register of Historic Places, and has been maintained through an income stemming from paranormal investigations, ghost tours, and haunted houses.

As he walked through the infamous building supernatural narratives were recounted by the other participants in the event. The legendary status of the sanatorium added an additional level of effectiveness to these personal narratives, while the narratives in turn added a similar quality to the place itself. Whenever a person in the group reported an anomalous experience, it was interpreted by all individuals present in a collaborative effort which drew from the pool of their collective supernatural experience, which is supplemented by legends and the beliefs that they represent. Supernatural traditions operate within communities in such a way as to encourage people to perpetuate the cycle of creation and dissemination needed to enliven the tradition, and to transform personal experience into legend, legend into tradition, and tradition back into experience (Degh and Vazsonyi 1983; Kinsella 2011).

Ghost Tourism

Like the legend trip, the ghost tour is a form of legend performance. It is, however, constructed of many small narratives rather than revolving around a single narrative and a

single place. Ghost tours are the result of using legends to cater to an audience in search of authentic experience, albeit with varying degrees of desire for such experience. People who create and perform ghost tours provide information in the form of recreational travel, using haunted houses as their tools. This commoditization of the supernatural is a result of Western affluence and is especially effective because houses act as the historical documents of a community, outlasting generations of occupants and providing continuity and a sense of history. The constant reenactment of legends during a ghost tour works to reevaluate the past of the site while changing what could happen there in the future. The ability of tour guides to capitalize on these houses is only increased by the fact that, in America, it is often only houses that have a place in historical events or were owned by historical figures that survive the chopping block of modernization. (Degh 2001; Harlow 1993; Kinsella 2011).

In the Hudson River Valley, the early tourism industry turned to ghost tales to draw in those people with disposable incomes and romantic mindsets. The most well-known example is the story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”, by Washington Irving. Though not written as a bid to draw tourists to the Hudson River Valley region of the state of New York, the story has become symbolic of the region. The ghost of the Headless Horseman exists so vividly in the minds of Americans—a seed planted firmly and early children through media and literature—that I rather doubt that anyone reading this who was born and raised in the United States does not know the character of the Headless Horseman, or the characters of “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” While a work of fiction, the story is also a reflection of the ubiquitous supernatural legends which pepper the landscape of the

Hudson River Valley, drawing its setting and inspiration from these real places and the stories of their “real” supernatural denizens. Thus, tourism and ghost stories were both literally and literarily the product of each other. The act of going abroad allowed one to experience the past and, through that experience, to connect with places that were not one’s home.

The methods of marketing used to sell ghost tours—word of mouth, social media, websites, brochures, etc.—are just as affected by community tradition as ghost stories themselves, and are just as likely to carry social meaning whether or not potential customers believe in the supernatural. Marketing tools are highly dependent on imagery, and a sense of the supernatural can be very easily communicated to potential audiences through marketing by making use of dark colors, spiderwebs, gothic fonts, and other such things. Word choice and verbal presentation can also easily be used to present ghost tours as a supernatural product for consumption. Belief marketing depends on commodifying lived experience, and in the case of ghost tour this specifically focuses on paranormal values. Tourists seek authentic experience and, in the case of those who frequent ghost tours, this authenticity is represented by the real possibility of supernatural encounters. However, unlike the legend trip, ghost tours create safe spaces in which people can experience the supernatural (Goldstein 2007; Richardson 2003).

Ghost tours are a fairly new phenomenon in the United States and though they could be looked at as commercializations of traditional beliefs, are as likely to be sites of social meaning and shared belief as any other place. Like any kind of tourism, they are a quest for authentic culture or, in the case of ghost tours, authentic supernatural experience. This

quest for supernatural experience is often thought to be artificial because it seems as if those who are participating in such quests are participating only to have their expectations fulfilled. But, because the experiences of patrons are so unpredictable, the guides of ghost tours often create narratives using their own supernatural experiences—and the experiences of others—as fodder (Goldstein 2007).

Tour guides, as the performers of a site, use their performances to bring the personal experiences of their audience into often mutually transformative contact with the narratives, or presented experiences, of a site. The act of sharing experience through stories and the memorabilia of tourism allows tourists to construct a narrative of their lives, making what had been disparate into a whole. Tourism helps to maintain and build a collective consciousness using totems which can be used as metonyms for a place and thus as universal reference. A single place can act as a symbol for the experience of an entire array of places, such as when the White House is used as a symbol for the United States, or how the Eiffel Tower in some ways represents the city of Paris (Glover 2008; Stronza 2001).

Shaping the common past is the easiest way to shape the common present. The narratives presented at heritage sites today are the creations of people of various backgrounds with varying interests and purposes. These heritage sites are often included in ghost tours—such as the Virginia City Ghost Tour—or host ghost tours themselves on a seasonal basis—such as the Winchester Mystery House. Place specificity in narratives on the part of the tour guides is essential to the successful presentation of history to a global audience. Heritage sites can form what are called ‘storyscapes’ where narratives are

negotiated, shaped, and transformed through the interaction of producers and consumers which, in the case of the ghost tour, would be the tour guides and that tour participants. When past events—even those such as legends, which are often historicized for the purposes of legitimacy—are used as products, they are no longer static texts. Instead, they are recreated through performance. Their interpretation is then flavored by the audience of consumers and the performers themselves, who are also involved in the presentation of the text as narrative (Glover 2008).

Legends often speak to contemporary needs and concerns in a way that history and fact do not. The religious pilgrims that visit the island of Selja, Norway take part in staged pilgrimages—a type of performance in and of themselves—in which they experience their own cultural past, in a way not unlike those people who take part in legend trips and ghost tours. Their personal experience of the places and landscapes they visit when taking part in such rituals are their own, but are also interwoven with the cultural knowledge and folk beliefs that they share with those around them. This continued and continuous performative interaction with places and landscapes imbued with the sacred fuels the cycle of the production and reproduction of the place's meaning, and thus feeds people's belief in the legends of that place and, consequently, the place itself (Selberg 2006).

Performance, Reflexivity, and Legend Reenactment

Richard Bauman defines performance as the responsibility an individual assumes in regards to an audience to show communicative competence by speaking in socially appropriate ways. In order to mark what is and is not socially appropriate communication

for a given situation, the performer must properly frame and key the performance by using signals, or metacommunicative devices, that the people who share the performer's beliefs and frame of reference recognize. If a performance is framed and keyed properly, then the audience will know what to expect. This expectation will, in turn, invite their participation. What keys a performance is ultimately dependent on the social context in which the performance occurs; thus it is nearly impossible to create an exhaustive list of those metacommunicative devices that key performances. The context of a performance is also important to its effectiveness, as performance is always a situated behavior (Bauman 1984).

The retelling of the supernatural legend can be framed and keyed in any number of ways, one of the most common being in a dark room or a haunted place, lighting a candle and turning a flashlight on and shining it upwards over one's face, and beginning the story with a phrase such as, "It happened not far from here..." or "It was a dark and stormy night...", both of which are prime examples of keying a performance. In the case of the telling of haunted house legends, if one cannot be inside or in the presence of an actual haunted house, then one does one's best to make their location as like a haunted house as possible. This can be done by waiting until nightfall, turning out the lights, lighting candles, and other assorted set-dressing.

The way in which performances are patterned also varies between cultures and communities. The pattern of a performance is often closely tied to the genre of the performance being given, and tells the audience what to expect of the performance and when by revealing to them its genre. For example, the pattern of the performance of a haunted house legend is very different from the performance of slam poetry. In the case of

the performance of a supernatural legend, the structure will often begin with a set-up which presents an ordinary version of our world populated by ordinary people, the intrusion of something otherworldly into said world, and then the consequences of that intrusion. This basic plot mirrors the rite of passage as described by Van Gennep and Turner, in which an ordinary person leaves home, confronts that which lies outside of their normal, everyday experience, and then returns to their home irrevocably changed by what they have seen (Bauman 1984).

How people experience, process, and reproduce performances—and gain meaning from them—has been examined in some detail Gary B. Palmer and William R. Jankowiak, who suggest that humans use performance to project images of both themselves and the world as they see it, and that performances are observed mainly as mental imagery, i.e. imagined scenarios. The significance of any given performance may be small or large, depending on the audience, but it is always significant in some way to the audience which witnesses it. The commentaries on the world that are presented in performances—such as the commentaries on belief that are presented in the relation of legends—may be accepted, debated, or ignored by the audience as they will it. Palmer and Jankowiak also suggest that performance studies focus on the collective creation of imagery “through expression and experience,” (Palmer and Jankowiak 1996, 240) as all interactants experience and process the images that are performed.

When debate occurs, audience members may take on the roles of performers in order to present a different or subjectively more correct view than was previously presented by other performers, not unlike prosecution and defense attorneys during a trial. However,

this does not mean that performers are uncritical of themselves, or are “unreflexive” in their responses to their own performances. Performers are, in fact, always monitoring their performances to ensure that they are performing effectively and competently. The awareness on the part of performers and their audiences that they are participating in a performance, and their consequent ability to react to that fact as is contextually appropriate to a performance, is part of what is known as reflexivity (Palmer and Jankowiak 1996).

Harris M. Berger and Giovanna P. Del Negro, describe reflexivity as the ability of people engaged in performances to use their own cultural knowledge and shared beliefs in order to “explore, negotiate, comment on, and transform” (Berger and Del Negro 2002, 64) culture itself. This reflexivity inherently also allows people to transform, explore, negotiate, and comment on the content of the performance itself. Thus, reflexivity is one of the key elements of legend telling and re-enactment. Without the ability of both audience and the performers to reflect on the events related to them through the performance of a legend and later comment on it, the process of debate that Degh argues in the core purpose of legend as a genre of folklore could not be fulfilled. Framing a performance actually awakens the type of reflexivity appropriate to that type of performance in the participants. The construction of a frame for the performance reveals to the audience how they are expected to react and engage with the performance itself. However, a performer may or may not be successful in employing the techniques that encourage reflexivity on behalf of a listener and a listener, in their turn, may or may not be receptive to the performer’s overtures in the first place. Performance is grounded in the understanding that both the self and every other participant in the performance is both experiencing the performance and

has some capacity to share their experience of the performance with others (Berger and Del Negro 2002, 64).

The performative aspects of experience also help to explain how phenomena come to be enacted through a performance's use of symbol in creating and also commenting on the performance's meaning. As performance is a social event, participation in performance also helps to create a shared reality—which, again, could be called a common frame of reference, tradition, or shared beliefs—and also creates a well of common experience from which people can later draw. Thus, a successful performance informs all other performances that occur after it has ended, much as prior trips to a haunted site act as the fuel for all future trips to that site (Kapchan 1995).

If we relate pilgrimages as a phenomenon to the phenomena related to legend re-enactment—legend trips and ghost tours, namely—then the work of Victor Turner becomes especially relevant. The act of pilgrimage takes place in the liminal realm, much the same as do legend trips and ghost tours. Additionally, the farther away one gets from home, the more sacred one's encounters become. The topography which one encounters on a pilgrimage also becomes part of the ritual itself, sacred in its passive participation, and in fact the existence of fixed, sacred topography is something that has been noted by anthropologists. Pilgrimages themselves are often focused on certain sites in particular, usually associated with some manifestation of the divine or the supernatural. The pilgrimage ritual itself involves leaving a Familiar Place (home, usually) and traveling to a Far Place (the pilgrimage site), and then returning. The space that exists in between leaving home and returning is what can be referred to as liminal (Turner 1973).

Turner also states that since liminal time exists outside of measurement, it is a time of possibility, where anything could happen. Citing Van Gennep, he also discusses the three classic phases of ritual: separation, margin or limen, and reaggregation. He also asserts that all rituals require spaces that are set apart from the mundane world, although this separation of these spaces from the real world may or may not be permanent. Also important to the effectiveness of ritual is “flow,” the mental state in which our awareness of what is happening becomes inseparable from our reactions to it. When flow is achieved in a ritual or a performance, the participants reach a state of mind in which their experience of the moment is unmediated by their apprehension of said experience, a state of mind far, far different than that which could be considered commonplace. Turner also asserts that in order for meaning to be understood, it must be understood retroactively by looking at what each event in an experience added to the total result of the experience. This is close to the process of creating a narrative, as the person apprehending the meaning of the events experienced must impose a plot—a beginning, a middle, and an end—to their experience in order to come to any conclusions about its meaning (Turner 1979, 1980).

Local legends are often linked not only to those people who stand out in the collective memory of the community, but also to well-known places and even objects. People’s interaction with these places and things is often what triggers the re-telling of a legend in the first place. This localization of the telling of legends is often one of the key features of experiencing that place. For instance, the classic American experience of haunting is entering or being in the presence of a haunted house, either literally—as with a legend trip or ghost tour—or figuratively through storytelling. The ghost itself is

inseparable from the place it haunts because it is only the presence of the ghost that brings that place into the liminal. The relationship between the oral tradition and popular culture has made the haunted house a “universally recognized cultural icon” (Grider 2007, 168; Simpson 2008).

The creation and maintenance of meaning through the performance of place is a complex process that, in the case of ghost tours, is the result of the meeting of place, legend, narrative, and performance. Haunted places are in part created and almost entirely maintained by the performance of their tales. These performances can, and do, take many forms, as the existence of the ghost tour and the legend trip show. Whether or not these performances occur in a semi-commercial setting as the result of careful research or scripting, or occur as the result of the excitement and tale-sharing of a group of pre-adolescent girls at a slumber party makes no difference. Both are ostensive acts which seek in their own ways to reenact legends and, in doing so, shape the beliefs of their communities while at the same time performing and legitimating them.

Chapter Three

Creating and Maintaining Meaning through the Performance of Place

The concept of performance of place and its role in creating and maintaining meaning was less difficult to formulate as an idea than the method by which to observe such performances in action. Although the original inspiration for this thesis came from a life-long obsession with ghosts, haunted places, and the paranormal, it was not until I was introduced to the practice of the legend trip that the connection between haunted places and the creation of meaning was made. However, anthropology is a practice based on participant-observation, and the legend trips evade such approaches due to their ephemeral and spontaneous nature. How was I to observe the performance of a haunted place—to observe a legend trip—without actually observing a legend trip? After much thought, I decided that the closest approximation would be the ghost tour, which mimics the re-enactment of legend *in situ* by a group of people, but is also predictable and repeatable to the extent that any performance can be predictable and repeatable.

Both the ghost tour and the legend trip are forms of ostensive legend re-enactment that seek to test out the truth of a legend. The motives that drive the participants in a ghost tour are more complex than those which drive the legend trip, and may or may not have anything to do with testing out the truth of legends associated with the places on the ghost tour. As with many rituals in our society, not all participants will have equal belief or investment in the ritual or its end result. This is more apparent in the case of the ghost tour than in the case of the legend trip, because those people who participate in a ghost tour may

have very different motivations for participation. Some may be seeking supernatural experience, while still others may simply desire to know the history of a place or to observe its architecture.

These are not likely to be primary motivators for the participants in a legend trip, as the legend trip acts to test legends for their veracity as well as provide a means by which participants can encounter liminality. This is likely due to the difference in age between those people who participate in ghost tours, and those who participate in legend trips. The ghost tour is the province of adults with disposable incomes who can afford ticket fees and, depending on their location, parking fees, fuel costs, food costs, et cetera. Though I have observed adolescents on ghost tours, they were supervised by their parents, other adults, or both, which is not the case with legend trips. The legend trip, in contrast, is an adolescent ritual which requires little or no financial investment on the part of its participants and is rarely performed by anyone older than a college student (Ellis 2001; Kinsella 2011; Miska 1995).

The ghost tour deviates from the legend trip in many other ways, such as how each uses space and place and how they are constructed by their participants. The legend trip focuses on a single place, usually rural and rundown, whose true history is not widely known by the community at large. Such places become the center of local legend complexes and draw adolescents looking to test their mettle by visiting them. The ghost tour, conversely, focuses not so much on a single place, such as a house, but on an area or neighborhood. This is because the ghost tour is a tourist attraction and, thus, must market itself around either a well-known locale, such as the Winchester Mystery House, or a well-

known neighborhood or city, such as the Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco or Napa. The public histories of these places are relatively well-known; however, the ghost tour highlights those narratives that are not part of the official history.

The difference between space and place is more important to note in discussing the ghost tour than in discussing the legend trip. The legend trip's singular focus on rural and run-down places means that the particular locale, which has meaning within the community, is surrounded by relatively meaningless space. This space has meaning only in the sense that it helps to create the idea of rurality and isolation, making the place itself a more attractive destination for intrepid adolescents. The ghost tour, in contrast, relates several distinct places within a single area. In this case, the space itself actually has greater meaning than in the case in the legend trip. While the place that is the focus of the legend trip usually exists at the periphery of a community and is acknowledged to be of it while at the same time being apart from it, the places that are performed in the ghost tour *do not* exist on the periphery of their communities. They are often in neighborhoods of the city center. For example, while at one time the Winchester Mystery House existed on the periphery of San Jose, it now stands across the street from both a movie theater, an upscale-shopping center, and a mall. It is completely embedded within the city of San Jose. Those places presented on tours in San Francisco are not only embedded within the larger city, but are also embedded within the neighborhoods that they represent, such as Chinatown and the Haight-Ashbury.

The places that become the focus of the legend trip are often not public places, and exist either as privately-owned property or are too far outside the easy reach of everyday

interaction to be considered public. In contrast, the individual locales around which ghost tours are constructed are often public, or at least are available for everyday interaction. These can include restaurants, hotels, and private homes which are easily viewed from the outside. However, it is rare for a ghost tour to enter the places which are being performed regardless of whether or not they are open to the public. This is usually because they are privately owned homes, businesses that do not welcome the intrusion of large groups of people, businesses or historic landmarks which are closed before the ghost tour begins, or because the place itself is unsafe. Unfortunately, it is not possible to say whether it is common for participants in a legend trip to enter a place, as each legend trip is as unique as the community that creates the legends that encourage the trips and the places that inspire such legends. If the ritual acts that must be performed to test the veracity of the legend require that the building or place be entered, then there is a high likelihood that the place will be entered by at least some, if not all, of the participants.

Finally, the ghost tour and the legend trip can be differentiated by the ways in which they are constructed by those who participate in them. The ghost tour, of the two, is a far more consciously constructed and predictable method of performing place than the legend trip. Ghost tours begin at a set time, usually between 7:00 PM and 8:00 PM, and usually end around 10:00 PM. Like the legend trip, the effectiveness of the ghost tour as a performance is partly due to its taking place at night, in the darkness. Unlike the legend trip, the ghost tour has a leader, in the form of the tour guide. This person is usually the author of the narratives told during the course of the tour, with the one exception in my experience being the tour guides at the Winchester Mystery House, who are trained

employees of a self-sustaining business. Its tour guides memorize scripts and present them to an audience. Some of the guides at the Winchester Mystery House were more familiar with the building and more willing to go off of the script than others, most stuck to their scripts with a fair amount of fidelity.

Because of its scripted and planned nature, the ghost tour also allows for less engagement on the part of its participants. This is also due to the fact that those stories presented during a ghost tour are fully constructed narratives, devised by the tour guides and changed by them when they feel it necessary to do so. These changes may be made to adapt to an audience with less knowledge of local supernatural tradition or to incorporate their own or past participants experiences into the tour. Changes may also be made because of the presence of certain categories of audience members, such as children. However, unlike the open-ended narratives which fuel the legend trip, the narratives presented in the ghost tour are not truly open to public debate, mediation, and consensus. Though participants on the tour may interrupt the narrative or object to its content, the narrative itself is built and maintained by the tour guide.

In contrast the legend trip is a communal experience in which open-ended narratives are re-enacted in ostensive ritual. These narratives are open-ended in the sense that they are constructed to adapt to the experiences of the participants and may be altered by later discussion by the participants. Though their forms and details are known, the narratives themselves are adaptable to the new evidence for belief that each legend trip experience provides synchronically with the experience itself. The ghost tour, conversely, is adapted to this new experience diachronically. The synchronicity of the legend trip

results in a true engagement of the participants with the legend presented by the legend trip, as opposed to the more removed engagement experienced by those who participate in a ghost tour. Unlike the ghost tour, the legend trip has no guide, being instead a communal experience shared usually by members of the same peer group, rather than the artificially-formed groups of strangers of disparate backgrounds and origin that make up the participants of ghost tours.

As has been mentioned previously, ghost tours have a very generalized format: one purchases the tickets either online or from the tour guide at the start of the tour. Each tour has a place at which the participants meet and then wait for the tour guide and all of the other participants to appear. The tour then leaves at its set time. A tour will last anywhere from two to three hours, with most ending at 10:00pm. This is due, at least in San Francisco, to city ordinance. As a result, though it would likely make for a more effective performance if they started at midnight, the majority of tours cannot even end at midnight.

Once all participants have been accounted for, allowing a certain amount of time past the set start time to allow for stragglers, the tour will begin. A tour stops at a number of places allowing for ten to fifteen minutes to reach the destination, the guide recounts the associated story, and fields questions or comments. Most tours deal with problems that one would expect as they move through the city in the late evening: pedestrians, ambient noise, car noises, weather, and unfriendly locals can all interrupt the flow of a tour and make it difficult to process or hear the information being presented by the tour guide. Tour guides account for and act around such distractions as much as they can, but there is a limited

number of strategies that can be used to compensate for the problems that come with using a public space.

During the length of my fieldwork, I participated in and observed nine ghost tours, most of the them multiple times. These ghost tours took place throughout Northern California and into Nevada, but most centered around the San Francisco and North Bay areas. These included the San Francisco Ghost Hunt, the Chinatown Ghost Tour, the Haunted Haight Tour, the Napa City Ghosts and Legends Walking Tour, the Sonoma Plaza Ghost Walking Tour, the Virginia City Ghost Tour, the Haunted Washoe Club Tour, and the Winchester Mystery House. I also attended several Halloween theme parks, including Heartstoppers, Fright Planet, and Preston Castle. These tours will now be examined in detail, giving particular attention to how places are presented, what places are presented, the manner in which they are presented and engaged with, and how ghost tour guides construct their narratives.

Creating and Engaging with Place

As has been stated previously in the second chapter, the key difference between space and place is one of meaning. Meaning is not an inherent quality of a space, in that a building or other locale. Rather, meaning is a direct result of interaction, namely interaction which serves to alter one's perception of the space itself. If one frequents the same pharmacy every week, that pharmacy does not necessarily have personal meaning to the individual. However, if one is the victim of a robbery in the parking lot of that same pharmacy, suddenly personal meaning has been given to that place as a result of a change

in perception. In that same vein, a person can walk by the same historic building every day, yet that building can be as meaningless to them as any other. But if that person were to go on a local ghost tour and learn that that same historic building—which they had passed by literally hundreds of times in their lifetime—had been the site of a little-known murder, and that this event was credited with making the building haunted, suddenly that building would have meaning. This would be because the new narrative had changed the perception of the person who heard it.

Each and every ghost tour works in several ways to create place. While some are confined to single buildings, such as the Washoe Club or the Winchester Mystery House, others span entire neighborhoods or, as is the case of the Napa, Sonoma, and Virginia City tours, represent entire towns. Thus, the amount of work that is done to create place in a ghost tour varies based on its setting, the number of places included, and how they are presented by the tour guide or tour guides.

The Winchester Mystery House is a prime example of how place is constructed and performed for the benefit of an audience. While the tours given at the house are not necessarily of the ghostly variety—some tour guides seem willing to speak about supernatural occurrences on the property while others are not—the supernatural reputation of the house is obviously and unabashedly used to draw visitors to its grounds. Once the house stood on acres of property, but now it is surrounded by businesses and stands not even two miles from a major freeway. Large signs along the roads surrounding the house point the way to its location and, although one can technically enter the grounds without a tour ticket by going through the gift shop, the house itself is off-limits to anyone but a tour

guide or a ticket holder. Each tour guide holds a large ring of keys and during the tour quite often doors are locked behind the tour group as they traverse the seemingly endless hallways and staircases of the confounding mansion.

The legends surrounding the Winchester Mystery House are well-known to the public, due to decades of exposure from television, movies, and books that explore the past of the house and its mysterious builder, Sarah Winchester. The legend states that Sarah Winchester was driven to Spiritualism by the tragic deaths of her husband, William Wirt Winchester, and infant daughter. William Wirt Winchester was the heir of the Winchester Repeating Arms Company, which Sarah inherited upon his death in 1881. It is said that Sarah was told by a medium that she had been cursed by the angry spirits of the people killed by the Winchester Rifle. To assuage them, she was instructed to buy an unfinished house on the West Coast and to continue building this house until the day she died, guided by the whims of the vengeful spirits that haunted her. The labyrinthine interior of the house is attributed to her paranoia that the spirits would find her and harm her in some way (Dickey 2016).

Much has been made of the tragedies of the Sarah's life and her supposed obsession with those tragedies, as well as her rumored Spiritualist practices. These stories are what draw people to this strange Victorian mansion, as evidenced by one young boy who was on a tour with me. The child knew the details of the house's stories before even taking the tour and was so deeply disappointed that one of the house's most famous ghosts, the Wheelbarrow Ghost, did not appear when we went into the basement that he cried and had to be comforted by his mother. The tour scripts themselves do not mention any supernatural

activity, apparently leaving such narrations up to the tour guides themselves. The mansion is instead presented as an oddity of Victorian architecture influenced by Sarah Winchester's purportedly deep belief in Spiritualism. There is even a room near the center of the mansion which is said to be Sarah's 'seance room.'

These claims are problematic for many reasons, but despite this they are still included within the script. The script is careful to hedge its claims, however, stopping just short of asserting any kind of supernatural belief or supporting any kind of supernatural phenomena. Tour guides often use phrases such as 'it is believed' or 'legend has it' to avoid any kind of definitive statement regarding either Sarah's motives or the ghosts that are said to wander the property. However, frequent mention of and allusions to the supernatural reputation of the place, as well as such oddities as the seance room and the repeated mention of the number 13 implicitly construct the place as supernatural, even while avoiding any explicit claims.

However, I got one gets a very different perspective on the house and Sarah's motives in speaking with the tour director. Sarah was, indeed, a private and even mysterious person, though she was not exactly as the stories portray her. She was wealthy and well-educated, and rather than living alone in the huge Victorian maze she created, she was accompanied by her sisters and her niece, Marian. In reality, Sarah did not often occupy the mansion at all, though she never stopped building it. Although she did lose both her infant daughter—her only child—as well as her husband to illness, these events lay fifteen years apart. In any case, at the time losing one's child and one's spouse were hardly noteworthy events, for all their tragedy.

The tour guide director credits many of the stories that now surround the house to a man named John Brown and his wife, Mayme. John Brown purchased the empty Victorian mansion after Sarah's death, planning to make it part of a theme park that never came to be. Interestingly, when Sarah died it was revealed that, while the contents of the house had been willed to her niece Marian, the house itself was not bequeathed to anyone. It sat empty and derelict for some time before being purchased by Brown, who began to give tours of the property soon after.

Even a cursory examination of the legends of haunting surrounding the house tells the researcher that their sources are not particularly legitimate. Sarah Winchester was a private person and rarely had visitors at the estate. In addition, her workers and servants were famously loyal, and were not known to tell tales about their employer or her activities. Where, then, do the stories come from? As the director says, many of the strange features of the house have perfectly reasonable explanations, but these explanations are not going to draw people to come to and tour a strange old house. The legends, however, do.

Unlike the Winchester Mystery House, the Washoe Club in Virginia City, Nevada, is not particularly well-known or often traversed. Its largest claim to fame is that it is where the first episode of the show 'Ghost Adventures' was filmed, in which a shadowy figure was caught on camera moving from one side of a room to another. This episode plays on a loop in the bar portion of the Washoe Club which is still open and accessible to the public. The portion which we toured is referred to as the Millionaires' Club, and was closed to the public in 1984 when it was condemned after an earthquake.

Being able to tour the Millionaires Club came as a surprise, and was arranged by the Virginia City Ghost Tour guide. The bartender at the Washoe Club agreed to take our tour group through the condemned building, though he warned that there was no electricity and very little light. He took our money and proceeded to lead us out of the front door of the Washoe Club and to a locked door, which he opened to reveal a very long, very dark staircase which lead into almost pure blackness. I was, of course, the first person to start climbing. I will confess to being extremely excited not only to tour an actual haunted building, but also to do so in the dark, at night. My father and the others on the tour, a woman and her two juvenile companions, followed me up the stairs. The guide, an affable middle-aged man with a Texan accent, followed. He was comically abrupt as he took us through the Club while relating stories of the haunting experiences that he and others had had there.

He also had many pictures on his phone, which he employed to illustrate his stories, including one that was a selfie a woman took in the club that has a faceless woman in the background. In addition, he had some EVPs on his phone, which he played for us to demonstrate the veracity of his claims. An EVP—electronic voice phenomena—is a recording of a sound that cannot be heard by human ears. Within the paranormal community, it is thought that the voices and sounds heard in these recordings are the voices of supernatural entities that have not passed on. They are used to communicate with such spirits, as well as to prove their presence in a place.

The amount of effort the tour guide made to assert the supernatural qualities of the Club was only underscored by the state of disrepair the building was in. Unlike most of the

buildings that I have seen and toured, the Millionaires Club is in a state of near-ruin. The floors were uneven, especially at the thresholds, and pieces and sections of old linoleum could sometimes be seen. The rooms were dark and foreboding due to the lack of electricity. There were many places where the plaster was peeling off of the walls, revealing the wooden slats beneath. Century-old wallpaper could be seen near the ceilings in some of the rooms. The tour guide showed us one door that had been slammed by an unseen force so many times that it was starting to break. There were also some antiques and pictures in the Club, though they seemed to have little purpose other than to add to the already creepy atmosphere.

The Winchester Mystery House and the Washoe Millionaires Club are a striking contrast. One is a public place which, while capitalizing on a supernatural reputation, does not normally make overt claims to such. The other is a locked place which seems far more haunted as well as being far less accessible, and openly advertises the evidence of activity that warrants its supernatural reputation. Also, while the Winchester has a cadre of tour guides working off the same script, the Millionaires Club had only one tour guide, telling stories as he saw fit. However, both tours were prime examples of how places are given supernatural meaning through performance. They are also the narrowest in scope, as each place consists of just itself, and does not include any other places within its net of narrative.

In order to examine further the complexities of creating place, we need to instead look at those tours which focus on neighborhoods and cities. These tours are different not only because they attribute supernatural meaning to multiple places, but they must also define what it means for a place to be included in a neighborhood or area. The act of

inclusion means that there must also be an act of exclusion on the part of the tour guide. In walking the streets of a neighborhood or part of a city, the tour group is essentially mapping what is and is not a part of the area's supernatural map. As the tour guide is the ultimate creator of this map, it is ultimately their will which includes or excludes a place and, by extension, a narrative.

In addition to this process of inclusion or exclusion, tour guides will often construct their neighborhoods by including information relevant to the greater culture or history of the neighborhood. This additional information acts as a framework for the supernatural narratives presented to the tour participants, adding legitimacy by embedding them further in everyday life. As discussed previously, one of the hallmarks of the legend genre is that it presents the "everyday" being disrupted by the "extraordinary." Without knowledge of the everyday life of the neighborhood, the participants on the tour cannot appreciate the level of disruption that these supernatural interludes bring to those that experience them.

Haight-Ashbury and Chinatown are two of the most famous neighborhoods within the already famous city of San Francisco. The tours that take place within them must do work not only to invest places with supernatural significance, but also invest the neighborhoods with a meaning that differentiates them from the city in which they are embedded, making them, in essence, places which exist within a place.

The Haunted Haight Ghost Tour is given in the neighborhood known popularly as the Haight-Ashbury, which was the epicenter of the phenomenon now known as the

‘Summer of Love’¹. In 1967 young people began arriving in the neighborhood in droves to experience the counterculture of the 1960’s and, in doing so, cemented the place in the national imagination as the center of the hippie movement. Many now famous and infamous people wandered the streets of this neighborhood during those years, and even now the neighborhood presents itself as a den of counterculture both nostalgic and contemporary. Interestingly to me as a folklorist, hippies and the counterculture they created are also deeply intertwined in our perception of the occult and the paranormal, as both were absorbed and practiced as a reaction to the dominant culture of the time. The streets are lined with record stores, coffee shops, and bookstores, and the tour itself starts in a coffee shop called ‘Coffee to the People,’ located on Masonic and Haight.

Tom Netzband, the creator and tour guide, met the tour group outside this coffee shop and proceeded to collect tickets and check off names. Tom himself is a long-time resident of the Haight and a paranormal investigator. The tour itself traverses several blocks of the neighborhood, ranging from the coffee shop all the way to the outskirts of Golden Gate Park. While Tom relates ghostly tales of the neighborhood—all of which were collected and researched by him—he also makes a concerted effort to interweave the history of the Haight with that of greater San Francisco. This is effective because the reputation of Haight-Ashbury is directly related to and, I would argue, feeds into modern conceptions of the city of San Francisco as a whole. At the same time, he also distances

¹ The ‘Summer of Love’ was a cultural phenomenon that encompassed the summer of 1967. As many as 100,000 people—mostly those who identified with hippie counterculture—flocked to the Haight-Ashbury inspired by the beat poets who had lived in the North Beach area in the 1950s.

the neighborhood from the city, pointing out the ways in which the Haight differs from greater San Francisco.

It may seem as though these two goals could not be successfully met in a single performance, but that is not the case. Tom relates the history of the city that is pertinent not only to the neighborhood, but also to the supernatural nature of the tour itself. For example, he relates that it has been illegal to bury the dead inside city limits since 1900, due to a city ordinance that was passed in large part to allow developers to buy and sell the large plots of land which were once occupied by cemeteries. It was left to the city's residents to move their loved ones' remains, and so it was that many thousands of bodies were left behind to be built over. This fact gives the entire city an air of the supernatural, adding to the atmosphere of haunting he builds as the performance progresses. Tom also points out that the Haight did not burn in the 1906 fire and, as a result, many of its historic Queen Anne Victorians still stand today. This fact differentiates the neighborhood from the rest of the city, while the story of the cemeteries makes it a part of it. However, the existence of both increases the effectiveness of the ghost stories told on the tour, as the Queen Anne Victorian is among one of our most iconic images of a haunted house.

In addition to his ghost stories and relations of the history of the city, Tom also tells stories about places that he refers to as 'haunting,' not haunted. One of the houses visited on the tour was once occupied by Jim Jones², of Jonestown fame. In the driveway of

² Jim Jones was an American cult leader who is most famous for ordering his cult members to commit suicide in their compound in Guyana in 1978. U.S. Congressman Leo Ryan, who had been tasked with investigating the cult, was murdered by the cultists when he tried to flee their mass suicide along with several others.

another, Charles Manson³ once slept in his van. In another, Janis Joplin⁴ once lived, which is “haunting” if only because the singer herself died such a tragic and untimely death. These stories, while not stories of the ghosts of the dead, are certainly stories of the ghosts of our collective past, and, thus, are just as haunting.

Chinatown is also an iconic San Francisco neighborhood, one that has been depicted in countless forms of media over the years. Perhaps more than many other neighborhoods and areas in the city, Chinatown seems to be a world of its own. This is due in large part to the laws at the turn of the 20th century which excluded people of Chinese descent from participating in much of public life. Chinese people were only allowed to live in certain places and to own certain types of businesses, and were largely unprotected by the greater law of the land. As a consequence of this forced insularity, the neighborhood seems to be both large and small. It is filled with tall buildings and alleyways and even, at one time, boasted a network of underground tunnels to accommodate what was—and is—a very large population within a relatively small area.

The Chinatown tour started at the Utopia Cafe, located on Waverly Place. The tour guide, Cynthia Yee, is a middle-aged Chinese American who has lived in San Francisco’s Chinatown since the early 20th century. Cynthia collected the stories that she tells on the tour herself, gleaning them from locals and family members. In Chinese culture it is considered bad luck to discuss the spirits and her tour is not exactly popular in the eyes of

³ Charles Manson is another American cult leader. His infamy lies in the fact that in 1969 his followers, the Manson Family, murdered actress Sharon Tate – the then-pregnant wife of Roman Polanski – heiress Abigail Folger, and several others in an attempt to start a race war he referred to as ‘Helter Skelter.’

⁴ Janis Joplin was a famous singer and song writer who died tragically of a heroin overdose in 1970, at the age of 27.

the locals. To assuage the neighborhood's inhabitants, he hands out little boxes of popper fireworks for tour participants to throw at the end of every story. These frighten away the spirits who may be drawn to her stories.

During the tour, Cynthia does several things which help to construct Chinatown as a neighborhood in a deeper, more thorough sense than the shallow one gleaned from media and tourists' visits. In the beginning of the tour she spent a bit of time talking about the Chinese Zodiac and the meanings of its signs. She also drew attention to the construction of the buildings, the colors in which they are painted, and also explained why Chinatown is where it is within San Francisco. Most, if not all, of the things she describes have to do with feng shui or Chinese supernatural beliefs. The buildings have curved eaves on their roofs to help keep spirits away. The colors of the buildings—green, yellow, and red—are the colors of prosperity, honor, and luck. Many apartments have mirrors facing outward on the windows to keep spirits from entering the home. Chinatown itself, unlike Haight-Ashbury or Pacific Heights, did burn down after the 1906 earthquake. City officials had planned to move the neighborhood farther outside the city limits, to a place which had very bad feng shui. To prevent this from happening, the neighborhood was rebuilt with haste, which can be seen in many of the older buildings which still stand, a prime example being the Baptist church on the corner of Waverly and Clay.

One set of stories Cynthia relates is particularly successful at underlining Chinatown as a place separate from greater San Francisco. This set of stories occurs as a narrative and its epilogue, one being told at the beginning of the tour and one at the end. The first story describes a fight between two friends which ended in murder. George and

Sam were from the same village in China and shared an apartment in a building on Waverly Place. One day, Sam accused George of stealing money from him, a charge which George denied. They fought, and in his rage Sam grabbed a cleaver and ended up killing George, though he later claimed it was an accident. At the time Chinese people were not allowed to enter a court of law, and because of this Sam was tried by his family association, or *tong*. He was found guilty of the murder of his friend and sentenced to hang in Portsmouth Square. Cynthia referred to this place as the backyard of Chinatown, as it is the only open space in the neighborhood. The tour itself ends with Cynthia discussing the monument to Robert Louis Stevenson, who helped Chinese people learn to read and write English. Portsmouth Square is also the first place that the American flag was planted in California. As the tour draws to a close, she talks about how Sam was publicly hanged for murder in this place.

The Chinatown Ghost Tour is among the most interesting I have attended, simply because it gives a rather fascinating and little-known history of a very well-known neighborhood. Much of what Cynthia does—the use of the poppers to scare away the spirits, the explanations of all of the customs used to keep spirits out of the home—simultaneously invests supernatural meaning in the neighborhood while at the same time defining Chinatown as a neighborhood separate from its surroundings. Each consecutive place performed on the tour only increases both one's awareness of this supernatural meaning and the neighborhood as a whole, performing both the supernatural places and the neighborhood synchronically.

To create a conception of a place within the minds of tour participants is one thing, but to engage with that place—to perform it in the literal sense—is another entirely. The performance of place in the context of the ghost tour requires both a conception of the larger context of the places one encounters as well as a direct engagement with those places on some level. Without this engagement by the tour guides and participants with the place, the performance is a failure. This can be compared to the performance of legend narrative itself. If Degh's assertion that legend as a genre exists to allow for the public discussion of things which cannot be discussed within the bounds of normal conversation, then we can assume that the performance of a legend has failed when this discussion does not happen in relation to the performance. So it is with the performance of a place. If the place is not engaged, then the performance has failed.

The engagement of a place during a ghost tour is much more nuanced than that of a legend trip, likely due to the fact that the participants of a ghost tour rarely have extensive knowledge of the legends of the places they will be visiting beforehand. Nor do they have extended conversational contact with each other. There is little to no opportunity to create the sense of anticipation of confronting the supernatural which exists in the legend trip. Nor is there a sense of purpose, or ritual duty, to fulfill. While all audiences to some extent affect the performances which they view, when comparing the legend trip and the ghost tour one is forced to come to the conclusion that the participants in a ghost tour are far closer to true spectators than the participants in a legend trip. This is due, more than anything else, to the construction of the ghost tour as a tourist attraction. Much like a tour in a museum, the ghost tour limits engagement with the objects of its focus. This may be

for many reasons. The places may be privately owned, unfriendly to the tour, condemned or unsafe, sacred in some way, or fragile and in need of protection from direct engagement. However, this does not mean that the ghost tour lacks all engagement with the places that it presents to its audience.

The Downtown Sonoma Walking Tour begins at a stately oak tree which stands in the flower bed of an upscale shopping center. This tree is unique in that it has a large branch which grows almost perfectly parallel to the ground. This tree is referred to as ‘the Whipping Tree,’ and it has a dark history. Native Americans who were subject to the mission in Sonoma were often tied to this tree and whipped. At times the victims were left to suffer and possibly die of exposure. Often the family would wait nearby for the punishment to end, if they were not being punished themselves. It is believed that many people died in this spot as a result of these brutal punishments, and the tour guides claim that there are nearly a dozen spirits attached to this tree.

Ellen and Devin, the tour’s creators and guides arrived at the site, greeted everyone and checked their tickets, and began the tour. Devin threw two slender yellow ropes over the branch, and then used a bucket to cover a pipe which stuck out of the ground. Two male volunteers were chosen to hold the ropes as if they were hanging from the tree, waiting to be whipped. The rest of the tour participants were instructed to place their hands on the trunk of the tree, close their eyes, clear their minds, and commune with the tree. We were also told to note whatever thoughts, feelings, visions, or sensations we had.

The physical engagement of this site was unique because we were not interacting with an idea or a representation of the misdeeds of the past, but with an object which was

actually present. The group as a whole was engaged with the place that was being described in the story in a way that I rarely have experienced on a ghost tour, likely because this was a tree, and not a building. Access to it could not be controlled or limited and, thus, we were able to engage with it more freely than one can with a privately-owned building or historic site.

Although the Whipping Tree had an extensive and terrible history, there were no ghostly narratives related to it. Instead, the stories of supernatural encounters related were those gleaned from participants on the tour. A self-proclaimed skeptic and his wife once placed their hands on the trunk of the tree and both said that it felt as if there were human flesh moving beneath their palms. Another woman claimed to see fireflies around the Whipping Tree, though there are no fireflies in California. Others have reported seeing faces in its leaves and branches. All of these reported memorates act as evidence for the supernatural significance of the Whipping Tree, even though the only narratives to mark the tree as anything other than ordinary are of the haunting, and not haunted, variety. However, the fact that such experiences do occur despite the lack of a narrative to guide them speaks to the depth of engagement that people experience with this place.

Creating Narrative

The ghost tour is the product of an individual mind. While the memorates and legends related on the tour may come from locals or other sources, how the narratives are ordered, worded, and eventually performed is the decision of an individual, rather than a community. This might be the key difference between the legend trip and the ghost tour.

While the legend trip and the narratives that the experience of it leads members of a group or community to create are the product of several minds working in concert, the ghost tour is the product of a single creator or team of creators. Ghost tours, unlike the more spontaneous legend trip, are the reflexive product of long-term work, research, and repeated performance.

Ellen McFarlane and Devin Scott Sisk are the creators of the Napa City Ghosts and Legends Walking Tour as well as the Sonoma Plaza Ghost Walking Tour. Ellen identifies herself as a Napa historian as well as a spirit medium, and both are paranormal researchers who have appeared on television shows such as ‘Ghost Adventures’ and at paranormal conventions. The tours are the product of both their interest in the history of the area, as well as their interest in the paranormal. Their process can start one of two ways: first, they investigate a location, or they do preliminary research before traveling to a location. Then they will either take the evidence they have gathered at a location and use it to guide their research, or they will take the research they have already done, go to a location they suspect might be haunted, and see if they can detect any activity. Whichever method is used, the combination of evidence and research fuels the construction of the narratives shared by them with their audience on the tour.

Evidence for the haunting is gathered in several ways, many of them common tools of the paranormal researcher’s trade: EMF detectors (electromagnetic frequency detectors, used to detect fluctuations in the energy fields of a place which paranormal researchers attribute to ghostly activity); EVPs; dowsing rods, an older tool normally used to detect water but re-purposed to detect changes in supernatural energies; and Ellen’s own insights

as a spirit medium are all used to gather evidence for suspected supernatural occurrence. Other, more historical sources of evidence are used to support assertions of paranormal activity or suspicions of it.

Devin shared with me an example of their method in action, relating to me a story about a haunted daycare they had once visited. The daycare was run by a couple from inside their home, and the husband was unfriendly to the intrusion of the paranormal investigators into their home. He insisted that there was no activity, and that Devin and Ellen were charlatans. Communications with the spirit in the daycare revealed that his name was Anthony B., that he was in the Army Air Corps, and that he had died in a fire.

The husband, doubtful of their assertions and eager to prove that they were incorrect, searched for an Army Air Corps base in the area, believing that one had never existed there. It turned out that he was incorrect. In fact, his house not only stood on what had formerly been the base, but was also very close to where the southernmost fuel depot had once stood. Additionally, he uncovered that a man by the name of Anthony had died in a fire there.

This is a stark contrast to the narrative which drives a legend trip, which is centered around a single place but which might be informed by several different memorates and legends about that place. In the case of the legend trip the evidence for haunting rests solely on the group's knowledge of previous experiences of haunting had by either themselves or others in that place. While ghost tour guides often supplement their own supernatural experiences with evidence provided through traditional ghost-hunting methods and

historical research, those who participate in legend trips do not require any such supporting evidence to either inspire their search for experience, or to legitimize it once it has occurred.

Tom, the creator of the Haunted Haight Walking Tour, began the process of creating his tour by handing out fliers to the people in the neighborhood and collecting supernatural stories from them. While some people's stories were obviously falsifications, others were not. Tom took some of them—the story of a little ghost girl that haunts an apartment, another story of the sound of heavy boots running by a window—and attempted to do research in order to find further evidence that the hauntings may have a legitimate source. In the case of the little ghost girl, no evidence could be found to confirm or deny her existence. Tom suspects that she may have been killed while riding the San Francisco Chutes, which were once located in the area, but were suddenly moved for an unknown reason. The heavy boots he connected to a murder that had occurred just outside the home where the running was heard. A young man, drawn to the Haight during the Summer of Love, was shot in cold blood by another man, dying just outside of the house's front window. In this spot, he reported, people often felt light-headed or short of breath.

Though it is only short vignette compared to some of the other legend narratives recounted on the tour, this narrative artfully illustrates the weaving of reported supernatural experience, historical research, and place performance that gives a place meaning. Interestingly, by telling the audience what types of supernatural experiences are common in the area, Tom not only brings forward the possibility of supernatural experience, but also reveals the nature of the evidence of the supernatural that previous experiences have provided to help create and maintain meaning.

Such descriptions of supernatural experience are a common feature of place performance in ghost tours. I have come across it during every tour I have taken, likely for the same reason that similar descriptions of supernatural occurrences are given during the legend trip. These descriptions tell the audience what to expect from the place in terms of supernatural experience, allowing them to recognize the signs that the place and its spiritual denizens are affecting them. They allow people to have supernatural experiences, and then reap the benefits of this creation of new evidence. In the case of the legend trip, these experiences fuel future legend trips, continuing the cycle of the legend through the perpetual creation and re-creation of evidence. In the case of the ghost tour, this continuous creation of new evidence reinforces the supernatural claims of the tour guide and allows them to continuously change the narratives that they share, updating their tour and keeping its tales from obsolescence.

Tour guides often impart descriptions of likely supernatural experience in tandem with narratives which incorporate supernatural experiences had by others that they have witnessed on their tours. While it is one thing to claim that people often feel shortness of breath or lightheadedness in a place, it is quite another to assert that a person—usually one who would in some facet be beyond reproach—experienced something truly out-of-the-ordinary. It is yet another still if the person presented had a far more dramatic supernatural experience that what could be considered normal. One could say that there is nothing more convincing than an unlikely experience had by a skeptic, and many tours would seem to back this assertion.

The San Francisco Ghost Hunt, created and performed by Jim Fassbender, traverses the streets of the neighborhood of Pacific Heights, in San Francisco. This tour begins in the Queen Anne Hotel, which had at one been a school for girls. One of the first things that Jim did on the tour was give people he deemed likely to have an experience in the place—in the case of the Queen Anne, young girls—an EMF detector. He then explained to them its purpose and that the resident ghost of the hotel, Mary Lake, has a particular affection for girls their age. The tour participants were then encouraged to explore the hotel and seek an experience. In my time wandering its halls, I did not experience anything supernatural. I did, however, witness this group of girls react rather dramatically to a spike on their EMF detector, as well as one girl insisting that she had felt a cold spot. Cold spots, for the uninitiated, are thought to be the result of spirit manifestations. It is believed that spirits absorb and use ambient energies in a place to manifest themselves, leaving unexplainable pockets of chilliness around the places that they haunt. These girls, having been informed of the types of experiences they were likely to have and given the tools to have them, found themselves having similar experiences. While none of these experiences were dramatic, they certainly added to the corpus of evidence of haunting surrounding the Queen Anne, even if it was only in a small way.

Another anecdote shared on this tour further illustrates my point. One of the stops on the tour is a building once known as the Mansion Hotel, although currently the building houses several privately-owned condominiums. This building was once inhabited by a woman named Claudia Chambers, who inherited the house upon her uncle's death. Claudia's sister, with whom she did not get along, built a mansion to loom right alongside

it. Claudia later died in what was referred to as a ‘farm implement accident,’ although Jim seemed doubtful that this was the case. In fact, he attempted to research Claudia’s death and was shocked to find that many key documents referring to the death had disappeared from public record.

When the building was a hotel, Jim had been allowed to take his tour groups inside. He would take the tours into the Josephine room, which was thought to have been the room where Claudia died. It was in this room, during a tour, when one of the participants—a skeptical LAPD homicide detective—suffered a bout of full-on spirit possession, and began babbling in police lingo. Once he was out of the trance, the man was embarrassed by what had happened, but described to Jim a scenario in which a cousin who had been living with Claudia murdered her for carrying on an affair with an unavailable man. The family then covered up his crime. The story not only supported Jim’s voiced suspicions as to Claudia’s actual cause of death, but provided support from an almost irrefutable source—a skeptical police officer.

Along these same lines, I heard a similar story during the Sonoma Plaza Ghost Walk. The final area explored on this tour is an open and dark field right next to the mission. This field, it was explained to the group once everyone was present and accounted for, was once used for the Bear and Rattlesnake Dance. Before this information was shared with us, however, we were instructed to clear our minds and take note of whatever images and feelings came to us. When we opened our eyes, we were asked to share. It was during this part of the tour, on a different night and with a different group, that a police officer from San Francisco reported to the tour guides that the images that he had seen had to do with

bodies being moved or improperly buried. Devin then shared that under the road that ran by the field there were hundreds of unmarked graves that had not been moved, presumably belonging to the Native Americans who had at one time been residents of the Mission. Again, a nearly irrefutable source provides evidence to support the supernatural, though in this case it was more supportive of the idea that such meditations can be an effective way of gathering information than of any specific supernatural occurrence.

Both of these incidents illustrate how the experiences of tour participants are incorporated into the narratives told on that tour as a means of providing evidence of the supernatural. By providing said evidence, the meaning that has already been invested in these places is maintained. These inclusions of may be dramatically out of line with our conceptions of how the world functions, or they may be large deviations from the standard. Someone experiencing a cold spot in a reportedly haunted hotel is not particularly hard to fathom, but a police officer experiencing an attack of possession borders on the unbelievable. Yet, these things were witnessed. They occurred, and more importantly—unlike the narratives on which the tour is built—they occurred while the tour was in progress, providing evidence for current supernatural activity and reinforcing the meaning of the place and the choice of tour participants to seek supernatural experience there.

However, unlike a legend trip, which creates new experience and inspires debate about the meaning of supernatural encounters at the time of the encounter, the ghost tour instead leaves the interpretation of the supernatural encounters that occur during its time frame up to the tour guide. They then decide where, when, and how to incorporate the new evidence into their existing group of narratives. Also, unlike the legend trip, in which only

a limited amount of people are exposed to these reinterpretations of existing narratives, the ghost tour exposes exponentially more people to a narrative, and to the evidence that the tour guide chooses to use to support their assertions of supernatural meaning. Thus, while the evidence that is created and incorporated into a community's legend complex during a legend trip may have more meaning for the small group that created it and the community that is later exposed to it, the evidence that is created and later incorporated into a ghost tour has a much larger potential of being made known outside of a community and of drawing outsiders in so that they can judge the evidence for themselves and, perhaps, have an experience of their own.

The tour guide as the ultimate creator of the ghost tour experience often feels a certain amount of ownership of the narratives that they have created. Unlike what we may call the normal performance of a legend, the ghost tour does not invite debate, and tour guides do not often incorporate the opinions of tour participants into their presentation of the narratives in the same way that they do the tour participants' accounts of their own experiences in a place.

I had asked Ellen and Devin at one point if they had ever heard their own narratives repeated back to them in the course of giving a tour, and they said that they had. They were quick to point out that those people who do so often get the narratives 'wrong,' and that when this occurs they 'correct' them, as their narratives require a great deal of research and effort to construct. At times people will argue *against* these corrections, but if it gets to that point Ellen and Devin said that the person is more than likely not interested in talking *with* them, but rather talking *at* them. Most people who repeat their narratives back to them, or

attempt to discuss the narratives, either want to talk about their own experiences, or lack thereof. It is not uncommon for locals to argue against the truth of the narratives because the supernatural conceptions of these well-known places do not match their own experiences of them. In essence, these locals refuse to accept the legend as truth and, thus, reject the possibility of the supernatural experience that the ghost tour is constructed to provide them.

In other instances, people are eager to share their own experiences of the places, even if they are not supernatural. Some of these experiences I would classify as ‘haunting’, in the same sense as Jim Jones’ old apartment in Haight-Ashbury is haunting. One participant on the tour related a story from his childhood in which he was poking around pay phones looking for spare change. Later, it turned out, one of those pay phones had been used by the Zodiac Killer to make a phone call.

Locals also tell many stories about the restaurant Fagiani’s, one of the stops on the tour. At one time, this restaurant was owned by two sisters, Muriel and Anita. One night, Anita was murdered at the bar, stabbed 13 times with a screwdriver. After her sister’s death, Muriel was never the same. She closed the bar without even cleaning it up and went home. For the following forty years, the bar stayed exactly as it had been left the day Muriel closed it, aside from the one day a year when Muriel would go inside and buy herself a drink in order to maintain her liquor license and her status as an active business. This prevented her losing the property to developers. Although they tell no specific stories of haunting about this place, Ellen is certain it was haunted. Many locals shared stories about it, until it was recently sold, refurbished, and re-opened under another name.

Local experiences of places may or may not be supernatural but, like the non-supernatural stories shared during the Haunted Haight and Chinatown ghost tours, these vignettes help to construct what can be considered ‘normal’ for the people in these towns and neighborhoods, painting a picture of everyday life in the area which can then be disrupted by the narratives shared by the tour guides. Without this rich local context, it is difficult to appreciate the level of disruption that these supernatural encounters cause, or their unique flavor. It is often said that there are no new stories, and my experience in observing ghost tours tells me that this is, for the most part, an accurate observation. However, there are endless ways to tell the same story, provided that the setting and the characters are unique. Through a combination of research, investigation, and incorporation of both supernatural and non-supernatural experience, ghost tour guides are able to present old stories in new ways, localizing them while at the same time making them meaningful for a public that may or may not be local.

Legend Re-Enactment in the Ghost Tour

The legend trip is, primarily, a legend re-enactment. The core legend being re-enacted is, of course, that centered around the place being approached by the group of people performing it. However, there is a far subtler type of legend re-enactment which is also an aspect of the legend trip, and that is the legend of the group of people who traveled to the same place and had a supernatural experience there. A group will travel to the place, perform whatever ritualized actions are necessary to invoke the supernatural forces that inhabit the place—whether it is the spirit of the serial killer who once lived there, the spirit

of a child who once died there, the demon who still stalks its grounds—and depending upon their success in enacting this ritual they will have a supernatural encounter, or they will not. If they do, then they have not only successfully re-enacted the legend of the place itself but also the legends of dozens, if not hundreds, of people who had done exactly as they have. They re-enact what is essentially their own legend and, in doing so, insert themselves into the legend complex surrounding that place and ensure that its meaning will be supported and perpetuated for years to come.

Legend re-enactment in the ghost tour is a much less apparent process. The modern ghost tour takes the majority of its formatting from other such historical tours. As such, whatever actions are taken by the participants are for the most part in the control—or at least under the influence—of the tour guide. This means that, if methods of re-enactment are to be made available to the participants, it is at the discretion of the tour guide. Tour guides may or may not provide such methods and tools to their participants and, in my experience, those tour guides who are most likely to do so are the tour guides who are themselves paranormal investigators or identify as such.

There are also differing levels of legend re-enactment which can be made available to tour participants. During the San Francisco Ghost Hunt the tour guide gave EMF detectors to a group of young girls in the Queen Anne Hotel and encouraged them to move about and see if they encountered the ghost of Mary Lake, the former headmistress. In giving these tools to a group of young girls when the ghost is said to have been the headmistress of the girls' school which the building had once housed, the tour guide was

encouraging a very subtle form of legend re-enactment, attempting to bring forth the spirit by drawing her out with what was not only familiar, but beloved: young girls.

During the Virginia City Ghost Tour, we were given EMF detectors and encouraged to monitor them during the tour. The tour group was small, including only myself and my father, as well as a woman accompanied by two young girls. As we walked the buildings and half-frozen streets of this small town, formerly a metropolis built on silver mining, there were several moments in which we encountered strange readings on our equipment. At one point, the group was instructed to turn off our meters and not to take any photos. We then crossed C Street to stand in front of the Palace Hotel, at which point we were told to turn our meters back on. They began flickering wildly, and the tour guide told us the story of a little girl named Cassandra, who had been killed in a stagecoach accident and frequented the boardwalks outside the Palace Hotel. Cassandra had once been very easy to communicate with until an incident in which many tour participants attempted to take her picture at one time. Since then, she had not been very forthcoming. The tour guide attempted to have Cassandra answer questions by manipulating our meters, but finally gave up. As we walked away, she told us a theory that Cassandra, when she was living, had been told by an adult not to go past a certain point on the street. We were told that readings on the meter would likely cease after we passed under the sign for the Palace, and they did exactly that. This attempt to communicate with this child's spirit is also a very subtle form of legend re-enactment, in that it attempts to engage the supernatural, but does so in a way that is non-threatening to the tour participant while at the same time being non-threatening to the spirits.

The Napa and Sonoma ghost tours engage in several forms of legend re-enactment, ranging from the subtle to the overt. The Napa tour begins outside of the old Napa Courthouse, which at the time of my fieldwork was closed due to a need for extensive repairs after a recent earthquake had done considerable damage to it. The courthouse is the center of this tour, with much of the performance taking place nearby. Ellen and Devin handed out both EMF detectors and dowsing rods to tour participants for the purposes of engaging with the spirits of the place. These were used several times throughout the tour to ask the spirits questions and extrapolate their histories, already well-known to Ellen and Devin.

The spirit of a judge, George Gildersleeve, is said to wander the grounds. In order to engage this spirit Ellen and Devin had women hold dowsing rods, and ask him questions. The women were encouraged to speak sweetly to him; men were instructed to be respectful. Three women—one chosen from the crowd by the dowsing rods, and two volunteers which included a friend of mine who had come on the tour with me—were pulled up to the front of the tour, where attempts were made to engage the spirit and make him move the dowsing rods to point at either of the volunteers. However, these attempts failed. My friend switched places with the girl who had been chosen out of the crowd, and still nothing was accomplished. Finally, another person switched places with my friend and the tour guides were finally able to successfully convince the spirit to use the rods. There were also some attempts to bribe the spirit with a small bottle of alcohol, of which the judge was almost as notoriously fond as he was of women.

The Napa tour also features the most elaborate and dramatic legend re-enactment that I encountered during my fieldwork. This particular re-enactment also takes place outside the Napa Courthouse, and it involves the story of a serial killer named Billy Rowe. Billy Rowe, a lifetime criminal, had decided that he was going to rob the Napa Bank. In order to accomplish this successfully, Rowe believed he needed two accomplices. Although he made contact with two accomplices, only one assisted him with his crimes. The two men decided that they were going to steal the buggy from the nearby Greenwood estate, which they assumed would be empty, as the owner was a sea captain who was often away. Tragically, they were mistaken. Both the captain and his wife, Lucina, were at the house when Billy and his accomplice lied their way into the home. After failing to keep up the pretense of good intentions, Billy and his accomplice turned on the captain and, when his wife Lucina arrived home with their buggy, attacked her as well. Both were tied up, and the captain was forced to drink chloroform and a sedative. Rowe and his accomplice then left the scene, only to return to steal the Greenwood's belongings once they had decided that attempting to rob the bank was too risky. They found the captain attempting to free himself and his wife, and shot the captain three times in the head before dragging his wife upstairs to violate and, later, kill her. However, the captain survived his injuries and managed to make his way to the road. He was found by a neighbor the next day. Sadly, Billy and his accomplice had since disappeared from the area.

It was not long after the crime was committed that the accomplice confessed and was sent to San Quentin. Rowe, for his part, was apprehended after bragging about what he had done to Lucina Greenwood and brought back to Napa for trial. He was convicted of

the murder and sentenced to hang. It is his hanging that Ellen and Devin have their tour participants re-enact outside of the courthouse where the gallows once stood. They separated our tour group into men and women, having the women sit on the steps while the men stood with them. Each man was assigned a part to play at the hanging: the sheriff, chaplain, judge, et cetera. One tour participant was chosen to represent the hangman, and another to represent Billy Rowe. The man representing Billy had a noose placed around his neck, while the man who played the chaplain was instructed to say, ‘God have mercy on your soul!’ Ellen, playing the part of the hangman, pulled the ‘lever,’ and the tour participants were instructed to say ‘Shunk!’ to represent the sound of the trapdoor of the gallows opening and Billy’s body falling.

After the hanging was re-enacted, we gathered in a circle to use the dowsing rods to communicate with Billy. One of the tour guides—I cannot recall if it was Devin or Ellen—asked Billy to use the rods to indicate whether or not any of the people in the tour group reminded him of his victims. The rods pointed to another friend who had accompanied me on the tour, and she was given a prize: a bumper sticker which said ‘Dead Serial Killers Think I’m Hot!’ and bore the logo of the Napa Ghosts and Legends Walking Tour.

Imagery without Narrative: The ‘Haunted House’

When it comes to encounters with the supernatural, it is useful to look at the fabricated haunted houses and similar theme parks that begin to appear in the fall as Halloween approaches. These attractions allow us to examine the ways in which our own

internalized narratives and the imagery that coincides with them inform our perception of reality. Halloween is a significant day in the calendar for both ghost tours and haunted houses, as it is the day when—at least according to popular belief—the dead and the living are most able to come into contact. The popularity of ghost tours skyrockets during this time of the year, to the point where it would not be unheard for a single tour to have 50-60 people on it. Tour guides have actually asked me *not* to attempt to take surveys from participants on Halloween, as the tours are far too full and the process would take half of the time allotted for the tour at least. Attractions such as commercial haunted houses and theme parks are also extremely popular as people attempt to engage not with the supernatural per se, but rather with the supernatural narratives which have shaped their ideas of what is horrible and frightening.

To supplement my work, I visited two haunted theme parks: one, Fright Planet, was in Sacramento, California. The other, Heartstoppers, was located in nearby Rancho Cordova. Neither installation was permanent, with each hiring actors and building sets in the late summer and early fall to open in October. Tickets were sold, much like they would be at a theme park, and guests were allowed to have their run of different ‘haunted’ attractions. Such places teem with actors, dressed to represent many different subgenres of popular horror. Ghosts, zombies, murderers, and even re-imagined characters from popular books all walked alongside the ‘living,’ embodying those things we are taught from an early age to fear.

The Heartstoppers theme park was housed in an empty building which had once been home to a children’s train park. It consisted of what had once been the main building,

as well as the area through which the train had once ran. Half of the park was situated underground, which made for an interesting experience, albeit a somewhat claustrophobic one. The lobby building had been dressed to look more menacing than its otherwise rustic interior would have allowed. The walls were hung with red fabric, and the windows had stained-glass decals on them with the park's logo and skeletons. A large, black Christmas tree dominated the lobby, dressed in webs, bones, and other macabre objects. Monster movies played in one corner of the lobby, while in another one could pay to have a 'ghostly' photograph taken.

None of the attractions of the park actually represented a haunted house. One attraction was a 'ghost town' called Deadlands; another a horror-inspired version of *Alice in Wonderland*; still another was a catacomb, though the entire length of it was pitch-black; and the last, Steamghast Asylum, was an insane asylum. All of the attractions were rife with images and objects that we associate with horror as a genre: blood and gore, screams and mysterious sounds, and ghastly representations of devils, killers, mad doctors, murderous mothers, and other such archetypes of modern horror.

These haunted theme parks are interesting for several reasons. The people playing the parts of ghosts, zombies, murderers, or other such characters are often indistinguishable from each other. In a way almost appropriate for Halloween, the line between life and death, and all the signs of both are strangely blurred. Throughout all four haunted houses it was impossible to tell if the actors were meant to represent ghosts or those they haunt.

Moreover, these haunted houses are presented to the guests of the park without narratives to give them meaning. The props, sets, and themes are provided to the attendee,

but it is up to their knowledge of legends and horror to create the stories behind these places as they walk through them. The actors within the houses are then not so much characters as props and screens onto which the attendee projects their own imagery and weaves into their own internalized narratives. Although the houses ostensibly are created to scare those who walk through them, what they do in reality is provide an environment that makes it easy to scare oneself.

Many would say that commercial haunted houses and parks are not unlike those places which we consider to be truly haunted. That is to say, experience cannot come without knowledge of the possibility of experience. Nevertheless, the difference between a haunted house that is created for Halloween entertainment and a haunted place which is the focus of a legend trip or is presented on a ghost tour is that a commercial ‘haunted house’ is populated with individuals who have agency, and can actually seek to scare those who wander the halls in which they lurk. The commercial haunted house seeks engagement with the individual, while truly haunted places are sought out and engaged by individuals.

The commercial haunted house could be considered the opposite of a ghost tour. The places in which they appear are more often than not empty spaces that hold no significance, but are chosen by the companies which own these parks because they are easy to lease and large enough for their purposes. Additionally, haunted theme parks have no storytellers—no interlocutors—to explain why an otherwise innocuous place might be haunted, or to instruct attendees on how to engage with the place in a meaningful way. Commercial haunted houses are, instead, an exaggeration of what we consider horrific and haunting—blindly obvious, but ahistorical. They are places whose only connections to the

real world are those brought to it by those who attend. However, unlike in the performance of a ghost tour, these meanings are not built upon each other. Rather, they simply act to inspire experience *without* creating new meaning. The meaning in the act lies not in engagement with the place, but rather in engagement with those meanings that the attendee has already absorbed due to previous experience and knowledge. Also, unlike the legend trip and the ghost tour, there is no feedback loop of new experience and evidence to add to the commercial haunted house, no corpus of legend to support. While participants may discuss at length the scares that they suffered, there is no ambiguity as to the nature and cause of those scares. No one participating has any doubt as to the reality of the situation; rather, they are aware that those images and meanings which have been inculcated in them since childhood were exploited for profit and cheap thrills.

There is, however, one aspect of the commercial haunted house experience which mirrors both the legend trip and the ghost tour, and that is the participation of a group in the experience. At Heartstoppers I was accompanied by a friend who traveled through the houses with me. But at Fright Planet I was unaccompanied, a fact that was commented on by both attendees and park employees. Each house had a gatekeeper, whose job it was to stamp tickets and to tell the actors inside how many people are going in. Apparently, this helps prevent overcrowding and wandering. In going through one of the haunted houses—again, an asylum—the gatekeeper shouted into the house, “She has no friends!” as I walked inside. When I told them as we waited in line that I was by myself many patrons looked at me with awe, acting as though it must have been an effort of great courage to walk through a haunted house alone.

The importance of the group to engagement with the supernatural cannot be overstressed. Both legend trips and ghost tours are activities based on groups of people attempting supernatural communion. The idea of engaging the supernatural on one's own—even if such engagement simply consists of a superficial encounter in a constructed and safe environment—seems fundamentally strange. Considering that the legend genre depends on groups sharing narratives about encounters with the Otherworldly and debating their legitimacy, this is perhaps not surprising. It is, however, interesting to note.

It is tempting to say that narratives are the creations of individuals, rooted in their perceptions of the world and their experiences in it. My observations above, however, suggest otherwise. At every juncture of the performance of the ghost tour, we can see that they are the creations not of individuals, but of groups of people working to reconcile their collective experiences into singular narratives. This is true in the case of those narratives which are constructed by the creators of the ghost tour, as they often include the experiences of many people and not just one. It is also true in the Halloween-inspired commercial haunted houses, which are filled with images accepted by our society to be both frightening and haunting, and depend on the shared narratives we have already absorbed. All such narratives act as mirrors for the beliefs held by participants, the histories of the places they see as meaningful, and the collective memories which lie in between what we believe and what we know. Embedded in the process of performing these reenactments of supernatural narratives is the process of belief negotiation and the unspoken understanding between individuals that these reenactments represent not only

the haunting past of these special places, but also the collective experiences that underlie them.

While the ghost tour itself is an object which is constructed in almost every sense of the word, from the places it chooses to feature to the narratives that it shares about those places, it still provides a sense of liminality to its participants. While this may not be as dramatic and as deeply affecting as the liminality produced in the course of a legend trip, it still provides at least to some degree that which all rituals may seek to provide: a doorway into another world where what is impossible may become possible. This, in its turn, gives the places which are part of legend performances a meaning beyond that of the everyday. Haunted places mark the sites of the encroachment of the Otherworld into the mundane world and draw us, whether by legend trip or ghost tour, to experience their Otherworldliness – their liminality—again and again. In doing so, they ensure the perpetuation of their own meaning and, thus, their own existence.

Chapter Four

Encounters with the Uncanny

In high school, I was a member of our speech and debate team. Not an entirely glamorous extracurricular activity, but I enjoyed it because there was an event that allowed the competitor to write and perform a piece of their own making. While these pieces could range from the wildly melodramatic to the cutely funny, I chose to go a different route. When it came time for me to perform my piece, I stood up and I told my audience a ghost story. Not the story of a woman who had tragically died and could not find peace, but the story of a living girl reenacting a legend. This girl, who remained nameless in all of the times I performed the piece, went into her town's cemetery late at night on a dare. I had shamelessly stolen this set-up from the countless stories I had heard throughout my life describing such supernatural misadventures. Sometimes the stories I had heard or read ended in a joke, and sometimes in tragedy, but in either case the person who went in ended up scaring themselves far more than any haunting ever could or did.

The girl in my story, narrating in the first person, described this process. Slowly, every noise and strange light became further evidence for haunting. Each was an omen of the danger that she had put herself in at the behest of her friend. Her fear rose to a fever pitch in the ten minutes the piece took to perform, until finally the story ended. Not with a proper ending, because there was no denouement, no epilogue to pull everything together and assuage the worries of the audience watching this girl slowly sink into her fears. Instead this story ended with her releasing the longest, loudest, most terrified scream that I could

produce. No one, not even I, knew what happened to that girl. Had she scared herself to death? Had she screamed at nothing? I never attempted to resolve the mystery, because that would have resolved the horror. It would have made the world a safe place again and, as the storyteller, that was the last thing I wanted to do. I wanted to leave the world ambiguous and to leave room for fear, doubt and, most importantly, belief.

My story drew on common themes and images to create a haunted place, albeit a generic one. It depended on the imaginations of the members of the audience to build the cemetery the girl visited, because it assumed that the imagery of the graveyard and the manifestations of a haunting already resided in their minds. I did not have to show my audience, nor did I have to tell them: they showed themselves. The audience drew upon the images in their own heads and the meanings of those images to complete my story inside their own minds, reflexively performing the narrative for themselves as I performed it for them in a type of performative flow. This haunted cemetery became a real place in their mind's eye, built of all of the cemeteries they had ever seen, visited, or read about. They visited it as the girl, saw it through her eyes, and felt her fear and dismay.

My performance of this fictional work of horror was not all that different from the performance of legends during a ghost tour. Though the ghost tour is embedded in actual places and history, it too draws on common folkloric imagery and themes to imbue certain places with a meaning beyond that of their everyday existence. Where at one moment a building may simply be a restaurant or a bar, all it takes is one legend, one hint that this place may not be all it seems to be to change that building in the eye of the audience forever. Whether or not one believes in the supernatural, legends of the supernatural irrevocably

change one's perception of a place by granting it an otherworldly quality that differentiates it from other, more mundane places. Once a place is recognized as haunted it becomes doorway into the liminal. While legends allow us to perceive this, it is their reenactment in these places that opens the door. This allows the participants in a legend reenactment to move from the real world to the liminal world and, in doing so, invite the strange into their lives.

The word 'liminality' comes from the Latin word *limen*, or 'threshold.' Haunted places mark these thresholds, their strangeness acting as an anchor for the supernatural. Both the legend trip and the ghost tour are a result of the curiosity that such places incite in us as human beings. Though the individuals involved in such legend reenactments may or may not believe, their individual belief is not relevant to the fact that the group is performing belief collectively and such belief is a product of their encounter with liminality.

Meaning, then, is what is left behind when one engages liminality in order to find or support belief. It is in essence what we bring back with us from our ritualistic journeys. Ghost tours and legend trips, through their engagement with liminal places by way of performance continually generate new meaning in those places. This meaning marks the places as special and worthy of exploration and, thus, continues the cycle. People flock to a place, engage with it through legend reenactment, gain or lose belief, and create new meaning in a process that can continue for weeks, months, or years.

It is interesting to ponder why it is that some places draw this sort of meaning, while some do not. Indeed, one of the original inspirations for this thesis as stated in the

introduction was the idea that the concepts of ‘haunting’ and ‘place’ are inextricably linked to each other. In his book *Ghostland: An American History in Haunted Places*, author Colin Dickey talks about this phenomenon, pointing out that any building that stands out from its surroundings seems to be ripe for haunting and ghostly tales. Such buildings, he argues, are not only haunted by supernatural entities but also by memory and our awareness of not only what we remember, but also what we have forgotten. Haunted places seem to act in the same manner as paintings and pictures, giving us an image on which we can map narrative. The more closely the place matches the narrative, the easier and more fruitful the process (Dickey 2016).

The ghost tour is an evolution of this cultural process. A place is chosen, and the legends and memorates associated with that place are distilled and woven into a narrative that includes both legend and fact. Whether the tour consists of several places in a single neighborhood, or several spots in a single building is inconsequential. In either case, a series of places is engaged through the recounting and reenactment of the legends of that place and of all of the beliefs that feed into the meaning of that locale. For example, at the courthouse in Napa we reenacted the hanging death of Billy Rowe near the site of his demise, tapping into the belief that such actions would rouse his spirit and draw its attention. In Chinatown we threw poppers on the ground to frighten away the spirits of the dead which were drawn by the recitation of their stories. Both were examples of legend reenactment, and both revealed deep-seated beliefs about the nature of the supernatural that are held by the communities in which these legends thrive.

The study of legend has long been a staple of folklore as a discipline. To the public, the iconic folklorist is a person with a notebook wandering the rural countryside and collecting stories from the elderly, poor, and otherwise subaltern to publish in dusty leather volumes for the perusal of other folklorists. These stories were considered backward survivals of older ways of life, collected like oral pieces of broken pottery and thought to represent life as it once was for our ancestors. As coveted as they were, these stories were not treated as parts of living, breathing tradition. They were considered to be the remains of dying traditions, and therein lay the core mistake of early folklorists. These stories and the beliefs and traditions they reflected were not treated with respect by large segments of the academic establishment. Nor were they examined with the same depth as other types of literature. Their plots were streamlined, their wording changed for the sake of aesthetics, and in the end what had been dynamic was made static. What had been a genre of adult performance became a literary genre for children, its content sanitized for the consumption of the young. For a discipline which seeks to study the lifeways of human beings, this seems an unforgiveable crime.

In the 1960s, folklorists and anthropologists studying oral traditions around the world began to move away from this method of studying oral tradition, but their judgmental attitude toward the study of belief – especially in the supernatural – in our own society remains. While we often accept that cultures outside of our own have supernatural traditions that are vibrant and show no signs of becoming less so, we are far less open-minded when it comes to the study of supernatural belief among ourselves. Belief in

legends is still seen as the domain of the backward and uneducated, with the word ‘poor’ implied but unspoken. Ghost tours give lie to this assumption.

First, these tours are often constructed by local people and are usually given in urban environments which are far from rural or backward. Unlike the haunted plantations of the South or the castles of Europe, they are embedded in all of the trappings of modern life. Tour guides encourage the use of high-tech equipment such as EMF detectors and digital tape recorders, and there are many smart phone applications which mimic the functions of this equipment. Second, tours are not largely taken by locals, but rather are targeted at tourists who are in the area. Such time and travel requires disposable income, especially in areas like the North Bay (Napa and Sonoma) and San Francisco. Third, the tours themselves are not cheap, usually twenty dollars or more per person. Obviously, this also requires a disposable income. We can conclude, then, that someone attending a ghost tour is far more likely to be middle class or above than not – unless they are a graduate student doing fieldwork. Therefore, I would argue that the equation of belief in legends and the supernatural with a lack of education or poverty is a false one.

Scientific and technological ‘enlightenment’ seems to have had little detrimental effect on belief in the supernatural as a whole. In fact, those who believe in and study the supernatural have quite often co-opted technologies for the sole purpose of explaining and supporting their beliefs. Popular movies which are centered around hauntings often portray not only spirit mediums, but also paranormal investigators armed with technology. *The Conjuring* is one such film, and an apt example considering that it is based on a case that involved Ed and Lorraine Warren, two of the United States’ best known paranormal

investigators. They are most famous for their work on the house that would inspire the book *The Amityville Horror*, as well as the film of the same name. *The Conjuring* is about a family, consisting of two parents and five girls, who move into an old, rural farmhouse. They are, almost immediately, beset with supernatural torments. The Warrens are called in to investigate the haunting. Both are religious, and Lorraine is a well-known and powerful spirit medium. They also bring with them lights, video cameras, and tape recorders in order to capture the supernatural phenomena. The story progresses and eventually the tormenting spirit is driven out of the home through the combined power of old traditions and new technologies (Wan 2013).

An interesting reversal of this idea can be seen in *The Ring*, a horror movie based on a Japanese horror film called *Ringu*. In this film, those who watch a certain video tape are doomed to die at the hands of the spirit which resides within it. She cannot be detected by technology, because she exists inside the very things made to capture her. As is common in horror films in which ghosts are the antagonists, the main character attempts to stop the deaths by seeking out the true story behind the girl and her deadly tape, only to find that her sleuthing skills have done nothing to put the spirit to rest. It is only through perpetuating the haunting by way of the spirit's technology of choice, namely videotape, that the main character is able to avoid the inevitably deadly consequences of her encounter with the otherworldly. Unlike many movies, *The Ring* does not have the spirit medium character that is a staple of the genre, likely because the spirit herself is not shy about her wants and desires, and most of the discovery of her history is done by the main character (Verbinski 2002).

Both of these films illustrate the connection between belief in the supernatural and technological innovation. This relationship has existed since the Spiritualist movement first began in the 1840s, when people began to take double-exposure photographs of ‘ghosts’ and manifestations of ectoplasm. Though their attempts to falsify proof of the supernatural may seem laughable to us today, they were anything but that at the turn of the 20th century. New technologies such as photographs, kinoscopes, and later motion pictures were all used by people for the purpose of performing belief in the supernatural. These technologies are still used for these purposes, as can be seen on shows focusing on the paranormal, such as *Ghost Adventures* and *Ghost Hunters*. Many technologies have also been developed specifically for ghost hunting purposes, such as the spirit box. These boxes are pre-programmed with certain sets of words and then set out for ghost to use to ‘speak’ with the living.

Each technology that is used by paranormal investigators to investigate haunting is related to an idea or assumption that has some basis in scientific method and theory. I am purposely avoiding using the term ‘pseudoscience’ for several reasons, not the least of which is that it echoes the condescension toward the study of belief that I have already identified as being problematic. Whether or not the scientific interpretations behind the use of the tools are correct is irrelevant when one considers their use a function of belief, rather than science. For example, EMF detectors are used to detect the presence of spirits because it is believed that like living beings they exude their own electromagnetic fields. Thermal cameras are used to detect fluctuation of temperature because it is believed that spirits consume energy in order to manifest, thus creating cold spots. These assertions seem

scientific because they describe the observable effects of spirits on the natural world, but the issue is that the ghosts themselves cannot be reliably observed or predicted through these signs. Nor are these signs reliably predictable or observable. These effects are part of a belief complex centered around ghosts which has little or nothing to do with science and everything to do with the performance of belief in the supernatural (Brown 2006).

One of the main problems with the study of this cultural phenomenon is that academics are too likely to dismiss belief simply because much of it has been deemed irrational and thus unworthy of dedicated and thoughtful study. The study of supernatural belief has been deeply affected by this bias because of all types of belief it is considered the least prestigious. Believing in ghosts, haunted houses, and the like is too deeply associated with outdated notions of superstition, an assumed lack of civilization, and even childishness despite all evidence that supernatural traditions thrive equally in all echelons of our society and show every likelihood of continuing to do so. Ghost tours are just one example of how even those things which seem trivial and even frivolous to us at first glance can provide us with a wealth of insight into how we perceive, construct, and interact with our environments. More importantly, they show us one of the many ways we imbue places with meaning of our own creation and then utilize such places in order to create, nurture, and foster our beliefs and the beliefs of our own communities.

Appendix A
Ghost Tour Information

The following tours were visited by me in the course of this fieldwork. Where possible I have listed the name of the tour, its tour guide/s, phone number, website, address/location of meetup, days of performance, and price. The information listed here is current. Any differences in circumstance between the tour at the time fieldwork was undertaken and the present will be noted. I have also noted how many times each tour was observed.

Napa City Ghosts and Legends Walking Tour

Ellen MacFarlane and Devin Scott Sisk

www.napaghosts.com

(888) 298-6124

Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday at 8:00pm

\$25.00

Meets at Old Napa Courthouse, Brown Street Entrance

825 Brown Street

Napa, CA 94558

Attended twice

Sonoma Plaza Ghost Walking Tour

Ellen MacFarlane and Devin Scott Sisk

(888) 298-6124

www.napaghosts.com

Most Wednesdays and Fridays @ 8:00pm

\$28.00

Meets at 1st Street East at the large oak tree in the Sonoma Court Shops

Sonoma, CA 95476

Attended once

Haunted Haight Walking Tour

Tommy Netzband

www.hauntedhaight.com

1-800-383-3006

Sunday-Thursday @ 7:00pm

\$25.00

Meets at Coffee to the People

1206 Masonic Avenue

San Francisco, CA 94117

Attended twice

San Francisco Ghost Hunt Walking Tour

Jim Fassbender*/Christian Cagigal

www.sfghosthunt.com

Wednesday-Sunday @ 7:00pm

\$25.00

Meets at the corner of Octavia and Bush, in front of 1801 Bush Street

San Francisco, CA 94109

*At the time this tour was taken, the tour guide/owner was Jim Fassbender, and the tour met at the Queen Anne Hotel at 1590 Sutter Street, San Francisco, CA 94109. It has since changed owners, and the hotel has ended its partnership with the tour.

Attended once

Chinatown Ghost Tour

Cynthia Yee and Korene Tom

www.sfchinatownghosttours.com

7:30pm

\$48.00

Meets at Utopia Cafe on 139 Waverly Place, San Francisco, CA 94108

Attended once

Virginia City Ghost Tours*

Bats in the Belfry

www.virginiacityghosttours.com

1-775-815-1050

\$20.00

Meets at The Silver Queen Saloon

28 North C Street

Virginia City, NV 89440

*A tour of the Washoe Millionaires Club was given as an impromptu supplement to this tour. The Washoe Millionaires Club is located on 112 S. C Street Virginia City, NV 89440

Attended once

Winchester Mystery House

www.winchestermysteryhouse.com

(408) 247-2101

Tour prices vary, as do times. Open 7 days a week.

525 S. Winchester Boulevard

San Jose, CA 95128

Attended twice

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