

The Anthropomorphization of Houses in Film

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Abstract

Often times in film, houses have been categorized as a part of the set design or production design. They are purposefully furnished and decorated according to the director's vision. Filmmakers, scholars, and critics recognize the importance of the setting and its decorations. However, let us consider the possibility that a house is more than the set design; it is a character.

The characterization of a house can be both literal and implied. There are the houses that come alive like, as in *Monster House* (Gil Kenan, 2006) and houses whose character is subtler in its presence, as in *The Old Dark House* (James Whale, 1932) or *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963.) The house as a character is neither static nor flat, but dynamic and complex. In order for us to understand the complexities of the house, this thesis will explore the major foundation stones of any character in film: costuming, physicality, the mind of a character, and its personalities.

Like a human being, each house has a unique characteristic and personality. To name a few of the many, a house can be a murderer, a seductress, a femme fatale, or an isolated being. Its personality is structured around the foundations. The exterior is representative of the character's physicality. The inner decorations of a house provide the costuming. A character's mind is explored through the house's rooms, spaces, and trap doors. Each room uncovers a new secret and reveals the depth of the house's personality. A house's personality is further enhanced through its gestures and movements. These foundations cover the skeleton of the house by being the heart and muscle of the character.

I want to explore the character of a house by studying a variety of classic and modern films such as *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939), *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941),

Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), *Days of Heaven* (Terrence Malick, 1978), *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), and *The Addams Family* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1991.) Thus this thesis will expand our understanding of the complexity and importance of the house in film. By examining the anthropomorphic qualities of a house, we will discover the house as an animate being. Let us define the concept of anthropomorphism as attributing human characteristics to inanimate objects such as a house. The goal of this thesis is to explore the means through which films routinely anthropomorphize houses, to what ends, with what implications, and why.

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Introduction

“No matter how dreary and gray our homes are, we people of flesh and blood would rather live there than in any other country, be it ever so beautiful. There is no place like home.” - L. Frank Baum.

Dorothy spoke these words in L. Frank Baum’s classic children’s novel, The Wonderful World of Oz. The first of his two sentences is often forgotten and dwarfed by the famous last line, “There is no place like home.” By adapting the novel into the 1939 film, *Wizard of Oz*, Victor Fleming capitalized on the meaning of this sentence. In her last moments in Oz, Dorothy learned that the key to her passage home was by simply clicking her red heels together and repeating the phrase, “there’s no place like home.” Through repetition, Fleming helped make the phrase into an icon that continues to symbolize the ideal life at home. Despite the fame and over quotation, Baum’s last sentence in the phrase above holds a lot of meaning. Standing alone, the symbolism shines in idealism and is often used to allude to the nuclear family household. However, when this phrase is read in its entirety, the symbolism and meaning is stronger and deeper in comparison to each sentence standing alone. It creates an image of home.

Pliny the Elder coined the phrase, “Home is where the heart is.” The idea of home is firmly rooted within all of us. Each individual has a unique perspective on this idea; however, there is a distinction between house and home. Margaret Morse’s essay “Home: Smell, Taste, Posture, Gleam,”¹ states that the concept of home “is not a real place” (63). Alternatively, home is “a personal...link to the imaginary [with] feelings and memories...[that] are highly charged, if not with meaning, then with sense memories” (Morse, 63). As the concept of home usually starts with a house, the house becomes “home” when we fill empty spaces with our past, present, and

¹ *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*. Ed. Hamid Naficy. New York: Routledge, 1999. N. 63-73. Print.

future memories. Along with our memories, we also project our conscious and unconscious psyche onto the dwelling. Through the projections of our psyche, the home transforms into a dynamic being instead of a static and lifeless dwelling. In her essay “Inside Fear: Secret Places and Hidden Spaces in Dwellings”² (1997), Anne Troutman further describes home by saying: “We dwell in the home; the home dwells in us” (143).

By itself, a house is designated as a work of architecture. To an architect, the house may be a piece of commercial property that is comprised of angles and uninhabited spaces enclosed by wood, stone, and cement. It is static architecture. Similar to that of an architect’s perspective, the house in film is often a disposable, temporary space that serves the functions of the director’s vision and story. In film, the house is typically categorized as a setting.

The house, as a setting, or set design, serves the director’s vision in a variety of ways. It can serve as an aid for the audience to identify with the primary character. The house can also help create the tone of the scene through its furnishings and architecture. It can also help create an identity of the human character occupying the setting. Although these examples aid the film, these functions of the house maintain its function as set design. As a setting, the house and its furnishings are significant to recognize in film, but its purposes at first seem functional and transparent.

Instead of viewing the house as static architecture, we can change our perspective by considering the possibility of the house as a character in and of itself in film. In The Poetics of Space (1969), Gaston Bachelard declares, “It is not enough to consider the house as an ‘object’ ” (4). The house as a character, which can call itself “home,” can be a dynamic character whose presence can be apparent or subtle and somehow “alive.” In this thesis, the house is not just a

² *Architecture of Fear*. Ed. Nan Ellin. New York: Princeton Architectural, 1997. N. 143-159. Print.

piece of architecture, but a being filled with memories, fears, and dreams. It can have a mind of its own. The mind of the house can directly correlate with the mind of the inhabitant. The inhabitant and the house can equally influence each other. This includes the inhabitant's conscious and unconscious psyche. Further, the house inhabits itself and can also be inhabited by humans and spirits. Like a human body, the house can be seen as a whole, but it is best understood by studying and exploring each "body" part that makes up this whole.

The sections of the house that will be explored include the character's exterior and interior spaces. The interior is composed of costuming, movements, and the house's inner thoughts. This thesis will primarily examine films from multiple genres such as horror, drama, and musicals, including but not limited to *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963), *The Others* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2001), *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), and *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939). It will also explore other narrative horror films such as: *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980), and *The Old Dark House* (James Whale, 1932). Aside from narrative films, this thesis will also analyze James Watson and Melville Webber's experimental film, *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928).

In order to gain a broad understanding of the house as a character, I will draw upon other film genres such as drama and comedy in which houses that are similarly anthropomorphized. Films like *Days of Heaven* (Terrence Malick, 1978) and *The Addams Family* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1991) will play an important part in this section of the thesis. The houses in each of these films are unique, and it is my goal in this thesis to investigate precisely how. By concentrating on films from a variety of genres, this thesis will provide a unique perspective into the anthropomorphization of houses.

I will also use a combination of a psychoanalytic methodology with material from literature on the phenomenology of houses to help analyze and interpret the houses in these films. This thesis will create a foundational understanding of the anthropomorphization of houses by utilizing material from Gaston Bachelard's Poetics of Space (1969). Sigmund Freud's Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (1966) will further our understanding by providing a psychoanalytic examination of the house. Anne Troutman's essay "Inside Fear: Secret Places and Hidden Spaces in Dwellings" will further expand out understanding of the psychological framework of the house's spaces and the fear that can be derived from it, as will Marilyn R. Chandler's Dwelling In the Text (1991) and Susan Bernstein's Housing Problems (2008). Additional material will also be incorporated from Margaret Morse's essay on "Home: Smell, Taste, Posture, Gleam," as she focuses on the concept of home. Finally, I will also draw upon literature that examines the anthropomorphization of houses in films such as: Barry Curtis' Dark Places: The Haunted House in Film (2008), Architecture + Film II as edited by Bob Fear, as well as Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz's essay on "Horror of Allegory: *The Others* and Its Contexts." By utilizing these books and essays to help analyze the aforementioned films and their characteristics, the personalities (seductive, protective, fatal) of each cinematic house will become apparent, and by examining the means by which films anthropomorphize houses, we can gain a clear understanding of each film and its elements as a whole.

Chapter 1: The Exterior - First Impressions

To make a bold claim, houses that occupy screen space are more dynamic than houses in reality. They are more dynamic in their incompleteness. Audiences know every nook and cranny of their dwellings. Nothing, including dark spaces and secret doors, can hide from the inhabited. Their houses become a part of them. Freud states that the “representation of the human figure as a whole is a house”³ (Chandler, 12). As this thesis unfolds, it will uncover the relationship between houses and humans through a variety of films. The house that occupies screen space is fragmented and unknown in both its exterior and interior. There are always dark places, secret doors, shadows, and unexplored spaces that help create each house’s mystery in the film. In order for us to have a more complete understanding of the complexity and mystery of houses in film, we must explore the exterior of the dwelling before exploring the interior.

Like a human body, a house’s exterior represents the physicality of a being. It displays itself as a structure, a piece of architecture, a dwelling. When the dwelling first appears in film space, spectators regularly see the front of the house, whether it is at the door, behind a gate, or off in the distance. With this two-dimensional view of the front, the appearance of the side or back of the house can be considered insignificant and forgotten. One such example is the Buchanan residence in Baz Luhrmann’s adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* (2013). The camera tracks Tom Buchanan riding his horse to the entrance. The aerial tracking shot captures the grandiosity of the architecture, but we only see a fraction of the exterior of the house before entering a parlor room. The rest of the exterior space is unknown and off-screen. However, as Norman N. Klein describes it, “Human beings have evolved a unique skill; they can imagine

³ Chandler, Marilyn. *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California, 1991. Print.

completeness, even when it is not there.”⁴ With the rest of the exterior absent from view, the audience’s imagination builds the rest of the exterior and gives each spectator a unique image of the dwelling. No house is the same.

To anthropomorphize a house, spectators attribute human qualities and characteristics to it. The director aids in this anthropomorphization through the film’s mise-en-scène and cinematography. John Ruskin’s essay on “The Pathetic Fallacy” might find the attribution of human characteristics to houses an error because houses are inanimate objects given human characteristics by humans involved in the act of projection. Ruskin describes this kind of error as a “state of mind which attributes...these [characteristics] of a living creature...produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things” (Ruskin, 71). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to address the complexities of Ruskin’s argument on the anthropomorphization of an inanimate object into a human being. However, given the place his essays hold in the concept of anthropomorphization, I mention it here because it names and describes the human tendency to attribute animate qualities to inanimate objects so often found in the horror film. Indeed, the genre of horror films consistently exploits the anthropomorphization of inanimate things, transforming the inanimate into animate beings or beings that somehow embody human characteristics to chilling effect. In this thesis, I will explore how a particular group of these films, horror and otherwise, feature houses with uniquely human attributes. Let us start this exploration by studying the anthropomorphization of a house’s exterior.

As the exterior architecture of the house represents the outward physicality of a being, it also takes on the burden of the first impression of both the primary character(s) and the

⁴ Klein, Norman N. "Freud in Coney Island." *The Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society and Its Circle*. Ed. Zoe Beloff. New York: Christine Burgin, 2009. N. Print.

spectators. First impressions are highly instinctual. Whether it is meeting a person, interviewing for a job, or visiting a new city, the first impression is a very important experience to consider. When it comes to houses in film, the exterior architecture occupying the screen space often gives the primary character and the audience their first impression of the house as a character. This impression indicates a purpose and gives the audience a small sense of the house as a being.

Before entering a house, one of two impressions is often given. One can be an impression of welcome. The exterior is typically pleasing to the eye and suggests that the interior space is the same. Or, there may be an impression of danger. The exterior appears menacing by way of its shape and shadows. It suggests that the interior is full of dark places and unknown terrors. Sometimes there can be signs or people who warn the person. However, most of the time the warning can be psychological and instinctual upon the first viewing of the house. It can be felt in the pit of one's stomach, in one's consciousness, or appear as a tiny voice in the back of one's mind. Horror stories and films capitalize on this particular impression.

In Edgar Allen Poe's short story, "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), when the narrator saw the Usher house for the first time, he stated that the house projected "a sense of insufferable gloom [that] pervaded my spirit"⁵ (Poe, 299). The narrator, Roderick Usher's friend, also called it "a sickening of the heart," which suggests that happiness is impossible in the Usher household. With this first impression, the protagonist's perspective is determined and the humanizing of the house begins.

In Poe's story, the house appeared decayed and fragile. Its walls were intact but had an air of collapsing at any moment. A fissure from the ceiling to the foundation seemed to be tearing the house in two. The windows morphed into eyes whose stare was vacant and

⁵ Poe, Edgar Allen. "The Fall of the House of Usher." *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allen Poe*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 2006. 299-313. Print.

unnerving. All of these things transform the house into the depiction of an aged, fragile, and decaying body whose life is hanging by a thread. Although the exterior of the Usher house creates a vivid impression, the psyche of the house's character can only be hinted at because it is concealed inside. Through the exterior, we get the impression that the life of the house can be linked to the state of mind of Roderick Usher, the head of the house. Later on in this thesis, a more detailed understanding of the decay of the house and its psyche will be revealed when we study the complex interior from Watson & Webber's 1928 film, *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

Watson and Webber's filmic adaptation of Poe's story is an American film that mimics filmic techniques from German Expressionist films. The German Expressionists in the 1920's were some of the first filmmakers to give the set design purpose and life. Directors in this era of films used the setting to mirror the mind of the primary protagonist. Instead of an objective world that was uniform and symmetrical, the German Expressionists created a world that depicted the mind as an exaggerated and distorted labyrinth.

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (Robert Weine, 1920), for example, is one of the most well known German Expressionist films. The architecture in this film features multiple houses whose angles are acute, abstract, and off center. These angles help the audience identify that the setting represents the inner turmoil of the primary protagonist, Francis (Friedrich Feher), and hints that the film's point of view is from an unreliable narrator. It is not until the end of the film that the audience learns the story is Francis' fantasy. He, along with Cesare (the somnambulist) (Conrad Viedt) and Jane (his betrothed) (Lil Dagover), are all patients in the mental asylum that Dr. Caligari (Werner Krauss) supervised. Francis himself suffered from fantastical delusions that warped his reality. The architecture of this film becomes alive because it is a visual representation of his warped psyche. This silent horror film, along with *Nosferatu* (F.W. Murnau,

1922) and other German Expressionist films have helped pave the way for the interpretation of the psyche through the houses' exterior in various films throughout film history, as we shall see in what follows.

The setting as a character in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* is much more prominent than the subtle physicality of Poe's house of Usher. Another house whose character is prominent from the beginning is that in Robert Wise's 1963 film, *The Haunting*. The house in this film generates an impression that can be opposite to that of the house of Usher. Based on Shirley Jackson's 1959 novel, The Haunting of Hill House, the house in the film version is not decaying, but maliciously thriving. The primary protagonist, Eleanor Vance (Julie Harris), is a woman in her 30's who lives inside her feeble mind. She considers herself an outcast with no home. Upon first sight of the house, Eleanor slams on her brakes and the scene cuts to the house. The audience enters Eleanor's mind through a voiceover that calls the house "evil" and "diseased" and her first instinct tells her to leave immediately. The film then cuts to a pair of windows, as she mentions the house "staring" at her. The book also characterizes the life of the house by stating that the "face of Hill House seemed awake, with a watchfulness from the blank windows and a touch of flee in the eyebrow of a cornice" (Jackson, 24). The suggested life of the house is immediate. The active gaze of the house suggests that the house is its own being and anticipated torturer. Unlike the house of Usher, whose windows appear as vacant eyes, this house is not dependent on the psyche of the inhabited; in fact, Hill House thrives by its own will. Through the house's gaze upon those that approach it, the exterior of Hill House warns its visitors of its own inherent evil that is waiting patiently inside.

The architectural style of the house both used in the book, The Haunting of Hill House, and its filmic adaptation is Victorian. The Victorian house was particularly popular in the 19th

century. Horror films often use this type of house to create a suspenseful tone, in part because of its obscure angles, steep roofs, towers, and turrets. Victorian houses like the one in *The Haunting* are also frequently isolated from any nearby neighborhoods or large city. Norman Bates' house in *Psycho*

(Hitchcock, 1960) is a prime example. Located

where the old and now unused highway used to be, Bates' house stands guard behind the Bates Motel. Upon first viewing, the exterior of this Victorian style house appears simple and homely until the mother's silhouette gracefully and eerily slides past the upper window. The spectator's impression of home is uprooted and replaced by unease. The otherwise homely exterior becomes a guardian of a secret and one begs to ask the question, who or what is lurking freely inside the house?



Figure 1: Screenshot of an exterior view of the Bates' House. (*Psycho*, Alfred Hitchcock, 1960).



Figure 2: Hopper, Edward. *House by the Railroad*. 1925. Oil on canvas. Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY.

Not all Victorian houses used in film are used for horror. The house in Terrence Malick's 1978 film, *Days of Heaven* is a place whose exterior gives the audience an impression of both isolation and life. Inspired by Edward Hopper's painting, "House by the Railroad" (1925), the house in Malick's film stands out in its isolation. Surrounded by fields, the only hint of civilization is the

railroad nearby. At first, the house is an aesthetic relief for travelers looking for work. The tall tower and white washed walls give the audience comfort amidst the endless sea of wheat fields. However, Edward Hirsch's poem "Edward Hopper and the House by the Railroad" (Wild Gratitude, 1986) brings the house to life by saying, "The utterly naked look of someone, being stared at...someone who is about to be left alone, again, and can no longer stand it."⁶ When comparing this poem with the exterior of the house, the life of the house is no longer aesthetically comforting to the seasonal workers and travelers. Instead it transforms into an isolated being. The first impression offered by this poem changes the house into a melancholy being trapped in its own isolation; this issue of isolation, and how it adds to a house's characteristics, will be addressed further in the thesis.

The exterior of the first few houses mentioned above provide impressions of the danger, evil, and the isolation that waits inside. However, there is one house whose first impression may be that of safety and familiarity: the house in *The Addams Family* (Sonnenfeld, 1991). This house's exterior visually contrasts Edward Hopper's Victorian house. The house appears visually revolting and unwelcoming rather than appealing. Despite the visually repugnant exterior, the Addams' house gives the impression of home because the members of the family project their memories and dreams onto the house. As Morse states, "home is thus an evocation that is of this sensory world" (Morse, 63). Meant to be a comical critique on houses in American suburbs, this film embodies L. Frank Baum's quote, almost literally. Unlike the previous dwellings mentioned, parts of the exterior of the Addams residence literally move. One example is the gate. In order to protect the house, the gate comes alive and bites unwanted solicitors such as the

⁶ Hirsch, Edward. "Edward Hopper and The House by the Railroad." *Wild Gratitude: Poems*. New York: Knopf, 1986. N. Print.

greedy lawyer, Tully Alford (Dan Hedaya). The house also houses its ancestors in the backyard. To many, this house would be considered uninhabitable; but to the Addams family, this house is home.

Since German Expressionism in the 1920's, the exterior being of a house has evolved from a setting to a character. As a character, the exterior features of the house do not necessarily provide direct evidence of the house as a living, sentient being. The evidence provided is more psychological and instinctive. The exterior gives the primary protagonist and the audience a sense of what may be lurking inside. Its clues are given with the space that is shown, but what is not shown, the audience must fill in with their own imagination. The primary function of the exterior, as the physicality of a being, is to protect the heart and soul of the house's character. But, before we explore the character's heart and soul (the interior), we must acknowledge the guardian who grants or declines access into the mind of the house, the door.

The Threshold: The Key

The door, also known as the threshold, holds the power to reveal or conceal the secrets and dangers lurking inside. The physical act of opening a door is symbolic when it comes to this thesis. In film, there are a variety of ways that the door opens. It can also close itself and lock the curious spectator in. Although it is only a small fraction of the house, the door is one of the most relevant sections of the house as a character.

When doors open in horror films, they often open by themselves. Although this seems like a now clichéd technique, it is still very powerful. It suggests that the house wills the protagonists to come inside. The decision to open the door was not made by a butler, owner, or by the visitor, but by the house itself. This can be a dangerous way to enter the house because the

visitor is succumbing to the will of the house. He or she is falling victim to the seductive temptation of the house as a kind of femme fatale.

Doors may also open by the will of the visitor. In *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) the film's protagonist, Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) knocks on the door to Buffalo Bill's residence. When Buffalo Bill (Ted Levine), also known as Jame Gumb, opens the door, Clarice willingly enters the house. This also occurs in *Nosferatu* when Graf Orlok aka Nosferatu (Max Schreck) opens the doors for Hutton (Gustav von Wangenheim). These examples show that the character of the house can be an extension of the inhabitant. The houses seductively entice the protagonist to enter into the house's psyche.

Breaking the door down is another way to enter the house, but this entry is not a welcome entry. The protagonist(s) or antagonist(s) force their way into the house's heart and soul. In the process, the house's will is violated. What is concealed is revealed without permission. Stanley Kubrick's infamous scene in *The Shining* (1980) is a fitting example. In the climax of the film, Wendy Torrance (Shelley Duvall) locks herself in the bathroom to protect herself from her husband, Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson). In a panic, the bathroom became Wendy's safe haven from Jack's insanity. For Wendy, this part of the house, her temporary home, embodied the heart and soul of the house. Jack takes an axe to the door and proceeds to violently break his way in.

Once one gains entry into the mind of the house, what is concealed will be revealed. However, the door that is closed symbolizes a refusal of entry. The locking of the door encases the protagonist and the spectator inside. The Collyer Brothers' house is an example. Paranoid recluses and hoarders living in a decayed New York mansion until 1947, the Collyer Brothers were a mystery to their neighbors and to their fellow citizens until their deaths. On March 21st, 1947, the NYPD received a call about a death in their house. They had difficulty gaining entry,



Figure 3: Collyer Brother's mansion exterior & front door (March 21, 1947).

because once the door was forced open, there was still no way to get into the house. Boxes of junk covered the doorway. Once the police hacked their way in, the mystery of the brothers was slowly revealed in the interior. The interior was not only filled with collected junk, it was also filled with booby traps. The two brothers

died within their own horded interior. The

psychology of the interior of the house is evidence of the paranoid mindset of Homer and Langley Collyer.

The locked door that prevented entry to the interior mind of the Collyer's mansion presents an overt example of the psychology of the house. In film, the anthropomorphization of the door and mind of the house are more apparent. Using the Collyer Brothers' mansion as a point of reference, let us now shift our perspective to a filmic example of the doorway. *The Haunting* is a good filmic example of the house's mind because Hill House is locked at night. No one could get in and no one could hear the screams from inside. The house became a tomb for its visitors and an impenetrable force from the outside. The mind of the house was free to do what it pleased. Hill House preferred closed doors. It preferred its secrets to be concealed.

If or when the audience and the primary character are accepted into the house, crossing the threshold is significant. It is the physical act of crossing that symbolizes the crossing into another world. This world is the mind of the house. Sometimes it tricks the spectator and protagonist into thinking that it is the same as reality. At other times, it becomes a whole new

world. The interior of every house is different. It is a complex being that can be nothing short of a labyrinth.

Chapter 2: The Interior – Costuming & the Mind

The Attic & The Cellar

The house's exterior shows traces of life as it protects the interior. Once we cross the threshold and step inside, we see that the heart and mind of the house's character lies in the interior. As we explore the interior, we find that it can be the most important aspect of the house as a character. The spaces in the interior are the most intimate spaces of the character. They "are a map of the conscious and unconscious" (Anne Troutman, 143). Each house and its intimate spaces are unique. Every house has a variety of rooms, secret spaces, furniture, and decorations that create a complex labyrinth which cannot be easily deconstructed. Every knick-knack, room, level, and dark corner mirrors the psyche of the inhabited, whether they are human or spirits. The psyche projects memories, secrets, and dreams into objects and rooms. Gaston Bachelard in his book, *The Poetics of Space*, describes that the house filled with memories and even secrets "becomes psychologically complex." Because of these projections, there is a presence of the ego, the id, and daydreams in the house. This psychological space is where we will discover the character of the house.

Before examining the costuming of the house, we should recognize that the interior spaces are both hidden and revealed. To explore these spaces, let us consider the possibility that, "a house is imagined as a vertical being" (Bachelard, 17). As a vertical being, the house contains an attic, a main floor, and the basement or cellar. According to Bachelard, each level represents a different psychological frame of mind and each has significance in the characterization of the house in film.

Let us first address the attic. In reality, the function of the attic is to store anything that may no longer be used. Typically it stores sentimental artifacts of the past. Symbolically, the

attic represents the ego, or the conscious. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, describes the conscious mind as the reality principle⁷. The conscious mind deals with awareness in reality by rationalizing thoughts and perceptions. It governs the mind through one's societal and ethical upbringing and influences. The ego often represses memories, traumas, desires, dreams, and impulses into the unconscious, or the id. Symbolized by the attic, in this case, one can call it the "voice" of reason.

To get to the attic, "we always *go up* the attic stairs" (Bachelard, 26). Bachelard describes getting to the attic as an act of ascension. We ascend into consciousness. The attic is meant to be a safe haven for one's thoughts. It is a familiar place where fears can be rationalized and daydreams occur. There are a variety of films that present the attic as a place for daydreams. Many of these films are nostalgic comedies or children's films. One such example is Alfonso Cuarón's 1995 film, *A Little Princess*. Sarah Crewe (Liesel Matthews) is a servant who dwells in the attic of a boarding house. The conditions of the attic in this film are grim, unpleasant, and at times scary. However, Sarah rationalizes the terrible conditions of the attic by daydreaming of fantastical stories. The attic comes to life through these stories, and as a result, the spectators and Sarah's perspectives are altered by the rationalization of the conscious mind.

The attic can also house spirits and ghosts in horror films. However, as the attic can be seen as the ego, the characters in the film and spectators rationalize their fear and the spirit's presence. There is little room for fear in the attic because the reality principle and the daydream are in command. Bachelard describes this rationalization by stating "in the attic, the day's experiences can always efface the fears of night" (Bachelard, 19). For this thesis, it is not so

⁷ Freud's essay, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning" as found in *The Freud Reader* (1989), first mentions the reality principle being linked to "sense-organs that are directed towards [the] external world, and of the consciousness attached to them" (302).

much the attic itself that I want to focus on, but the act of ascending to another level and the top floor. The “reality” principle, or the conscious part of the mind dominates our thinking, our actions, our ways of living. As the attic represents the “reality” principle, it is significant that we examine the journey to the attic because it is a journey from danger and the unknown to reason, safety, and awareness. It is a psychological act of ascension. This journey is more significance to the characterization of the house than the filmic presence of the attic itself.

For example, James Whale’s 1932 film, *The Old Dark House* features a house whose interior is crumbling. We can assume that the cause of this deterioration is because of the broken, feuding family members who inhabit the house. The two aging siblings, Horace (Ernest Thesiger) and Rebecca Femm (Eva Moore) argue about who should get the heavy gas lamp from upstairs. Rebecca informs the guests that in order to get the lamp, one must enter the most evil family member’s room upstairs. This room houses their 102-year-old father. Horace takes Philip Waverton (Raymond Massey), but soon hides in fear in his bedroom. We find Philip and his wife, Margaret Waverton (Gloria Stuart), ascending the stairs to the room. In this film, ascending to the attic, or top floor, is a dark journey. The lighting in the scene is minimal and the shadows are accentuated. While ascending, their fear is heightened through anticipation of the unknown at the top floor. They fear the top floor, but they cannot go down the stairs because the menacing, drunk butler, Morgan (Boris Karloff) awaits for them on the main floor. When Philip and Margaret reach the bedroom, they learn that the father is in fact good, and not evil. Their anxiety and fears are subdued by the reason and logic of the old father. It is through this dark journey that the anthropomorphization of the house is revealed. The attic in this scene exhibits the house’s reasonable mind. As it can be representative of the conscious mind, this top floor, or attic becomes a safe place, a familiar place to the protagonists and the audience.

The house's consciousness does not necessarily limit itself to the attic. Gaston Bachelard uses the attic as an example because it is the highest one can ascend in a dwelling. In film, the spaces that spectators are aware of are the spaces shown on the screen. If the protagonist's journey up the stairs doesn't end in the attic, we must assume that the top floor of the house contains the house's ego. As with *The Old Dark House*, the spectator is aware that the father dwells on the top floor. Whether the top floor is the attic or not is unknown.

A more complex example of the top floor housing consciousness is Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). The house's character can be more dynamic in the sense that the top floor houses two mindsets and not one. These two mindsets are shown in the two rooms. Norman Bates and his mother occupy the two bedrooms. As the attic represents the conscious, these two rooms represent Norman's split personalities. Each personality (or room) fights for control. One may associate this mental disorder with the unconscious. However, let us consider Norman's multiple personalities as a fight for the conscious mind.

Norman's mother and Norman himself have two very different egos. Norman's room is filmed as being considerably smaller than his mother's. We can see this in the size and furnishings of his room. Through his speech and the size of his room, we can assume that he is stuck in a childhood phase. Norman's character is fragile and childlike. His personality is that of the child. Norman's traumas are replaced by the personality of his dead mother, who is representative of the conscious mind⁸. Mrs. Bates can be representative of the conscious mind because she, in a sense, censors Norman from participating in anything gratifying.

⁸ Freud's essay, "The Uncanny" as found in *Writings in Art and Literature* (1997), defines the conscious mind as a "function of observing and criticizing the self and of exercising a censorship within the mind" (211).

As Norman's mother represents Norman's conscious mind, we can assume that her personality is the projection of Norman's memories and his point of view of her. Norman projects Mrs. Bates' personality as protective, murderous, demanding yet loving to her son. Hitchcock shows the audience that her room appears to be larger. The size of the rooms alone may be foreshadowing not only of Norman Bates' split personalities, but also which of his personalities is winning the fight for his mind.

The journey of ascension in *Psycho* leads to death. "Mrs. Bates" attempts to protect Norman's mind by killing any intruder who wants to access his ego. Detective Milton Arbogast (Martin Balsam) suffers this fate when he tries to access Norman's conscious or, in other words, his mother. The top floor in this house can be representative of the conscious mind, or "Mrs. Bates." This floor can also be a psychological space that "defends the individual against the anxiety of being alone" (Troutman, 149). In this case, "Mrs. Bates" is protecting Norman from a state of loneliness. However, we can also extend Troutman's statement by recognizing that the Bates' house itself may be trying to defend itself from abandonment. As we find out later on in the film, the house is assumed to be abandoned, just as Norman's personality abandons his mind as his mother's personality takes over.

The Bates' house is battling itself. Two egos are fighting for control. As mentioned previously, those who inhabit the house project memories and daydreams onto the house. Because of this, we can speculate that the dwellers can project their disorders onto the house as well. Like Norman's opposing personalities, the conscious (ego) resists the unconscious (id). According to Freud, resistance occurs when one tries to "transform what is unconscious into

what is conscious” (364). This resistance is also called repression⁹. Thus, we can interpret that the ego represses the id. However, there are slips of the unconscious where one’s repressed memories or self is revealed. This is typically called a Freudian slip¹⁰. Slips of this nature can create a sense of fear or a sense of the uncanny¹¹. In terms of Gaston Bachelard’s description of the verticality of the house, the unconscious can be found in the basement, or cellar. The cellar is the “dark entity of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces” (Bachelard, 18). The dark entity that Bachelard describes thrives on fear and on the sense of uncanniness.

Horror films capitalize on the basement in order to generate fear from the audience. The basement in *Psycho* provides a useful comparison between the psychology behind the Bates’ attic (top floor) and cellar. The upper level, as stated before, contains the dueling personalities of Norman Bates: one is Norman himself, while the other is his mother. In one scene, Norman argues with his mother because he wants to safely hide her in the basement for a few days. Mrs. Bates protests. The scene cuts to Norman carrying his mother down to the basement. It is no coincidence that the revealing of the hidden mother takes place in the basement. The mother’s skeleton is revealed right before Norman Bates, dressed in a wig and his mother’s clothing, attempts to kill Marion Crane’s sister, Lila Crane (Vera Miles) and Marion’s lover, Sam Loomis (John Gavin). What generates fear in the characters also provokes fear in the audience. The

⁹ This is found in Lecture XIX “Resistance and Repression” in *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1966).

¹⁰ Freud calls these slips ‘parapraxes’ in his *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. They are “psychical acts...[that] disturbs the intention is...a counter-intention, an unwillingness” (74, 88). The intended saying is a product of the conscious mind. Therefore, this “counter-intention” or “counter-will” can be linked to the unconscious because it is a slip of something repressed.

¹¹ Freud’s essay on “The Uncanny” in *Writings on Art and Literature* (1997) describes the uncanny as “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (195).

basement becomes a fearful place because it embodies and reveals Norman's unconscious and fractured state of mind. Norman's house continues to come to life because of this reveal.

The cellar can be a place full of darkness and fear in many other horror films. Take for instance, *The Silence of the Lambs*. In it, there are two iconic dwellings that are located in basements. The first is Hannibal Lecter's cell. In order to get to the cell, Clarice takes a journey downward. Demme's cinematographer, Tak Fujimoto, uses a montage to emphasize the long journey that descends to the cell. The lighting gets darker and the architecture becomes drab and primal. White walls are replaced with large and almost decaying foundation stones. Clarice and Dr. Frederick Chilton (Anthony Heald) enter through a variety of locked doors. The door with red lighting signifies the end of the journey's descent. The color in this scene represents danger.

Many directors isolate certain colors in their films to symbolize something. For example, M. Night Shyamalan used red as a motif in his film, *The Sixth Sense* (1999), to represent the world of the dead and extremely emotional moments. Another example to note is the use of green in *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958). We can assume that green represents Scottie's (James Stewart) fixation on Madeleine (Kim Novak). The use of red in the *Silence of the Lambs* can be significant because it sends a subliminal message to the audience that they, and Clarice, have entered the most dangerous part of the institution. Clarice's descent into the psychiatric facility's cellar represents the descent into the unconscious. The longer the journey downward, the more dangerous the unconscious becomes.

Even at the bottom of the unconscious, there is a presence of the conscious. Barney (Frankie Faison), one of the guards, literally holds the key to the fear filled state of mind. Demme's placement of Hannibal's cell at the end is intended. But before Clarice reaches his cell, she witnesses a variety of insane characters, such as Multiple Miggs (Stuart Rudin), who can

enact the drive of their own unconscious. Demme shows them as locked behind bars in a small dark space.

Hannibal Lecter's original cell is different. His surroundings are only a few feet deep and wide. There is no verticality to his dwelling; however, he still resides in the basement. Instead of bars, Hannibal resides behind a door less glass wall. The only place for transference of objects is through a small cabinet-like drawer. As this is his unwanted dwelling, the first time the audience meets Lecter, we find him politely standing in anticipation in the middle of the screen space. Everything in his cell is straight and clean, including his clothing. There is no sense of disorder.



Figure 4: Still of Hannibal Lecter in his cell. (*The Silence of the Lambs*, Jonathan Demme, 1991).

His room is flooded with light, which removes any possibility of dark spaces. As there are no dark spaces, there should be a sense of ease because whatever is hidden in the dark is revealed. However, the bright lighting turns a sense of safety into a sense of something more uncanny because it

reveals that Hannibal possesses complete control. The sense of the uncanny occurs because we the audience are expecting a dark room that houses a mentally unstable cannibal. Instead, we are introduced to a clean well-lit room with a courteous, controlled psychologist.

One may ask how Hannibal's cell is a character. His cell, much like Hannibal's gentleman-like persona, is an illusion. Hannibal represents the most dangerous form of the unconscious. It creates an illusion of safety by way of it appearing clean and door-less. This polite and calm persona is a façade for his desire to be free. The cell comes to life in the same way. As far as we know, Hannibal's cell came into existence when Hannibal was originally

imprisoned there. Once again, Lecter and the cell exude an uncanny fear for Clarice Starling and the audience. We fear it because it dwells in the unconscious; yet we desire it because the unconscious has no rules. It thrives on pleasure. Hannibal, although imprisoned and unable to take pleasure in his cannibalism, is still able to dwell in the Id.

Hannibal's cell is significant and complex in its characterization of houses, but, there is yet another basement that we need to explore. This basement belongs to Jame Gumb, also known as Buffalo Bill. Buffalo Bill's basement is a maze that only he can navigate. The basement is home to him. He comfortably dwells in his unconscious. His cellar is full of doors that contain dark, hidden spaces. The only light available is artificial. Natural lighting is kept out. These incomplete dark spaces are endless to the spectator. They "guard and contain [one's] anxieties" and are "accommodations of the unconscious" (Troutman, 153). Buffalo Bill projects his desires and anxieties in the basement. It is a place where he acts on his desires.

Buffalo Bill's Id is concealed underneath the main floor. The main floor is where Buffalo Bill becomes Jame Gumb. But because Buffalo Bill has dwelt in the Id for so long, Jame Gumb's personality appears unpolished and hesitant. The main floor of the house embodies this personality. It is a poor façade that fails to conceal the life of the basement, of the unconscious below.

During the climax of the film, when Clarice Starling enters Jame Gumb's house, Clarice and the audience notices the house's disarray. Dust hangs in the air like an early morning fog. The furniture and his knick-knacks are cluttered. Clarice's instincts flair and she has to descend into another basement and another person's unconscious. As Jame Gumb's unconscious lies just barely underneath his conscious, the journey to descend into the basement is short. This basement embodies fear. After Clarice finds Catherine Martin (Brooke Smith), she proceeds to

search for Buffalo Bill, until the lights are turned off. The audience then enters Buffalo Bill's point of view. The basement comes to life in its darkness. Buffalo Bill navigates his way through the basement by way of night vision goggles. He, like the basement, is comfortable in his unconscious.

This basement comes alive, but also dies. As stated before, there is no natural light present in the basement. The presence of natural light can be representative of the conscious mind. And as the conscious rules over the unconscious, Clarice's instincts kill Buffalo Bill. The symbolic death of the house's unconscious occurs when a bullet hits the window and natural light floods in. The house in a sense dies with Buffalo Bill. What has been concealed in the maze of his unconscious is forever repressed by the conscious and the dark spaces in the scenes remain dark, fearful spaces to the spectator.

Dark Spaces, Mazes, and Trap Doors

Now that we have a stronger understanding of the attic and the basement as the conscious and the unconscious mind of the house, let us broaden our perspective of the house as a character by further exploring the rest of the interior spaces of the house. Even though we cannot see or know every nook and cranny of the house in a film, the screen space that is shown is critical to explore and evaluate. Outside of the cellar and the attic, there are hidden spaces waiting to be uncovered.

One may ask how hidden spaces contribute to the anthropomorphization of the house as a character. As we will find out, hidden spaces give the house's character depth and help construct the personality of the house. They are the character's secrets. The ego and id of the house show the inner workings of the mind. Hidden spaces are secrets that drive the house to "action." These spaces can be dark and mysterious. They can be found in two parallel worlds. In this part of the

thesis, we will analyze these dark, hidden spaces by exploring a house's trap doors, secret compartments, and maze-like structure.

This section will also analyze the spaces that are revealed through the house's furnishings. The mise-en-scène gives the audience a sense of the house. Through careful placement, each piece of furniture and knick-knack deliberately occupies a specific part of space in every scene. This becomes the costume of the house. As we will see later on in this thesis, the costuming of a house can unconsciously uncover secrets.

Before we analyze the costuming of the house, let us explore the mazes, trap doors, and dark, hidden structure of the house. One real life example of a maze-like house is the Winchester



Figure 5: Exterior View of the Winchester Mystery House. Taken from www.oldhouseweb.com

Mansion located in San Jose, California. This Victorian mansion began construction in 1884 and did not stop until the owner, Sarah Winchester, died in 1922. The Winchester Mansion is truly a mystery and a maze.

Containing “160 rooms, 2,000 doors, 10,000 windows, 47 stairways,”¹² this house features

stairs that lead to nowhere, windows built onto the floor, and many other eccentricities in construction. There is speculation as to Sarah Winchester's intentions in constructing the house. It has been said that she wanted to create a maze-like house that keeps spirits confused and away from her. This alone shows a glimpse into this mysterious woman's psyche. We can assume that there are hidden spaces that still need to be discovered in her house. The Winchester House can be an example of a real structure that mirrors the maze of the mind.

¹² Winchester Mystery House website:
<http://www.winchestermysteryhouse.com/sarahwinchester.cfm>

In reality, there are very few examples that demonstrate a maze-like structure, but in horror films, almost every house is a maze. Barry Curtis states in his book, Dark Places: The Haunted House in Film, “The haunted house film plays a game of alternating what can be seen and what is hidden” (20). Evidence of the house’s game can be seen through the maze of the house. Through the house’s maze of the mind, the audience must determine the purpose of the spaces shown and hidden. Let us use the Usher house in *The Fall of the House of Usher* (James Watson & Melville Webber, 1928) as an example. This house plays a game with the audience because the spaces alternate and blur the lines between reality and fiction. This avant-garde film visually shows the weak, inner mind of Roderick Usher through spaces revealed in the interior architecture. Edgar Allen Poe tells the story of the Usher house through a visitor’s first person point of view but Watson and Webber’s film visually tell the story through Roderick’s point of view.

As this is a silent avant-garde film, the representation of Roderick’s mind is visually depicted through the house’s interior. In the beginning of the short film, Roderick’s sister enters the room where Roderick and she are to dine. The furnishings of the room are minimal. On the tablecloth covered table sit three plates, three glasses, silverware, and a vase of flowers. Three chairs also occupy the space of the room. The anthropomorphic characteristics of the house are apparent through the unoccupied space in the frame. The architecture’s “presence [in this film] defines the...social position of the characters and their inner moods” (Schaal, 13). The architecture in *The Fall of the House of Usher* is significant because it exhibits elements of German Expressionism found in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. In this particular setting, the walls in the background are abstract, off-centered, and are abnormally high. As previously stated, to the expressionists, elements such as off-centered architecture visually reveal the primary

characters' inner turmoil. In this scene, the abstract architecture alludes to Roderick's weak psyche, but it is overshadowed by the tableware and furniture, which gives the audience an appearance of a stable mind. After his sister falls ill at the dinner table, the interior of the Usher mansion is presented through a montage of superimpositions, through which the interior spaces become a confusing and limitless maze.

In one particular sequence, the sister appears lifeless. Her lifeless face is superimposed six times in the frame. The film cuts to an oddly angled door and Roderick is ascending from the cellar, where his sister is laid to rest. The scene cuts once more to Roderick's visual point of view. Here is a hallway where the stairs, ground, walls, and door to the next level are uneven. In this scene, there is no sense of complete space. The lighting of the room gives the frame heavy shadows. These shadows appear to fracture the spaces in the hallway. Through the visual theme of fracturing, the audience recognizes that like Roderick's mind, the Usher house is splitting as well. The concept of splitting "provides us with a portrait of [the] unconscious" (Troutman, 153). Poe regards the house as a "sentient" being. Roderick influences the house as much as the house influences him. He states the "evidence of the sentience...had molded the destinies of his family, and which [Roderick]...what he was" (Poe, 307). The dreariness of the house had no doubt affected Roderick's psyche. It is here that we further recognize the strong connection between Roderick and the house. In Dwelling in the Text (1991), Marilyn Chandler notes that the house not only mirrors Roderick's psyche, "it also reflects Roderick's physical state to such a degree that the building and the man seem united" (Chandler, 54). We do not fully recognize the anthropomorphic qualities of the Usher house until its collapse. Given Chandler's claim regarding the physical and emotional connection between Roderick and the house, we can only

assume that the destruction of the house visually represents the collapse or mental death of Roderick.

Watson and Webber's filmic interpretation of Poe's story visually shows the maze-like mind of the Usher house through experimental techniques that emulate German Expressionist films. Through these techniques, the mind of the house can be discernible through the confusing interior spaces. As previously mentioned, the evidence for the anthropomorphization of a house can be subtle or apparent. In *The Fall of the House of Usher* the house's anthropomorphic qualities are apparent. This house is the film's central character. Robert Wise's film, *The Haunting*, is another film that makes the house a central character. Hill House as we have already discussed, was "born" as an evil being. As the interior of the house can be both the mind and the "actions" of a being, one can assume that Hill House's hidden spaces are endless. The maze in the house is an attempt to thwart any possibility of the intruders creating identification and a sense of homeliness in the house. It can be both "possessed and possessing" (Curtis, 66) as long as it maintains "ownership" of itself.

As the possessor, Hill House attempts to possess its inhabited by its interior spaces. In Shirley Jackson's novel, Dr. Montague asks Eleanor, Theodora, and Luke, "Have you not wondered at our extreme difficulty in finding our way around? ... Time after time we choose the wrong doors, the room we want eludes us" (Jackson, 77). Dr. Montague further explains that the house is off-center. Every angle is slightly off and no floor is truly level. It was created to adapt to Hugh Crain's (the architect of Hill House's) psyche.

The mind of the house is complex but fairly easy to identify. Hidden spaces are harder to understand. Hill House actively attempts to make its tenants lost. This active confusion of space

begs the question, what is the house protecting by having such a complicated maze? The answer is the heart of the house. Every house is different. To Hill House, the heart resides in the nursery.

Although the book does well to emphasize the vastness and confusion of space, the 1963 film helps the audience visual it. There are a variety of scenes that display the house's hidden spaces. Although we do not have an architectural blueprint of the house that makes it possible for us to see the maze, we understand that the maze is present through the protagonist's actions and body language. The cinematography does well to emphasize the confusing space.

Director Robert Wise first gives the audience a sense of Hill House's confusing spaces when Eleanor and Theodora cannot find their way to the dining room. Insisting that they have checked every door and followed Dr. John Markways's instructions, the two remain lost until John opens the door for them. The screen space in this scene creates a sense of claustrophobia for the spectators. The more they panic, the more the space seems to shrink. The spaces of the house capitalize on the psyche and emotions of the characters.

To explain further, there are two prominent scenes that display this capitalization of a maze-like space. The first example occurs when Eleanor runs towards the nursery to find Mrs. Grace Markway. Earlier in the film, John Markway finds the nursery by accident, but in this scene, Eleanor finds the room without any trouble. How does she find the room so easily? The house possesses certain characters and allows them to navigate the house with a little more ease than others. In this case, Hill House wanted Eleanor to not only find the heart of the house's character, but to enter it alone as well.

Right after Eleanor enters the heart of the house comes a second prominent example of space. This can be seen in the climax of the film. Eleanor has succumbed to the house's desire to possess her. As she stands at the top of the stairs in the library, a room that primarily gave

Eleanor a sense of nausea and fear, a trap door opens and reveals the horrified face of the lost Mrs. Grace Markway (Lois Maxwell). The opening of this trap door confirms the seemingly infinite space of Hill House. Trap doors are important because they are the gateway to the secrets of the house. But in this film, one of the many secrets behind that trap door shuts just as quickly as it opens. The secret remains hidden and the trap door disappears.

The anthropomorphic characteristics of Hill House, as seen in its mazes and trap doors, introduce the question of possession and ownership. Who possesses whom? In horror films “the discourse of ownership is complex – haunted houses are possessed and possessing” (Curtis, 66). In this case Hill House appears to be possessed by the temporary inhabitants; however, the power of the house lies in its possession of the inhabited. Hill House desires Eleanor. As the narrative progresses, the audience senses the house’s power and possession over her. She recognizes this in her thoughts, noting, “I am disappearing inch by inch into this house” (Jackson, 149). For Eleanor, the mazes of Hill House slowly seduce and possess her. To the doctor, Luke, and Theodora, the spaces of this house are confusing, claustrophobic, and terrifying. There is a lot more to say when it comes to the hidden spaces of Hill House, but we must analyze other houses in order to gain a better understanding of the importance of hidden spaces as a characteristic for the house’s character.

In *The Haunting*, the audience is given a glimpse of the secret behind Hill House, but they cannot explore it. It maintains its sense of mystery and threat. Sonnenfeld’s *The Addams Family*, by contrast, reveals the secrets of the house by showing what is behind the trap doors and secret compartments of the house. When Uncle Fester finally gets past the secret bookcase, he discovers that the secrets of the house are revealed after a journey of pulling the correct chain, sliding down the passageway, and riding a gondola to the next passage. Gomez and Fester enter

their childhood playroom. Fester, clearly disappointed, stumbles upon the secret wall that leads to the treasure room. The editing of the film cuts from Fester's expression to the seemingly endless amount of gold. The secrets of the Addams Family are not secrets per se, but they are well known characteristics of the family that need to be protected by the house.

The journey to the secret treasure room and childhood playroom evokes a sense of limitless space in the house. It gives a spectator an impression of knowing the house. Instead of creating a feeling of suspense in these unknown spaces, the Addams house creates a sense of play, a sense of home. Occupied by secret compartments and trap doors, this house can be anthropomorphized as a fun house to its occupants, instead of a haunted house.

As stated earlier in this thesis, screen space cannot capture every corner and shadow of the character of the house. Instead, the screen space gives the audience hints to the house's "actions." We have already mentioned the haunted and funhouse space, but there is another space to consider. Let us consider the house occupying space in two parallel worlds. These spaces are visually the same, but the occupants utilize them differently. Alejandro Amenábar's 2001 film, *The Others* is film where the house is occupied in two worlds.

The Others is an allegorical attempt by a Spanish director to deal with the past. According to Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz in "The Horror of Allegory: The Others and its Contexts," Grace and her kids are stuck in a sort of limbo that is indicative of Spain's citizens being stuck in the country's history. From 1939 to 1975, Spain was under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco. Until his death, Franco led an oppressive government against the citizens of Spain. Since Franco's death in 1975, Spanish cinema has attempted to reconcile with the past by creating "a world where children, 'monsters,' and ghosts constantly interact" (Muñoz, 2008). In *The Others*, Grace's world is some kind of limbo, whereas the other world (where the ghosts

abide) is representative of Spain's past. As it is a violent past, the reconciliation of Spain's history is evident through the thematic elements of darkness, religion, and repression. We will find that these elements are present in the house's interior and are important to the characterization of the house as a whole.

Grace Stewart (Nicole Kidman) and her two children, Anne (Alakina Mann) and Nicholas (James Bentley) live in a large house on the Channel Islands during World War II. The exterior of house is surrounded by beautiful scenery, but the interior is dark. Anne and Nicholas both have a genetic condition where coming in contact with direct sunlight harms them. With this photosensitivity to light, Grace keeps the house dark and the rooms locked.

The darkness of the house hides the interior's spaces while the locked doors are meant to keep out the invading light and the invading spirits and spectators. The house can be representative of Grace's repressed psyche. Grace's power lies in her control of "isolation and religion" of Anne and Nicholas (Muñoz, 211). She constantly conceals what wants to be revealed and manipulates her children by mentally "threatening them with eternal damnation" (Muñoz, 213). In this case, hidden spaces are abundant because the light is an intrusion when the children are present. We only see sunlight permeating the house when the kids are absent. In this case the light is not an invader, but a welcome relief to Grace and the spectators. This light reveals the previously dark spaces of the interior. But what is revealed can be concealed just as quickly, because Grace controls the dark and the light. By controlling the light and dark, Grace actively represses any knowledge of the past. Throughout this film, we recognize that darkness is a theme that obscures the truth.

The hidden spaces are threatened and revealed when the other world invades Grace's world. She has built a home that protects her projection of her mind. We see evidence of her

mind in the opening scenes of the film when she gives Mrs. Bertha Mills (Fionnula Flanagan), Mr. Edmund Tuttle (Eric Sykes), and Lydia (Elaine Cassidy) a tour of the house. The tour leads to the music room, which is by far the brightest room of the house. On the walls are murals of a wooden boat sailing towards a single, rocky island. In the murals, the colors are rich and dark. This is in contrast to the deteriorating, white door, baseboards, and fireplace. On top of the fireplace are two dark red gas lanterns sitting on the edges. In the center are two blue and white printed urns with a miniature statue enclosed in a glass case in between. Behind the urns is a four-piece mirror framed in a dull gold. The primary object in the room is the grand piano. As Grace's children are not present in the room, the curtains are open, in which they reveal the



Figure 6: Still of Mrs. Mills, Lydia, & Mr. Tuttle in the Music Room. (*The Others*, Alejandro Amenábar, 2001).

piano's dark cherry wood composition.

The light in the music room displays elegant furnishings that suggest the Stewart's affluence. This is one of the few times we see a naturally illuminated room during the film. After the music room, Lydia and Mrs. Mills shut the

curtains in the following rooms and Grace illuminates the house by a gas lamp. As there is no electricity in the house, the interior spaces of the house are dark. Details of the rest of the house are only lit up when Grace walks by with the gas lamp. Otherwise it is full of darkness and shadows. Through this tour of the house, we get a glimpse of what Grace chooses to reveal and conceal in her mind.

Whereas Grace conceals the light, the parallel world invites it. In one scene, Nicholas and Anne wake up to missing curtains. Supposedly removed by the other world's occupants, Victor

(Alexander Vince) or his parents, the two worlds suddenly collide. The dark spaces that are prevalent in Grace's world are unacceptable in Victor's world. The spaces of their home are dangerous when revealed. These dark spaces hide the dark secret of tragic murder. We find out in the climax of the film the nature of these two worlds. Mrs. Bertha Mills (Fionnula Flanagan) reveals the mystery of the film by stating that "sometimes the world of the living gets mixed up with the world of the dead."

The hidden spaces in Grace's world reveals that they live in the world of the dead whereas Victor's world is the land of the living. The two worlds collide and meet during a séance performed by the Old Lady (Renée Asherson). Amenábar refrains from entering the world of the living until Grace and her children watch Victor and his family leave the house. With the reveal of the land of the living, Grace and her children's "healing process can begin" (Muñoz, 214) because they recognize their world and their haunted past.

As we live in Victor's world, we understand the concept of home. The spaces that we occupy in the home are projections of memories and the past. However, in the land of the dead, unless revealed by an outside source, the memories and projections of the past are repressed in the interior of the house. The dark, hidden spaces conceal the Stewart's violent past and the truth of the land of the living. This is a film that deals with the Stewart's (and Spain's) "reconciliation with the past" (Muñoz, 215). Those who live in our world can project memories and experiences into the spaces of many houses. But in the land of the dead, Grace and her children can only occupy one house. This is the house they died in. The spaces in their house may be flooded with light, and their past, unrepressed memories. But since the house is their only home in the land of the dead, they will ward off any future trespassers in the land of the living. The house is "alive"

in both worlds, but according to Grace, Anne, and Nicholas, “home is the beginning and the end, the ‘long’ or ‘last’ home” (Morse, 71). This is their home, hidden spaces and all.

Costuming

As we have already seen, the interior architectural spaces of a house can be representative of the house’s mind. It is a labyrinth with an infinite amount of space. A house, like one’s mind, can be a place where one can store secrets and memories. The size of a room, the angle of a ceiling, or the integrity of a wall are all important elements to consider when exploring the anthropomorphization of a house. However, when the inhabitants project memories and secrets onto the house, they project it onto objects such as furniture and decorations. The furnishings of a house can be a variety of objects such as: furniture, memorabilia such as photos, art, toys, curtains, antiques, etc.

One may ask how and why the furnishings of the house are applicable to the house as a character. Furniture and décor gives life to every room in the house. As every room is distinct, the décor is an aesthetic that designates a room as a bedroom, a living room, a study, etc. Without them, the household is an empty space. It is an empty mind. Every object whether it was bought or inherited, represents the personal aesthetic styles of the dweller. An object becomes a personal possession when it receives the inhabitant’s projections of his or her memories and secrets. This is what helps build the concept of home. It also gives each piece of décor and furniture more depth.

In film, we cannot know the meaning behind every knick-knack and possession. However, we can get an impression of the animation of a house by viewing the furnishings in the screen space as a collective. As a collective, the audience will gain a general understanding of the personality of the inhabitant and the house. The collections of furnishings are a conscious

decision of the director and art director. He or she carefully places each object onto the screen in order to enhance the mise-en-scène. Stanley Kubrick is particularly known for doing this in his film *The Shining*. For example, the subliminal message of this film addresses the genocide of the American Indians. Kubrick discreetly delivers this message to the audience by placing Indian artwork and Calumet baking soda cans in the background of the scene. Although the audience may be aware of the director and art director's involvement in the placement of a house's furnishings, they suspend their belief and assume that the placement was a conscious decision made by the inhabitant. Like the Calumet cans, the audience must take a closer look into the furnishings and objects in the frame in order to find the underlying message(s) of the film. Studying the placement and detail of a house's furniture and décor in a film's screen space is significant because it can both reveal and conceal the inhabitant's unconscious.

A house's décor is a conscious stylistic decision made by the inhabitant. It is an attempt to conceal an individual's true self. But, instead of concealing, it reveals one's secrets, memories, and desires in one's unconscious. This is where we discover the costuming of the house. Written and drawn in a cinematic style, Alison Bechdel's memoir and autobiography of her father, Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic (2006), is a perfect example of the unconscious being revealed in the furniture and décor of the house. Bechdel's father had a passion for redecorating the family house into period rooms. He attempted to hide his sexuality and shame behind the decorations and furniture. In the opening chapter, Bechdel writes, "His shame inhabited our house...[the] period interiors were expressly designed to conceal it" (20). It was through her father's conscious choice of décor that unconsciously revealed his secret sexuality and his shame for it. Although this is not a filmic example of the anthropomorphization of the house, it is important to consider

this house because Bechdel records the evidence of a house's character through her writing whereas a film visually implies the evidence in the screen space.

Bechdel's book gives us a literary example of the unconscious being revealed through a house's furnishings. For example, one particular panel in Bechdel's book shows her father's Victorian style library. Instead of describing the color of the library, Bechdel describes the textures. In her father's library, the author describes two large windows whose curtains are made of velvet and are held up by gilt curtain rods. The detail of these curtain rods are suggested as there is a centerpiece and perched bird on each end of the rod. This panel also describes "flocked" (Bechdel, 60) wallpaper with an impression of ornate patterns and designs. Four paintings, one of which appears flowery, hang on the walls. Don Quixote and Mephistopheles lamps light the room. Towards the left of the panel, an ottoman separates two plush, Victorian style chairs. To the right of the panel, a "leather-topped mahogany and brass-second empire desk" (60) is situated in front of the "massive walnut bookcase" (Bechdel, 61). This is the main attraction of the library. In the next couple of panels, we learn that the bookcase is full of books that her father has not read; however, it is a furnishing that sparks conversation with his favorite students and possible sexual partners. Here, Bechdel describes her father as "a nineteenth-century aristocrat" because of his Victorian styled room. In this room, the textures evoke our visual and cutaneous senses. In her essay "Home: Smell, Taste, Posture, Gleam," Margaret Morse cites Proust and his comparison of "the sense memory to an anchor at great depth" (68). To Bechdel, the library comes to "life" through her memory of feeling the texture and detail of the room's furnishings.

Revisiting the film, *The Haunting*, can make a useful comparison of Bechdel's library by examining its use of furnishings and recognizing how these contribute to the process of

anthropomorphization. We have already established the house as an evil character by studying the house's angles and hidden spaces. Hill House attempts to hide its true nature through its furnishings and décor in every room, with the exception of the nursery. Dr. Markway describes the nursery as the “cold, rotten heart” of Hill House. The furnishings of the nursery are plain and less extravagant than Eleanor's room. The design of the wallpaper is simple and flowery. In the foreground sits an empty birdcage. To the right is a large fireplace with ornate designs. The center of the room displays a small round table partially covered by a tablecloth. The most



Figure 7: Screenshot of the nursery. (*The Haunting*, Robert Wise, 1963).

notable furnishings in the nursery are the two wheelchairs with homemade blankets draped over. These wheelchairs depict Hugh Crain's child living in the nursery

from childhood till death. It also

evokes Eleanor's memories of her mother. In the background, a child or angel is painted on a panel screen in the shape of a church window. All around the room are tiny knick-knacks and books. Despite their simplicity, the furnishings are also more sinister. Repeatedly written on the archways of the room is the phrase, “Suffer little children.” This room and its furniture possess multiple memories, traumas, and secrets from multiple inhabitants. The desires of the house dwell here and as a result, the décor appears threatening in its simplicity, instead of elegant and innocent. The rest of the house's furnishings maintain its appearance of elegance and innocence. These two facades embody the house's costume.

As there are many furnishings to note in this film, there is one that particularly stands out among the rest. It is the motif of angelic statues. Often symbolized in modern religious and

Christian cultures, an angel is thought to have virtuous, innocent qualities. When Eleanor steps up to the doors of Hill House, she notices the house's knocker as that of an angel's face. It appears to be laughing with a wide grin. The laughing knocker suggests the house's innocence and childishness. Is the angel mocking her or is it attempting to hide its true personality?

The statue of St. Francis, or "Hugh Crain," provides another interesting example. St. Francis is not an angel. However, in Catholicism, a religious person who has performed a variety of good deeds can be deemed a saint after his or her death. Although St. Francis is not an angel, the religious characteristics of sainthood suggest innocence and goodness. This statue is seen twice in the film. Shot in a low angle, the statue occupies a lot of the screen space and commands its presence. We also get a sense of the grandiosity of the statue in an extreme long shot. St. Francis' left arm is extended and three women surround him. Every face of the statues wears an enigmatic smile that cannot be deciphered. Dr. Markway, Luke, Theo, and Eleanor anthropomorphize the statue by renaming St. Francis "Hugh Crain," and the three ladies, Crain's wife, his daughter, and Eleanor as the companion. Eleanor is goaded into "dancing" with Hugh Crain and thinks she has seen him move. Theo replies, "Haven't you noticed how nothing in this house seems to move, until you look away, and then you catch something out of the corner of your eye?" This line is key to *The Haunting* and to this thesis as it describes the elusiveness of seeing a house physically move. Giving this statue a personal name changes its enigmatic expression into a sense of wry, patient knowing. The statues and the house as a whole come "alive" in the statues' body language and expressions. Overall, the aura of goodness and innocence changes into an aura of foreboding danger and evil. Because of this statue, we recognize that the motifs of angelic and saintly statues unsuccessfully hide the house's evilness through its apparent goodness.

Aside from trying to hide the Hill House's evil nature and desires, there are also many instances where the décor holds an active gaze. Each statue in Hill House always engages in the act of watching its inhabitants. There are many instances where there is a medium close up shot of a statue subtly facing Eleanor. In almost every scene, something is "watching" her. The placement of a statue "staring" at Eleanor implies the mind of Hill House as active. Hill House is a complex being whose anthropomorphic qualities can be found in every furnishing, space, and floor of the house.

"The key themes of haunted house films is the past's power to disrupt the present" (Curtis, 84). With a theme as powerful as this, horror films must take great care in the details within each shot. In particular, the furnishings and décor of the house in *The Others* are significant because they occupy the world of the living and the world of the dead. As mentioned previously, the memories and desires in the land of the living are repressed in the land of the dead. They are "unaware of their condition" (Curtis, 133) until "the others" reveal their violent past to them.

In this film, the children suggest Grace's unstable mentality. In one scene, Grace's mind is questioned when she hears the running footsteps of a child upstairs. Thinking that it is Anne or Nicholas, she apprehensively exits her reading room and heads to the stairs. Finding Anne there, she asks if Nicholas is upstairs, and finds out from Anne that he is not. Anne further explains that it is the boy, Victor, who is running around and making the noise upstairs. Grace hears the ghostly dialogue and footsteps and chases these invading ghosts to an unused room. In this room, white sheets cover every piece of furniture and decoration. Every thing in this room looks like a ghost. Grace slowly and apprehensively walks through this room in search of the whispering invaders. These sheets imply the repression of memories and events in the other world, but to

Grace, they hide the invaders. In Housing Problems (2008), Susan Bernstein suggests that as the “past intrudes into the present, the repressed returns in a disguised form to haunt the present and bear witness to its lack of wholeness” (Bernstein, 98). These sheets are one of the many forms of repression that haunt Grace. In a sense, her past memories are the invaders because they are hidden under the sheets that symbolize her repression. It is here where we get a glimpse into the mind and memories of Grace’s unconscious. In fear from the ghostly hand that touches her, Grace tears off the first sheet, which unveils an angelic statue. She then uncovers a coat rack, a chair, and finally a mirror that displays the door closing behind her. This unrevealing of the sheets leads her to “discovering her historical past” and “understanding her family’s present death” (Muñoz, 215) in the next room, which is the attic. The anthropomorphic qualities of the house are displayed in the sheets and furniture. As the house mirrors the inhabitant, the revealing of the furniture can be a revealing of one’s memories.

The drapery in this film decides what shall be revealed and concealed. Although the costuming of the house in this film is subtler than *Hill House*, the curtains are the gatekeepers of the house’s mind. One can compare this to the gatekeeper in Franz Kafka’s short story, “Before the Law.” The curtains, like the gatekeeper, are the guardians of the conscious mind¹³. The curtains hide Grace’s unconscious that is, her memories, desires, and traumas from the other world. The furnishing only reveals what is necessary to the inhabitants and the audience. Like the white sheets, they must be moved in order to reveal the unconscious. As the presence of “the others” becomes known to Grace and her children, the drapery and curtains become a

¹³ In Lecture XIX of *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* Freud describes the watchman (aka the gatekeeper) as a censor that “examines the different mental impulses [or the unconscious]...and will not admit them into the [conscious] if they displease him” (366).

battleground of revealing and concealing in both worlds. This is evident towards the climax of the film when the children wake up to missing curtains.

As Grace is mourning the departure of her husband at the front gates of the house, Anne wakes up to a room filled with light. She screams. Grace hears her scream and runs towards the children's room. This long run suggests the distancing of Grace and her children. When Grace reaches the room, she discovers the missing curtains. She then shrouds her children in her robe and attempts to find a dark room. This becomes an impossible search as all of the curtains are missing. Grace's search for darkness is an escape from the monster of past (the light). It is in this scene that the past reveals itself to the present, or the children. History is the "monster to escape from, vanquish, eliminate and eventually overcome" (Muñoz, 215). The curtains were the gatekeepers that concealed their repressed history. With the curtains gone, the monster of their shared violent past must be dealt with. If we view the drapery as a gatekeeper of the mind, we can then recognize the evidence of the anthropomorphization of the house through the furnishings.

Significant use of furnishings to anthropomorphize a house can be found in films from other genres as well. The furnishings and décor in Orson Welles' 1941 film, *Citizen Kane*, for example, reveal some of the many anthropomorphic qualities of Kane's estate, Xanadu. Inside the great palace of Xanadu, Kane's possessions are limitless. Charles Foster Kane grew up as one of the wealthiest men in the world. He began his collection of priceless artifacts when he acquired the ownership of the *New York Inquirer*. At the beginning of the film in the documentary, *The News on the March*, the narrator describes Kane's possessions as "a collection of everything. So big it could never be catalogued or appraised. [It is] enough for ten museums, the loot of the world." In this beginning, we as the audience are given hints as to Kane's

possessions. However, Orson Welles does not reveal the extent of Kane's possessions until Kane marries Susan Alexander Kane (Dorothy Comingore).

In one particular scene, Kane walks through a large arch and enters a foyer or living room. As he enters the infinitely large room, the large scale of the arched entryway and three statues dwarfs Kane. These statues represent three different nations at the height of their power. One statue is Greek, another is Chinese, and the last one is Egyptian. The arches themselves are representative of the Roman era. Xanadu's possession of these statues unconsciously claims that the house may be more powerful and influential than these previous dominating governments.



Figure 8: Screenshot of Kane dwarfed by Xanadu.
(*Citizen Kane*, Orson Welles, 1941).

Kane walks confidently past them, as if he were royalty. When he reaches Susan, who is playing with puzzles, Kane stands in front of the enormous fireplace. The fireplace, Kane, a couple of statues, Susan, a chair and a table, occupies the space in this scene. They compliment the house's character with their

extremely detailed designs. The statues reflect eras of other empires. However, it is the grand fireplace that commands the presence of the frame. The fireplace appears to engulf Kane. It takes up more than half of the space on the screen. Although it is viewed by an extreme long shot, the audience can still identify the intricate details of the fireplace. The furnishings in Xanadu reflect the power of the house, but we will not have a full understanding of the grandiosity of Kane's possessions until his death.

At the end of the film, Kane's possessions are all brought into a room with seemingly infinite space, one similar to that where Susan played with her puzzles. Even after death, Kane's

possessions anthropomorphize the house through the sheer volume of their priceless objects. As Troutman puts it in her essay, “Inside Fear: Secret Places and Hidden Spaces in Dwellings,” “Consciously and unconsciously, we assign meaning to every surface, every cavity, visible and invisible until certain types of spaces become associated with specific feelings” (Troutman, 156). The furnishings that Kane had acquired are countless. To expand on Troutman’s statement, we project meaning onto the spaces of a house through acquired objects and artifacts. Kane’s possessions were so grand and innumerable that Kane couldn’t project meaning and feeling onto every object. There is one object, however, that serves as a key player to the movie and the house. This is Rosebud, Kane’s childhood sled. It is one of the few objects onto which Kane has projected his memory. Aside from Rosebud, the furnishings and priceless décor point to the isolation of a house as a character, and reinforce our sense of the isolation of Kane as a man.

The furnishings are important to the house as a character because they give life to the empty spaces of the interior. By filling a room with personal objects full of memories and desires, the mind of the house will exhibit a variety of complex, anthropomorphic qualities. The majority of this thesis has explored how the interior, the exterior, the door, and the furnishings of a house display evidence of its anthropomorphic qualities. By examining a variety of horror films, we have begun to understand the complexity of the house as a character. Now that we have explored the structure, the spaces, the mazes, and the threshold of the house, let us explore how all of these elements of the house create a personality.

Chapter 3: Personalities

When we look at the anthropomorphic evidence of the house as a whole, we can see the personality of the house. The idea of a house possessing a personality is central to the examination of the house as a character because it enables us to perceive each complex section of the house as a part of a complete being. The interior and exterior of a house “do not function as binary opposites but rather coarticulate each other” (Bernstein, 107). As Bernstein suggests, each unique section of the house compliments the other and builds the overall personality of the character. A house can embody a variety of personalities. In horror films, houses are given a bad reputation. Spectators associate the house with the nefarious actions of the antagonist. In this thesis, it has been proposed that the mind of the inhabitant correlates with the mind of the house. We have also explored the complexity of the mind of the house and its latent meanings and actions. That being said, this section of the thesis argues that the houses in horror films, including Hill House, are not as dangerous as they appear. In fact, with a little exploration, we may learn that they have the most innocent of personalities.

Hill House is a staple dwelling to any study of houses in film. Let us return to this house once more. Throughout this thesis, we have explored the interior, the exterior, and the furnishings of Hill House. As it is a complex being, the house has been established as being “born” evil. If we look at the evidence of the house’s anthropomorphization, Hill House appears to embody an evil personality. It begins with the exterior of the house. From the moment Eleanor saw Hill House, her mind told her to leave immediately. She likened the tall Victorian windows of the house to eyes that were watching her. This impression of evil starts before the house is entered. It gives the inhabitants and the spectators a sense that Hill House’s personality is menacing, malevolent. When we enter the interior of the house, the personality of the house

becomes more apparent. As the heart and mind of Hill House is located throughout the interior, the house's true personality is visible.

Hill House is a complex being. Its personality appears to be pure evil; however, let us instead consider the house as a seductress, or a femme fatale. By taking a deeper look into the "evil" actions of the house, we may recognize that these actions are intended to seduce Eleanor. From the beginning of the film, the audience subconsciously recognizes that Eleanor's weak psyche is already crumbling. She is a recluse who has no place to call home. From the moment she saw the house, the house began to seduce her. The eyes of the house may have been voyeuristically gazing at her. The windows and the statues were constantly watching her. She became the object of desire. This seduction is not a sexual seduction. It is a seduction of possession. The seduction of the house's gaze directly correlates to Eleanor's subconscious voyeuristic gaze of the house.

To the other inhabitants and Eleanor's conscious mind, the house's actions were a threat. Instead of being a threatening force, the house taunts the residents in its game of seduction. It actively separates the others from Eleanor. For example, Dr. Markway and Luke are led outside of the house when they catch sight of a dog wandering the house. With this separation, the house searched for Eleanor's location by banging loudly on the doors. Thinking that it was her dead mother, Eleanor wakes up to the house banging on the walls. Once she realizes where she is, Eleanor hurries to Theo's room. The banging starts at the end of the hallway and makes its way towards Theo's room. It also varies in noise. At times, the banging is loud and tremulous and at other times it sounds like someone is banging a cane against a hollow wall. Once it reaches the room, the banging momentarily stops. Hill House found that which it desired, Eleanor. It tries to get in by turning the medusa head doorknob. The camera follows the cracks of the door as if it

were the house looking for a way in. Theo and Eleanor both felt the presence of the house through the sensation of being cold. She gave away her location by screaming that the house itself should not enter the room. After banging on the door a few more times, a woman's maniacal laughter is heard and the sensation of warmth indicates the momentary departure of Hill House presence. It is significant that aside from Eleanor, Hill House does not physically come in contact with the house's inhabitants. By way of its mazelike structure and ghostly noises, the house confuses and taunts the inhabitants. It also does not physically kill Eleanor. She kills herself. The house lets the residents know that it is present by way of a cold sensation, as is suggested in the description of the scene examined earlier.

The seduction of Eleanor can be evident in two key scenes. The first scene is when Luke finds the writing on the wall. Written in chalk, it says, "Help Eleanor come home." Consciously, Eleanor responds by fear. The house is calling her by name. Her unconscious mind is starting to call her home. She becomes aware that the house's intention is not an evil one, but rather an act of seduction. In the novel, Eleanor recognizes the powerful seduction of the house in her thought: "I am disappearing inch by inch into this house, I am going apart a little bit at a time" (Jackson, 149).

This first scene reveals Hill House's desires. It wants Eleanor. In the second scene, the seduction of the house becomes more personal. As Eleanor's mental connection with the house becomes stronger, the house's possession of her grows stronger. This becomes evident when Eleanor dreams of the house banging on her door for the second time. In this dream, she holds Theo's hand in fear. She mentions to Theo that her hands are as cold as ice. Eleanor then wakes up on a daybed, with Theo nowhere nearby and an empty grasp. Who or what was holding her hand? The scene suggests that it was the hand of the house. This second act of seduction shows

the house's growing influence and possession of Eleanor. Her conscious psyche is crumbling whereas her unconscious mind is merging into the house.

The house's seduction is complete when Eleanor "joins" the house after her death. This is where the personality of the house reveals itself to be a femme fatale. Femme fatale's are beautiful yet dangerous and fatal. One's impression of the house is that of danger. It emits an aura of evil, but this aura is slightly masked by the elegant furnishings of the house. As previously discussed, the furnishings of the house hide the house's true character. Although the house does not directly kill Eleanor, it aids her death through its actions of seduction.

The seductions of the house are psychological. At the end of the film, Dr. Markway insists on Eleanor leaving due to her weakened mental state of being. Eleanor is in the car waiting for Luke to escort her. The scene cuts to a shot of the house. With two lights on, the house is watching her. "The house was waiting now...it was waiting for her" (Jackson, 178).



Figure 9: Screenshot of an exterior view of Hill House (*The Haunting*, Robert Wise, 1963).

Before Luke was able to get in the car, Eleanor sped off towards the gate. Her conscious mind had reverted to her unconscious self. However, the farther she got away from the house, the more her conscious mind took control. The house's

last act of seduction is through the unexpected presence of Mrs. Grace Markway. The moment Eleanor's conscious mind took control, a confused and lost Mrs. Markway runs into the path of Eleanor's speeding car. Eleanor reacts and swerves her car into a tree, where she dies. Mrs. Markway explains that the house led her outside and that is when she saw Eleanor. The house

finalized the act of seducing Eleanor to “come home” through the manipulation of the lost Mrs. Markway. With this deadly act of seduction, Eleanor joins Hill House.

Hill House, as a seductress, opens up the possibility of viewing houses in horror films from a new perspective. The appearance of a haunted house can be the manifest personality of the character. If we look deeper into the anthropomorphic elements of haunted houses, we notice that their true personalities are more innocent than they appear. For instance, the house that appears to be homely can be more deadly than the haunted house. Before we explore a house’s murderous personality, let us explore another kind of personality for the house.

The houses in *Citizen Kane* and *Days of Heaven* are examples of houses with personalities of isolation, but each is representative of a different form of isolation. Examining the distinct personalities of these two houses will broaden our understanding of the character of the house as a whole. Let us return for a moment to Kane’s estate, Xanadu, in Orson Welles’ film *Citizen Kane*. By briefly studying the furnishings of the house, we got a glimpse of Xanadu as a character. Xanadu is complex. The exterior of the house is intricate and grand. *The News on the March* describes the house as a “never finished, already decaying palace.” Not much is seen in the exterior except in the visual obituary of “Xanadu’s Landlord.” In the newsreel, the exteriors of Xanadu are captured in a montage. The towers and outer walls are presented in a low angle shot. The exterior walls of Xanadu display its intricate designs and details. Its purpose is to reflect Kublai Khan’s palace. The next scene in the montage displays Xanadu in an aerial shot. The narrator then describes the “ingredients” of Xanadu as a mixture of “one-hundred thousand trees and twenty thousand tons of marble.” Through the aerial and low angle shots, the grandiosity and power of the house can be asserted. Xanadu’s exterior displays the isolation of the house as a conscious choice. As Kane’s status rose and fell, the integrity and structure of the

house did the same. What was once revered became abandoned and forgotten. We see this at the end of the film when the last shot mirrors the opening shot of the film. This shot displays the gate with a “K” in the foreground of the frame whereas the palace stands in the background. The composition of the opening and closing shots are almost the same, except in the final shot smoke rises from chimneys of the residence. The smoke is a result of burning Kane’s personal, “worthless” possessions, but it can also be representative of the fall of an empire. At first, Xanadu’s isolation was envied and revered. It was an outer expression of wealth that turned the house into a personality whose isolation can be compared to that of a sick person in quarantine.



Figure 10: Screenshot of an exterior view of Xanadu (*Citizen Kane*, Orson Welles, 1941).

The interior of Xanadu better captures the house’s isolation. The interior of the house has grand empty spaces that are only filled by priceless treasures. Orson Welles beautifully captures the limitless interior spaces through his lighting techniques and deep focus shots. The interior, like the houses previously mentioned in this

thesis, correlates with Kane’s mind. The interior displays Kane’s ego. Take, for example, the scene where Susan leaves Kane. Kane is standing in Susan’s bedroom when she leaves. The spaces in her bedroom are filled with knick-knacks and trinkets. This is a room filled with Susan’s memories. The scene cuts to a deep focus shot of Susan’s departure through Kane’s point of view. In this shot, Xanadu appears empty and isolated. The sense of isolation grows when the darkness engulfs Susan completely. As this scene states Susan’s departure from Kane’s

life, it also displays Kane's isolation. In the next scene that is again shot in deep focus, Kane walks by a mirror that infinitely multiplies him. This suggests that Kane's only company is himself. The empty yet infinite spaces in this shot display the isolation of both Xanadu and Kane. The spaces in Xanadu and Kane's possession of treasures display his narcissism¹⁴. Kane's narcissism is visible through his treasures because they are meant to display and boost his wealth and power as a man. They can also remind Kane himself of his power as a man. As stated before, the house becomes an isolated personality through these impersonal objects, and limitless spaces. Like the exterior, the house's personality changes into a character whose personality becomes isolated and outcast from society.

The house in Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven* can also be representative of an isolated personality. However, this house is isolated because it is alone. Set in a landscape where wheat fields are limitless, the exterior of the farmer's (Sam Shephard) house appears to be both a deliverer and a captor. These two characteristics of the house are expressed through Bill's (Richard Gere) point of view. As the movie progresses, so does the house's personality and our understanding of it.

The Farmer's house is elusive. The film is told from the point of view of Linda (Linda Manz), Bill's little sister. For much of the film, the character of the house is determined by an outsider's point of view. This is typically Bill's perspective. The first time we get a glimpse of the interior of the house, it is viewed from an outsider's perspective. In this scene, the Farmer has already asked Bill, Abby, and Linda to stay and work for him after the harvest. Abby is churning butter in the foreground and the open door in the background reveals the kitchen. This is a small

¹⁴ Freud defines narcissism as a "fixation of the libido to the subject's own body and personality" (Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, 517). This can be interpreted as a fixation and love for the self.

glimpse into the house's personality, but we, the audience, are outsiders who must wait to enter the interior of the house at another time. As an outsider, we still see the house as a savior.

The first time we see the interior of the house is on the wedding night of Abby and the Farmer. The bedroom of the couple is elegant and homely. The design of the bed's headboard is beautifully engraved. Lace hangs down as a curtain on the outside of the bed. Covering the white sheets is a beautifully made lace blanket. In this shot, we get a sense of the homeliness of the house. However, this is not through the perspective of Bill. The house does not become an isolated being until he enters the house on Abby and the Farmer's honeymoon.

When Bill first enters the house, the interior is simple and homely. The sunlight brightens the hallway. It warms the room by bringing out the rich colors of the red rug, the green plant, the rich brown chair, and the tan walls. As Bill gets to the living room, we notice the warm, rich colors once more. The most notable piece of furniture is the red couch in the living room. This couch occupies the center spaces of the room. Its purpose is to suggest the affluence of the Farmer. To the right of the couch is a piano that holds miniature statues and a cushioned chair with a pink diamond design. To the left of the couch sits two chairs and a small plane. The lighting in the living room enhances the warm, rich brown and red colors of the furniture that occupies this space. This gives a sense of welcome and homeliness to any outsider.

After Bill entry, the house's character changes into a character of isolation. Curtis mentions that "isolation [is] always metaphorically present, even in relatively humble houses" (Curtis, 66). The interior of the house shows the isolation of the farmer through its furnishings. Every piece of furniture and décor in the house are aesthetically welcoming to the eye, but they also unconsciously display the house's solitude. As many things are handcrafted, one's memories are projected onto that personal object. The farmer is surrounded by memories of the past. As

previously mentioned, Edward Hirsch describes the house's inability to stand its own isolation. This isolation is almost unbearable. Every piece of furniture and architectural structure displays the isolation in the farmer's house. This is also reflected in *Xanadu*. These two distinct forms of an isolated character show that as the primary protagonist changes, so does the characterization of the house. *Xanadu* and the Farmer's residence are primary examples of the evolution of the house as a character, each within the context of its respective film. Each is a dynamic character.

Thus far, we have seen that the house can embody two personalities: one of which is isolated, the other a seductress. One more must be considered, namely, the most dangerous house, the house as murderer. As previously discussed, haunted houses are more innocent than they appear. It is the house that looks innocent that is in fact the most dangerous. Such a house can be found in Victor Fleming's 1939 classic, *The Wizard of Oz*.

The two worlds displayed in this film are representative of Dorothy's (Judy Garland) mind. In her reality, Dorothy is a young woman who does not receive much attention at her Auntie Em (Clara Blandick) and Uncle Henry's (Charley Grapewin) farm. Her dog Toto is also about to be taken away. Her reality is in direct opposition to the land of Oz because that is a land where Dorothy's dreams and desires come true.

The house in *The Wizard of Oz* has but a brief presence in the film. It is a dwelling that exists in both Dorothy's conscious and unconscious mind. As it is a farmhouse in Kansas set in the 1930's, the house does not have any garish or excessive qualities. It is, rather a plain one-story house made of wood. We get a good glimpse at the exterior of the house during the tornado sequence. When Dorothy arrives at the house, Auntie Em, Uncle Henry, Hunk, Zeke, and Hickory have just locked themselves in the storm cellar. As Dorothy enters the house, the white picket fence is caving in and the screen door flies off. As the beginning of the film is shot in

sepia, we get a sense of the exterior through texture instead of color. The windows are large and box-like. The back porch of the house has two thin pieces of wood that pass off as pillars holding up the extended roof. Its roof itself has a small chimney and covers the house's interior by its roof tile. The porch itself is small and made of wood, but it does not have a fence. Nor is it a raised porch. Outside of the porch appears to be couple of stools and a trough or metal bathtub turned upside down. At first glance, the outer personality of the house is deceptive in its simple architecture. Next to the back porch, the cellar is located on the outside. In this film, the cellar mirrors the protection of the conscious self. It can be a protection of reality from intruding forces. When Dorothy is looking for her family, the house's interior is briefly shown. The house appears to have a few rooms. In this brief sequence where she looks for Auntie Em, we recognize a few furnishings in the house, such as a rocking chair, a stove, a portrait, a kettle, and a butter churner. Although it is not much, these few visible items that occupy the house give us a small sense into the simple, rural furnishings of the house. These simple furnishings allude to the innocence of the house; yet, their minimal presence does not overshadow the house's purpose. For Dorothy, the house is a shell that protects her from physical and mental destructive forces and intruders.

With such a short presence in the film, the anthropomorphization of the house is evident in its purpose. Its purpose is to protect Dorothy. In reality, the farmhouse is a protector. It protects her from the destructive forces that were carried in the tornado. However, the lines between reality and fantasy become blurred in the tornado when the window knocks Dorothy unconscious. This window allows Dorothy to enter her unconscious. Through a superimposition of an unconscious Dorothy and the whirling tornado, the scene cuts to an exterior shot of house ascending in the tornado. The transformation from reality to fantasy can be seen in the characters

passing by in the tornado. Dorothy's family passes by in a comical way. Auntie Em is knitting, a cow flies by, and both Hunk and Zeke are humorously paddling through the tornado in a boat. The transformation to her fantasy is completed when Dorothy envisions Miss Gulch (Margaret Hamilton) riding a bike who then transforms into the Wicked Witch of the West riding her broom. The house as a guardian and protector then exits the tornado and descends to her fantasy, the land of Oz. In this world, it protects Dorothy's mind by becoming a murderer.

In Oz, the people in her life metamorphose into fantastical characters that influence her decisions in her unconscious. When the house is wildly descending into her unconscious fantasy, the house had a chance to land anywhere. Instead it lands on the Wicked Witch of the East and instantly kills her. Not much is known about the witch except that she is the sister of the Wicked Witch of the West and she wore magic ruby slippers. Why did the house fall on this witch? What was the house protecting?

We must explore the possibility that that the house became a murderer because its primary purpose is to protect Dorothy's mind. The house projects a personality of innocence and simplicity. Yet it shows its capabilities as a danger and as a guardian in this lone action. Margaret Morse's essay "Home: Smell, Taste, Posture, Glean" mentions that in order for a runaway (Dorothy) to find home, "there must be a disequilibrium of some kind; the hero must leave home before anything in the story can happen" (Morse, 70). Dorothy had already run away from home in her reality; but as Morse suggests, Dorothy had to leave her house of reality in order to start her journey home. The disequilibrium for Dorothy is the house's killing of the Wicked Witch of the East. The house could have landed anywhere, but as Dorothy's guardian, the house became a murderer in order to give Dorothy a hero's journey. She had to overcome the

Wicked Witch of the West in order to find her way home. If the house landed elsewhere, Dorothy may have never found her way back to her conscious mind, back to home.

Conclusion

To re-iterate the 1st century philosopher Pliny the Elder's phrase, "Home is where the heart is." Home, as we have learned, is an imaginary place constructed by the inhabitant's fears, desires, and memories. Through a person's memories and psyche, the spaces in the home are filled with meaning and content. As many associate the concept of home with a house, the dweller's heart correlates to the house. A house by itself is a static work of architecture with empty spaces. In film, the house is often categorized as a setting. It is a simple and inanimate residence. However, "it is not enough to consider the house as an object...the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, [and] the house allows one to dream in peace" (Bachelard, 3,6). To disregard the house as a character in film degrades the complexity of a house. The house seems "alive" because it possesses an inhabitant's daydreams, memories, and fears.

This thesis has opened up the doors to understanding the house as a character, but there is still much to learn about the house and its significance in film as a whole. By exploring a wide range of films from different genres, this thesis has explored the possibility of the anthropomorphic qualities of a house. Essential films such as *The Haunting*, *The Others*, and *The Wizard of Oz* provide evidence of the ways in which houses in cinema become complex characters in their own right. In order to understand the different kinds of roles houses play, this thesis has analyzed the interior, the threshold, the costuming, and the exterior of a variety of cinematic dwellings. Each "part" of the house establishes the personality of the character.

By exploring the anthropomorphic qualities of the house, we determine that the physicality of the house is seen in the exterior. The exterior of every house is distinct. As seen in Edgar Allen Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" and in the literary and filmic

version of *The Haunting of Hill House*, the house's exterior gives the audience and the primary inhabitant a first impression of its personality. First impressions can be misleading. We see this in Terrence Malick's film *Days of Heaven*. What appears to be a savior in a landscape of wheat is really an isolated being. Edward Hopper's painting "House by the Railroad" and Edward Hirsch's poem "Edward Hopper and the House by the Railroad" illuminates this interpretation of the anthropomorphization of the Farmer's house. Hopper's painting of the Victorian house also helps us understand, by contrast, *The Addams Family* house and Norman Bates' house in *Psycho*. Although they may have similar architecture, we determine that the character and personality of houses in these two films are different from the Farmer's isolated house in Malick's film.

This thesis has also examined the interior of the house. By drawing upon the literature studying the phenomenology of a house and through a psychoanalytic analysis of the house, this thesis has interpreted the interior as the mind of each film's central character(s). The spaces that are hidden and revealed in a film shot are analogous to the maze-like mind of the character. Gaston Bachelard's book, *The Poetics of Space*, helps us understand the house's attic and basement and their given relationship to the house's conscious and unconscious minds. The attics and basements analyzed in *The Haunting*, *Psycho*, and *The Old Dark House* give us a strong sense of each house's conceptualization of mind.

We have also determined that the house's interior in horror and other films is rendered anthropomorphic or animate through the placement of furniture and décor in the empty spaces of the house. The inhabitant projects his or her memories onto the furnishings of the house, and adds to the house's dynamism. Without these furnishings and the sense memories linked to them, a house is only an empty and static work of architecture, devoid of costume.

In the films explored in this thesis, each section of the house has uniquely animate qualities. When looking at these sections individually, it can be hard to grasp each house's full anthropomorphic qualities. However, when looking at these elements as a whole, we find that they work together to create an entire being. The house in film may not be "alive" per se, but in each film explored herein, the house exudes its presence in a vital and compelling way that adds to our understanding of each film as a whole.

This returns us, finally, to the concept of home. Houses as characters can also maintain a sense of home for the primary inhabitants of the house. For the Stewarts, their house is a place to defend. It is the only thing that remains from their time in the world of the living. For Eleanor, Hill House was ultimately the one place that she could call home, because it was the only place where she felt like she belonged. Lastly, Dorothy's house is an unhappy home until she embarks on a journey that helps her realize the importance of home as the place from which she came, and hoped to return. To reiterate the famous line by L. Frank Baum, "There is no place like home." Home may not be the safest or happiest place, but it is nonetheless a place where the inhabitant (onscreen or off-screen) can project his or her memories, dreams, and fears. Its significance for the psyche of characters and viewers alike is rich with conscious and unconscious meanings.

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