

Giving up the Ghost: The Haunting of Modern Culture

Abstracts

Dr María del Pilar Blanco (Department of Spanish and Latin American, UCL)

Presence, Absence, and Simultaneity: The Haunted Fictions of Henry James and Juan Rulfo

When we think of haunted sites – and the haunted house in particular – we begin to invoke an excessive space, a site that has lived too much and is cluttered with past experience. But what about houses that are empty, abandoned, and that risk being classified as outside of experience, or un-experienced? In this paper, I will be looking at Henry James and Juan Rulfo, two different writers from distinct American geographies, whose works offer contrasting notions of the relationship between exile and belonging. I will focus specifically on the theme of hauntedness as contiguous with exile, whether self-imposed or forced. In exile, we are faced with the (im)possibility of the return. In other words, the very idea of return always haunts the concept of exile, and in turn, within the experience of exile we find an activation of the romance of reoccupation. Henry James's fantasy of return – 'The Jolly Corner' (1908) – has been read in terms of the uncanny, the queering of the self, and has even been inserted into a historiography of psychic research. Here, I will explore how James takes us through a stylistic journey that, seen as a whole, constitutes the romance of return, or the fantasies evoked by the subject returning from self-imposed exile. From the opening of Mexican Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955) we are introduced to a ghost town that has come to be so through a series of desertions. How can an author convey that sense of emptiness, and what do the ghosts of that place enunciate? In both these authors' explorations of the play between presence and absence, actuality is brought into dramatic tension with the spectral, thus opening the question of whether haunting is in fact coexistent with the immediacy of experiencing the present.

David Constantine

Poet, editor and translator **David Constantine** has published ten collections of poetry including *Something for the Ghosts* (2002, shortlisted for the Whitbread Poetry Prize), *Collected Poems* (2004) and *Nine Fathom Deep* (2009). He is a translator of Hölderlin (his *Selected Poems* won the European Poetry Translation Prize in 1996), Brecht, Goethe, Kleist, Michaux and Jaccottet. In 2003 his translation of Hans Magnus Enzensberger's *Lighter than Air* won The Corneliu M. Popescu Prize for European Poetry in Translation. He is also author of a novel, *Davies* and a biography of Sir William Hamilton, along with three collections of short stories, of which *The Shieling* (2009) was shortlisted for the 2010 Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award.

His 'Tea at the Midland' won the BBC National Short Story Award, 2010. He lives in Oxford, where he edits *Modern Poetry in Translation* with his wife Helen.

From a review of *Something for the Ghosts*: David Constantine's sixth collection of poetry addresses those staple poetic themes, death and memory, through the metaphor of the ghost. These are less poems about hauntings and more haunting poems, characterised by loose rhythms and slippery syntax which resist simple reading, demanding instead the reader's full involvement in the process of sense-making. All poetry, the book suggests, is a kind of ghosting, a deliberate use of language haunted by other meanings and other usages, so that we find disturbingly familiar echoes and returns in the words we read, and catch glimpses of shapes and forms which refuse to reveal themselves fully to vision. These poems are populated by the dead, the silent, the voiceless and the absent, who are given a kind of voice in the sense that each poem offers itself up as a medium which allows itself to be spoken through. Constantine works with a language of indirection to try to articulate, and give speech to, his own ghosts, and those of modern memory.

Prof. Colin Davis (Department of French, RHUL)

The Political Ghost: Haunting, Revolution, and the Return of the Dead in Louis Malle's *Milou en mai* (1989)

The characteristic ambivalence of haunting is that the intrusion of the past into the present can be both comforting and disabling. The haunted person may welcome the return of the dead as a sign that what is gone is not lost whilst being simultaneously denied the possibility of moving on into a creative future. This can be understood in terms of individual psychology, producing effects such as Freudian melancholia or Abraham and Torok's crypt, whereby the lost object is preserved within the surviving, grieving subject. Haunting can also be understood as a political phenomenon. The ghost of Hamlet's father was calling for the overthrow of a king as well as for private vengeance. This article examines the appearance of the ghost of a dead mother in Louis Malle's film *Milou en mai*, which is set against the backdrop of the events of May 1968. Apparently heralding the failure of social and aesthetic emancipation, the ghost signals the persistence of a past which will not pass. But in this case at least it does not preclude all openness to the future. In Hamlet's phrase repeatedly quoted by Derrida, time is 'out of joint'. In the haunted medium of film, the ghost epitomises a suspension of the reigning norms of temporality and causality, announcing a moment where something new might be created, something encapsulated in the dream of emancipation and a better social order.

Mark Fisher (University of East London and Goldsmiths College)

***not really now not any more*: Hauntological Place and Non-time**

'not really now not any more' – graffito that inspired Alan Garner's *Red Shift*

The ethnologist Marc Augé famously makes a distinction between what he called anthropological places and the non-places of ‘circulation, consumption and communication’ which increasingly dominate the late capitalist world: airports, retail parks, hotels. But it is necessary to extend Augé’s typology by considering a third type of place: the hauntological place. The hauntological place could be a site of former anthropological significance which has now fallen into dereliction, its symbolic regime perhaps irretrievably decayed – think of the eerie unintelligibility of the stones at Avebury or of the impassive statues on Easter Island. Or it could be sited beneath a busy anthropological place, where artefacts – relics, perhaps, of an older symbolic regime - lie buried, awaiting the potentiating contact of contemporary human beings. Alternatively, the hauntological place could be a space which has always resisted coding by any symbolic system. Such spaces can still be said to belong to the symbolic system of the anthropological place in the negative sense that they mark its limits: they are no man’s lands, dead zones, blasted heaths, which you dread straying into for fear of encountering what Reza Negarestani calls ‘Inorganic Demons’. ‘Pulp-horror, archaic science fiction and the darker aspects of folklore’, Negarestani writes in *Cyclonopedia*, ‘share a preoccupation with exhumation of or confrontation with ancient super-weapons categorized as Inorganic Demons or xenolithic artifacts. These relics or artifacts are generally depicted in the shape of objects made of inorganic materials (stone, metal, bones, souls, ashes, etc.). Autonomous, sentient and independent of human will, their existence is characterized by their forsaken status, their immemorial slumber and their provocatively exquisite forms. ... Inorganic demons are parasitic by nature, they... generate their effects out of the human host, whether as an individual, an ethnicity, a society or an entire civilization’.

The fiction of MR James, Nigel Kneale, David Rudkin and Alan Garner is obsessed with the encounter with such “inorganic demons” in specific (hauntological) landscapes – landscapes stained by time, or where time can only be experienced as broken, as a fatal repetition. All of these writers had their work adapted by British television between the 1950s and the 1970s. These television works now constitute a kind of double hauntology – their preoccupation with the spectral is doubled by their own status as revenants of a lost popular modernism. This lecture will explore how these fictions’ explorations of hauntological landscape connects with the early 21st century ‘hauntological moment’: a moment of temporal crisis or ‘dyschronia’ in which time becomes as featureless as Augé’s non-places.

Dr Kirstin Gwyer (Merton College, Oxford)

Ghostwriters: the Spectre of the Holocaust in Contemporary Jewish Writing

Menachem Rosensaft, founding chairman of the International Network of Children of Jewish Survivors, has said: ‘Many if not most children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors live with ghosts. We are haunted much in the way a cemetery is haunted. We bear within us the shadows and echoes of an anguished dying we never experienced or witnessed.’ As Rosensaft implies, the enduringly haunting quality of the Holocaust is the product as much of its absence as of its presence in the present: of its refusal to reappear to, or be conjured up by, those who come after it. What haunts

its descendants, and with them perhaps the rest of the Western hemisphere, is not (just) the ghosts of the deceased but the impossibility of gaining even belated access to their story. What remains for, and is transmitted to, later generations – the experiences, told and untold, of those who survived the Holocaust – is no more accessible: the secrets encrypted in the ‘haunted cemetery’ of the descendants are indecipherable to them.

What this paper aims to explore is how alongside, and even encroaching on, these prevailing poststructuralist and psychoanalytically-informed readings of the ghost as an absent-present figure of deferred meaning, temporal disjunction and (traumatic) repetition, there seems to be a recent sense in Holocaust literature, and certainly literary studies, that the ghosts of the past are becoming readable again. What is more, where they cannot ‘decode’, contemporary authors may simply create, acting in turn as mediums, interpreters, ghostwriters, even inventors, as they seek to track down the ghosts that refuse to haunt them.

Prof. Dina Khapaeva (Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies)

Spectres of Stalinism in the Post-Soviet Gothic

I will present a typology of post-Soviet spectres and the undead to show the link between the fascination with them and the societal unwillingness to face the responsibility for the terror, as well as the moral and social consequences that it entails. I will also try to demonstrate how the notion of humanity is challenged in post-Soviet fiction and films. I argue that current fascination with the undead and ghosts – both in Russia and worldwide – is linked to the rising cult of death in contemporary culture and to a shift of interest from humans to undead nonhuman monsters, which is typical for defining current aesthetics.

Prof. Karen Leeder (New College, Oxford)

Ghosts of Revolution: The Haunting of the Berlin Republic

This paper addresses the ways in which the Berlin Republic is a haunted space. Despite the pervasive rhetoric of new beginnings associated with the unification of Germany, German culture since 1990 has seen a paradigm shift from looking forwards to looking backwards. This is in part the result of the wholesale collapse of those certainties which had sustained the post-war political consensus as well as people’s everyday lives since 1945. But it is not simply a product of the ‘Requiem for Communism’ noted by Charity Scribner (2003). We are also witnessing a much more significant renegotiation of history, and especially modernity, which involves re-evaluating that which has been suppressed, overwritten or silenced in the interests of progress, and has manifested itself in a striking repertoire of phantoms, spectres, vampires, ghosts and the undead in contemporary German culture. However, this project diagnoses the widespread appearance of spectres as the symptom of a profound and ongoing crisis, as un-authorised histories destabilise the present. In the context of post-1989 Germany as a whole this speaks especially to the agitated legacy

of the Fascist past (emerging especially in the family novel). But it also has an acute and overriding significance in addressing the death and afterlife of the GDR – a state founded on the spectre of communism (recalling the first sentence of the *Communist Manifesto*: ‘A spectre is haunting Europe’) – but now also a spectre itself: one which haunts the imagination of a culture that tries, almost obsessively, to remember, re-imagine or reconstruct it.

Sarah Sparkes (IGRS, London)

Guests, Hosts and Ghosts and How to Make Them: The *GHost Project* – Visual Art and Creative, Interdisciplinary Research

I shall look at ghosts and the paranormal in contemporary visual art by drawing on the *GHost Project* and its exploration of the paranormal through video art, performance, installation and creative, interdisciplinary research. Drawing on the *GHost* exhibitions and performances as well as the ‘Hostings’, I would aim to provide some answers to questions such as what makes an artwork haunted, can one speak of an aesthetics of haunting and how does one create a haunting or a haunted space in visual art? I would give examples of how artistic practice converges with the investigation methods of paranormal research and how new technologies are appropriated as ghostly mediums.

<http://www.host-a-ghost.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.ghostsofsenatehouse.blogspot.com/>

Prof. Julian Wolfreys (Loughborough University)

Memory to Come Or, Towards a Poetics of the Spectral

One of modernity’s haunting problems is that of representation. Representation is a limit, which, in the name of any politics, always assumes the representable as such, and with that, a spectator, witness or audience whose role is governed tacitly by a social contract, grounded, in turn, by the naïve belief of objectivity and the real. Thus, as others have argued, all representation is to greater or lesser degrees, recuperative: we are written back into, or at least made complicit with, the very political position that representation would figure and make available to critique. In recent years, as Derrida has brought to our attention, such categories – objectivity, the real, representation itself – have been problematized by teletechnologies, virtual mediatic interventions, and a vast array of ‘ghost machines’. One result is that the supposed spectator has become more idle, passive, than ever. It is thus more necessary than ever to think the difference – perhaps a spectral play – that takes place between the recuperative poetics of representation and the singular poetics of enunciation. The latter opens a space through gesture, expression, that is, in its singularity, impossible to represent. It is thus my aim, to begin to think this spacing, in terms of a poetics of the spectral, where that which is at the limit of representation, or possibly beyond it (how would we know?) might be thought if not directly, then in terms, on the one hand, of memory, the souvenir, and, on the other, that which is to come, rather than any programmable future as such. Beginning with a return to Derrida, but taking into

account recent work by Jacques Rancière on poetics and politics, the figure of the phenomenological 'given' as articulated by Jean-Luc Marion, and perhaps admitting to the revenant spectres of Benjamin, I will explore what is available to us as a poetics of the spectral.