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Locating haunting: a ghost-hunter's guide

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Recent work in human geography seems to support Roger Luckhurst's (2002) claim that the humanities and social sciences are undergoing a 'spectral turn'. This paper is intended as a contribution to this 'turn' and to assist those who might be interested in investigating haunting. It begins by discussing the meaning and value of ideas of haunting, identifying a number of ways in which it makes analysis productively hesitant. Second, since hauntings usually involve attempts to represent the unrepresentable, we would like to offer a practical guide for locating these awkward moments of hesitancy. Drawing upon a number of examples from films, literature and life we will discuss some of the ways in which ghosts may be made manifest, textually and materially. We will conclude by suggesting that in being hesitant and embracing indeterminacy we might open up new and potentially productive apprehensions of haunted spaces and the enchanting energetics that are particular to them.

Keywords: enchantment • ghosts • ghost stories • haunting • spiritualism

This paper is offered as something of a practical guide to those interested in the geographies of haunting and spectrality. As Steve Pile points out, 'To be alert to the ghost – and the presence of ghosts – requires a particular kind of seeing' and with this in mind we hope to provide some encouragement, and a few useful intellectual resources, to investigators of haunting.[1] We will do this through an examination of two different kinds of materials associated with the spectral: ghost stories and spiritualist séances. What unites our engagement with these very different kinds of evidence is that both struggle with the problem of representing the unrepresentable, and that they do this in what we would argue are ultimately highly productive ways. Ghosts are hard to get to grips with, and thinking about the efforts of other ghost-hunters, both real and imagined, to bear witness to haunting offers a few clues about the kinds of ways we might go about materializing the spectral.

It is obvious that geographers and others are increasingly interested in ghosts and haunting – a sign of what Roger Luckhurst has described as a 'spectral turn' in the humanities and social sciences.[2] Of course there are different ways in which we might engage with ghosts. Within literary and cultural studies there has been a tendency to see them as an index of something else: for example, Rosemary Jackson writes that fantasy *expresses* a culture's fears and taboos, both in the sense of representing them and in expelling them when they threaten its stability.[3] Robert Mighall points out the flaws in this 'anxiety model' in his discussion of critical analyses of the vampire: 'a tautology operates which insists that the vampire is erotic, and because it is monstrous this testifies to sexual anxieties which the critic then identifies'.[4]

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In this kind of analysis, ghosts are mysteries that must be solved, although they are not significant in their own right.

Other writers have made more of an effort to get to grips with haunting. Stimulated in part by Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*, and by work on affective and emotional senses of attachment to place (fear, guilt, loss, rage), this work has sought to make productive sense of the absent, mysterious and terrifying aspects of modern life. For Avery Gordon, the ghost can represent a past tragedy or injustice, and our encounter with it might lead to a new engagement with the present. The disinterring of the colonial past in countries like Australia is a good example of this kind of productive encounter with the spectres of past traumas, making the taken-for-granted world uncanny. The refugee or exile remembering home, or returning only to find it changed forever is similarly haunted. We might also be spooked by the traces of those who have gone before us not because we sense a tragedy or loss but precisely because we know so little about them. Both houses and second-hand clothing can appear to be haunted by those who used to inhabit them, according to Daniel Miller, Nicky Gregson, Kate Brooks and Louise Crewe. Cities appear to be exemplary haunted sites, as Pile makes clear, because they are anonymous but highly charged spaces. Nigel Thrift suggests that we are haunted by 'apparitions which are the unintended consequences of the complexity of modern cities, cities in which multiple time-spaces are being produced, which overlap, interact, and interfere'. Finally, John Wylie, through a reading of the work of W. G. Sebald via Derrida, argues that haunting as a motif displaces notions of place as dwelling and authentic identity.[5]

This complexity can sometimes leave us uncertain as to what is going on in cities and place. And uncertainty can also be identified as a key element of fantastic fictions, including ghost stories. Lucie Armitt's reading of Tzvetan Todorov's work on the fantastic suggests that texts like these can encourage a hesitant response in the reader, who struggles to decide whether the account is true or not. The fantastic might force us 'to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described'.[6] Of course for some critics this hesitation is simply an expression of the indeterminacy of literature and language; again the ghost is in danger of being reduced to an expression of something else, in this case a post-structuralist critique of mimetic theories of representation. And while ghosts can be very useful in this way, they might still possess something else besides. So we are happier with the idea of ghosts as traces of the unknown or unknowable than as a kind of puzzle, standing in for something else, something more important. Like Pile, we think that 'ghosts are not coherent', that they can mean many things at once: 'just like an element in a dream, the figure of the ghost is overdetermined – pointing in many different directions at once'.[7]

We would also like to suggest that ghosts can be enchanting. Jane Bennett argues that despite appearances, modern life contains sites where we may be enchanted, surprised, charmed and disturbed. We can learn to look for these sites and to encourage this response in ourselves; more importantly she argues that 'to some small but irreducible extent, one must be enamored with existence and occasionally even enchanted in the face of it in order to be capable of donating some of one's own scarce mortal resources to the service of others'. In other words, we need to feel this way because it encourages us to engage with the world; 'it is too hard to love a disenchanted world'. Can looking for ghosts help us to do this?[8]

In order to explore this question we offer a guide to ghost-hunting through a discussion of two different ways in which ghosts manifest themselves or are made manifest: first, the textual and second, the material. In both examples we concentrate on previous attempts to investigate hauntings. We then conclude with a brief discussion of the value of taking a hesitant approach to ghost-hunting. Here we argue that this hesitancy retains both the particularity of spectral spaces and the enchanting force that ghosts perform.

Textual manifestations

We want to begin by suggesting that those interested in haunting and spectrality might look in one of the places where these manifestations tend to be quite common: the ghost story. This section of the paper therefore presents three ghost stories to consider how haunting works in these kinds of narratives. The first concerns a tragic, vengeful ghost; in the second a suburban house is invaded by something uncanny; and in the last a mysterious object haunts two experts. The first has something to say about the attachment of haunting to people and places, and points out that we cease to fear ghosts when we understand their reasons for haunting. The second and third examples develop this to show how disclosure and detection are central to many tales of haunting, though a troubling or enchanting excess often remains.

The first of our three stories is a recent Spanish/Mexican horror film.[9] *El espinazo del diablo* (*The devil's backbone*) is set in an isolated, and haunted, Spanish boy's school during the Civil War. During the opening sequence Casares, one of the teachers, asks:

> What is a ghost? A tragedy condemned to repeat itself time and again? An instant of pain, perhaps. Something dead which still seems to be alive. An emotion suspended in time. Like a blurred photograph. Like an insect trapped in amber.

Casares is not alone in thinking this way. Both fiction makers and real ghost-hunters have suggested that places and objects might somehow hold or store emotions, memories or even consciousness. Nigel Kneale's BBC TV drama *The stone tapes* suggests that powerful emotions might be recorded in the stones of old buildings.[10] In the real world, 'Earth Mysteries' writers and parapsychologists like T. C. Lethbridge, Paul Devereux and Don Robins have suggested that 'a kind of psychic record may be imprinted on a location, perhaps because of some violence or strong emotion generated there'.[11] Natural materials might also carry these 'recordings' even when they are no longer part of a landscape: Robins suggested that the apparition that seemed to haunt a pair of mysterious sculptures known as the 'Hexham Heads' was somehow encoded into their crystalline structure.[12] Irrespective of the likelihood of this, haunting often represents a return of some sort, with ghosts coming back to attend to unfinished business, or because the wrongs done to them have not been redressed.

This is certainly true of *El espinazo del diablo*. In the 'making-of' documentary the director says 'I think a ghost is something waiting to happen. So… that's what the film is about… things waiting to happen'.[13] So the plot is partly about vengeance, the working out of the consequences of a past tragedy, with the inevitability of this creating some of the tension even before we know anything about past events. Pile suggests that ghosts disrupt temporality because they represent 'an undisclosed injustice – a death, a haunting: a tragedy for which there is not yet a history.'[14]

But we would want to suggest that a ghost does not have to be 'a tragedy condemned to repeat itself time and again', 'an insect trapped in amber'. That suggests that ghosts are following a script, recordings playing mechanically. If a ghost is something waiting to happen, then it might well be something existing in the virtual, a source of energies and possibilities. Instead of replaying its tragedy every time, each haunting might offer something new, a form of 'spiral' – rather than bare – repetition, in the Deleuzian terms discussed by Bennett. While the ghost may haunt the same places in the same way, each haunting is different because it concerns different observers, and produces different relationships between ghost and observers; 'each turn of the spiral enters into a new and distinctive assemblage'. And of course the ghost in *El espinazo del diablo* does eventually manage to make things happen.[15]

So while the film suggests that the ghost is 'something dead that appears to be alive', we prefer to think of it as *something alive that appears to be dead*. Disturbing ghosts, bringing them back to some sort of life, is one of the aims of this paper. And it has important implications for the politics of haunting, because ghost stories can be strangely comforting. This is clearly the case for *El espinazo del diablo*. It is a very scary film, at least at first, but something happens as we learn more about the ghost and its motives. We become sympathetic towards it, and it ceases to scare us as much as it did when we first encountered it. In fact knowing why a ghost haunts is one way of loosening its hold over us. Once it can be narrated it ceases to be a mystery or threat. Which is why we want to sound a note of caution about investigations of haunting: they might exorcise our object away altogether. We want to think about how this might happen and suggest an alternative.

Strangely enough, perhaps, ghost and detective stories can be quite similar, and this resemblance is not simply a formal one. If haunting is associated with uncertainty, hesitancy, and the uncanny, then it also represents an opportunity to understand and come to terms with mystery. Noel Carroll notes that 'The point of the horror genre… is to exhibit, disclose, and manifest that which is, putatively in principle, unknown and unknowable'. As a consequence horror narratives revolve around the point of *disclosure*, of 'rendering the unknown known'.[16] The dramatic appearance of the phantom, or the discovery of an unknown presence are examples of this kind of disclosure. This process of disclosure is often played out in the text as 'a conflict of interpretations' and 'a deliberation about this conflict in terms of a ratiocination, the drama of proof, and the play of competing hypotheses'.[17] The story's characters, and its reader, debate the likelihood or unlikelihood of the haunting. Hesitancy is followed by disclosure, discussion, and explanation. The monster becomes visible; the ghost is laid to rest.

Similarly, Todorov pointed out that detective fictions involve two narratives: the first is the narrative of detection and the second is the narrative of the mystery itself.[18] The story of the detective's investigation of a mystery uncovers and pieces together another, earlier narrative – what really happened and 'whodunnit'. A cliché of this kind of story has the detective gather the protagonists together in order to reconstruct the events and present the solution. Ghost stories often possess a similar double narrative; a haunting or mysterious set of events is explained, at least partially, when a past event comes to light. Yet making sense of haunting denies it the enchanting charge that probably provoked our interest in it in the first place.

So we want to suggest that in our investigations into haunting we might usefully take heed of our fictional predecessors, but that we should also stop short of making ghosts make

sense. In order to do this we want to consider two brief examples from the golden age of the British ghost story.

One of the best examples of the similarity between ghost stories and detection comes from the work of Algernon Blackwood (1869–1951), the author of horrific and fantastic fiction. Blackwood's Dr Silence, a 'psychic doctor', featured in five extremely popular tales in *John Silence – physician extraordinary* (1908) and one in *Day and night stories* (1917). Seemingly modelled on Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, Silence discusses cases with his clients in his consulting room, visits the sites of cases, and is meticulous in his reasoned investigations. However, he is also well versed in the occult, reflecting Blackwood's own interest in psychic research and occultism.

The first of the Silence stories, 'A psychical invasion', concerns a haunted house in Putney, in London's suburbs. Its tenant has apparently taken an 'overdose' of cannabis and this has somehow encouraged a psychic presence to invade his home. Dr Silence sets out to investigate the house. The tenant has not actually seen the entity; it remains thoroughly immaterial and invisible, though its impossible presence terrifies him. Silence realizes that while he may not be able to sense this entity himself he might be able to witness the haunting *indirectly*, using a cat and a dog as 'barometers'.[19]

> He believed (and had already made curious experiments to prove it) that animals were more often, and more truly, clairvoyant than human beings. Many of them, he felt convinced, possessed powers of perception far superior to that mere keenness of the senses common to all dwellers in the wilds where the senses grow specially alert. Cats, in particular, he believed, were almost continuously conscious of a larger field of vision, too detailed even for a photographic camera, and quite beyond the reach of normal human organs. He had, further, observed that while dogs were usually terrified in the presence of such phenomena, cats on the other hand were soothed and satisfied. He selected his animals, therefore, with wisdom so that they might afford a differing test, each in its own way, and that one should not merely communicate its own excitement to the other. He took a dog and a cat.[20]

Silence's careful, one might almost say scientific, use of these animal barometers helps him find and repel this psychic invader. In fact it is reminiscent of the subtle (though inanimate) devices employed by investigators like Harry Price (who we will return to later), and in fact Dr Robert Morris, a Kentucky parapsychologist, apparently noted the different reactions of a dog, a cat, a rattlesnake and a rat in his investigation of a haunted house in the 1960s.[21] But Silence is also interested in the history of the house; as with most haunted houses, from the classic Gothic stories to Danny Miller's Edwardian semi, it is previous inhabitants who haunt us. At the end of the story Silence reveals something of the evil history of the woman who used to live there; this is a good example of the twin narrative as the earlier story that Silence has recovered makes sense of the haunted house mystery.

This is also obvious in our third story, 'The red hand' (1897) by Arthur Machen (1863–1947). The story concerns the investigation of a murder in Clerkenwell, London, by two friends who propose rival explanations for its bizarre nature. Phillips, a sober ethnologist and archaeologist, cannot believe that there is anything supernatural about the case at all, while Dyson, a writer who shares Machen's own mysticism, is prepared to consider the most outré explanations. Between them they play out Carroll's 'drama of proof', as so many other fictional duos have done when faced with the fantastic, from the protagonists of H. P. Lovecraft's 'The

unnamable' to *The X-Files*' Mulder and Scully.[22] Despite Dyson's willingness to entertain the prospect that 'there are sacraments of evil as well as good amongst us' he solves the case by the application of rational deduction.[23] Phillips, on the other hand, is hampered by his refusal to believe that 'the troglodyte and the lake-dweller… may very probably be lurking in our midst', and can only follow Dyson's investigation much as Watson follows Holmes.[24] Dyson makes the mystery make sense, just as Dr Silence does. And when the case is finally solved we are presented with a story that makes some sense of what has gone before, just as Silence is able to recover the truth of the haunting by reconstructing an earlier story.

But there is something excessive about the presences haunting London in both of these stories. The animals that Silence uses as his barometers only provide hints as to the nature of the mysterious entity: the cat rubs itself against the legs of the invisible intruder, which shows us that it is there without letting us know what it is.[25] This is of course a classic example of what Rosemary Jackson describes as 'non-signification' in horror fictions.[26] Roger Salomon refers to this as the 'problem of witnessing': 'how to naturalize such narrative enough to make it credible without limiting the implications of issues raised and thus explaining away the horror'.[27] Horror and fantastic fictions are full of such almost-presences, from the invisible 'Damned Thing' in Ambrose Bierce's story of the same name (1893), whose movements can only be detected as it disturbs long grass or blots out the stars in the night sky, to E. F Benson's 'The chippendale mirror' (1915), which replays the scene of a murder over and over again, and the Invisible Man of both H. G. Wells' novel (1897) and James Whale's film (1933).[28] At one point in *El espinazo del diablo* the ghost is invisible but leaves wet footprints behind it as it walks. There are similar limits to Silence's scientific approach to the haunting; he becomes worried because the dog appears to be terrified, though he admits to himself 'that it was really impossible for him to gauge the animal's sensations properly at all'.[29] In other words it proves quite difficult to calibrate his barometers.

Similarly, in Machen's story Dyson is troubled by a clue he discovers, a stone known as the 'black heaven', carved with 'inscrutable' characters. When Phillips offers to try to make sense of these glyphs, Dyson says: 'take the thing away with you and make what you can of it. It has begun to haunt me; I feel as if I had gazed too long into the eyes of the Sphinx'. Phillips also fails to decipher the symbols (despite having formulated 'thirty-seven rules for the solution of inscriptions') and agrees, 'I yearn to be rid of this small square of blackish stone. It has given me an ill week'. Something about the stone haunts them both, and it seems that this is only partly because the inscription remains unsolvable.[30] And the two friends are shown another disturbing object at the end of the story, when they have identified the murderer, who presents it to explain something of his motives. We are told that 'Phillips and Dyson cried out together in horror at the revolting obscenity of the thing', which is then not described further.[31] These mysterious objects do not become straightforwardly meaningful despite the solving of the murder; in fact the uncovering of the original story simply opens up another, and much more profound, mystery. This tension is obvious from Machen's other stories, as S. T. Joshi points out:

> one could easily imagine Machen writing an accomplished detective novel; but of course he would never have done so, for the notion of resolving all loose ends, and thereby emphasising the rational intellect's understanding of the world, was anathema to Machen, the religious mystic.[32]

This tension between investigation and mystery seems a rather fruitful one, and is also visible in historical attempts to manifest ghosts. We turn now to our second set of examples.

Material manifestations

So far we have explored the ways in which ghosts and haunting are disclosed and made sense of through the narratives of supernatural and horror fiction. In this section we wish to further explore this process of disclosure and, in particular, the excess of ghostly manifestations. Here we dwell upon the interaction between the ghostly immateriality and the spectral transformation of different objects, bodies and spatialities. Indeed, one of the ways in which geographers have sought to understand the spectrality of space and contribute to broader debates on spectrality, is through the ghostly rendering of space, objects and embodiment. For example, Pile explores how various architectures of the city are haunted by multiple phantoms: as he puts it, '[t]he spirits of the dead become a part of the very fabric of the city, woven into its physicality, such that the sidewalks and stairwells become spectral, attached in some way, to the spirits of the spirits – like a shadow cast by the body of reality'.[33] Here it is the very substance and the concreteness of the city and urban space which bring forth ghosts and haunting. As such the intertwining of the material with the immaterial registers a disruption or dislocation of the ordinariness of different spatialities. The involuntary and often unsettling recollections which occur in such spaces involve the transformation and destabilization of the very mundanity of materially ordered space. In other words, haunted spaces concern the disruption of the normalized affordances of objects (i.e. how they enable and constrain 'taken-for-granted' modes of action and practice) and their attendant spatialities: mundane practices with and towards objects are shifted and the habitualized sense we make of objects is disrupted such that the configuration of materiality, space and bodies show up and are enabled in new and unexpected ways.[34] Arguably, then what we are dealing with when a space becomes haunted is the disruption or dislocation of normalized configurations and affordances of materiality, embodiment and space.

We would like to explore this argument further through the example of spiritualism. Originating primarily in the mid-nineteenth century, spiritualism was a transatlantic movement that held it was possible to contact and communicate with the spirits of the dead through the central space of the séance.[35] Here the medium, skilled in communicating with the deceased, plus other believers and invited guests gathered round (usually) a table, linked hands and waited for signs of contact. The manner of this contact came in different forms. Beginning with simple knocks or 'raps' on the séance table, as the nineteenth century progressed 'spirit lights' were witnessed, mediums 'apported' different objects from 'the other side' (often petals of flowers) and began to materialize body parts such as spirits hands, faces and limbs, reaching its ultimate conclusion in fully embodied materializations (first performed in 1873 with the manifestation of 'Katie King' by the medium Florence Cook). The following example, under the mediumship of Evan Powell, is typical of séance reports:

> We had spirit lights, the Direct Voice, and movement of objects. My face was brushed by spirit drapery, and a flower was placed in my hand… A small table was lifted out of the cabinet and pressed against a lady sitter, whose handbag was taken from her and placed on the table.[36]

Most common to the performance of the séance was the registering of spirit communication through the movement of different objects. In particular, spiritualism became known by the short-hand of 'table-tipping', whereby the table round which sitters gathered moved, rocked and tilted to reveal the presence and record the message of the spirits. Here, under the mediumship of J. R. M Squire, a Dr Robertson records such phenomena:

> The raps on the dining table were loud, frequent and intelligent, i.e. they responded to the wish of the medium, imitating his raps, rapping the numbers requested and giving responses by the alphabet to questions put…The dining table, a large heavy oak table, 5 feet by 7 feet, was frequently lifted up and moved about the room, and this not by any of the four persons present. Again, a writing table on which the four witnesses seated themselves was twice tilted over with a strange unearthly facility, and they landed on the floor.[37]

And from 'an inquirer' William Overton, reporting on a séance held in Bethnal Green, London, in 1868:

> The room was darkened only about a minute when the raps commenced. During the evening, the large loo table, weighing about 100 lbs, was lifted from the floor several feet, and, I think, would have gone up to the ceiling if there had not been a gas chandelier in the way. The table was held suspended for some seconds at a time, waving to and fro as if it had been only a feather, and the hands of two present were forcibly pulled off by what appeared to them the hand of a giant.[38]

In the séance therefore, and the spiritualist movement more generally, the ghost is registered and disclosed through the transportation of objects and material artefacts. Indeed, this materialization is one which shifts and alters the affordance of an object in that the normal possibilities for action engendered by a table are disrupted by its registering of the ghost. Furthermore, this movement and physical shifting of objects is one that makes different the normalized spatiality of things: registering the ghostly displaces and dislocates material geographies. This disruption occurs precisely through the disordering of how space and its object relations come to be known through practice. This making strange of the affordance of the object and its attendant spatiality is arguably unsettling: no longer in their place, no longer offering their normal course of practicable action, dislocated ghostly materialities disrupt our senses of space. In other words, the familiar object-spaces that endure through habitual practice are made strange and mysterious. Ghosts and spirits lend what we like to deem an *uncanny affordance* to material geographies. When the normalized and familiar possibilities for action proffered by an object are made strange and unfamiliar our practiced senses of space are disrupted and refigured, displaced and dislocated.

The uncanny affordances of displaced materialities offer up different and contingent affectual registers. These disorientating modes of affect are transversal in that different lines of sensation transect and cross in often contingent ways through the bodies of the sitters and the relations between objects and the participants. This transversal affect emerges out of the different relations between bodies, objects and the sensual apprehension of this relational emergence.[39] One of the key loci in this affective relationality was the comportment and body of the medium: often entering a trance-like state in order to become the conduit for the spirits to communicate, the medium enacted a form of what can be deemed spectral embodiment. This, as many spiritualist commentators pointed out, was a corporeality that required not only a particular sensitivity (gendered and patriarchal assumptions meant that women

were often deemed the best and most appropriate mediums), but also a degree of discipline and calibration of the body. As one mid-Victorian commentator explains:

> The gift of mediumship requires developing by constant sitting, in the same way that a musical or an artistic talent requires to be cultivated; and a person can therefore no more expect to be a proficient instrumentalist without previous practice.[40]

Indeed not all those who attempted this corporeal practice achieved it, as we can see in this example from a Mr T. M. Simkiss reporting to the London Dialectical Society in 1873:

> I am not myself a medium in the common acceptation of the term, though I have tried to become one. I have tried in a variety of ways to see, hear or feel spirits myself…by sitting alone in the dead of night for many hours in a room that was used for some years exclusively for the purposes of spirits and mediums…but with no apparent effect.[41]

Thus the ability to disclose the ghostly and perform this mode of spectral embodiment relied upon skill and somewhat intangible characteristics of 'the gift' or 'sensitivity'. As such, mediumship was a contingent performance, not always successfully enacted, and derived through a varying and mysterious assemblage of practice, affect and corporeality.

The haunted space of the séance derives from the uncanny affordance of materialities *and* the manifestation of the ghost through transformed affect and embodiment. These processes unsettle sedimented practices of materiality, embodiment and the expectations of how certain spaces show up. This unsettling or making unfamiliar of the familiar is at the heart of Freudian notions of the uncanny wherein the sudden and disruptive return of repressed and unconscious anxieties to consciousness, produces sensations of dread, fear and even horror. Placing aside the spectral notion of the unconscious upon which this theory is based we would argue that the space of the séance, and its uncanny affordances and modes of spectral embodiment, do not always produce affectual registers of dread and fear.[42] Certainly in the early days of the spiritualist movement these sorts of sensations would have been uncanny to the degree they produced horror in the sitters. Here an anonymous 'Honourable Lady' reports to the London Dialectical Society concerning such sensations, enacted in a séance under the famous medium, Daniel Dunglas Home:

> We were seated in a partially darkened room. We first heard raps and then saw a human figure at the window. It entered and several other figures came trooping after it. One of them waved its hands. The atmosphere became fearfully cold. A figure which I recognised as that of a deceased relative, came behind my chair, leaned over me, and brushed lightly my hair with its hand. It seemed about eight feet high…But the most extraordinary thing of all was the laughter. One of us said something and all the spirits laughed with joy. The sound was indescribably strange, and it appeared to us as it came from the ground.[43]

Yet as the movement progressed and séances became more commonplace, horror and fear of the strange often gave way to sensations of reassurance, comfort and even delight. For spiritualists the defamiliarization of a dislocated table engendered belief in the reality of the other world (often circumscribed as a utopian 'elsewhere' of emancipation and freedom for all) and offered hope and guarantee that loved-ones had passed safely. In a period where the spatial relations of distance, proximity and bodily boundaries were being opened up by the uncanny possibilities of the telegraph, communication between the 'two worlds' through

the supernatural displacement of, and 'raps' on, tables became a source of both opportunity and warmth. As Jeffrey Sconce puts it, 'each time a medium manifested occult telepresence, be it through rappings or spirit voices, planchette readings or automatic writing, she [sic] provided indexical evidence of a social stage continually displaced and deferred that held the promise of a final paradise.'[44]

Sometimes unsettling in their intensity, but often culminating in feelings of assurance and even delight and humour, séances could be orientating or disorientating, or both. Thus séances were always contingent spaces caught up in different charged orientations towards belief or incredulity, mystery or rational explanation. However, consistently emerging through the event of the sèance, for both spiritualists and other sitters, were a series of imponderable moments and instants of undecidability. This lack of knowability of what or who was rearticulating the familiar spatial and practical fields of both objects and bodies gave these spectral geographies their particular resonance. As one nineteenth-century commentator describes, 'as the operators are invisible, it is impossible to say *how* they effect this object.'[45] Castle eloquently expresses the undecidability of spectrality when referring to the phantasmagoria shows of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries:

> The subliminal power of the phantasmagoria lay in the fact that it induced in the spectator a kind of maddening, irrational perception: one might believe ghosts to be illusions, present 'in the minds-eye' alone, but one experienced them here as real entities, existing outside of the boundary of the psyche. The overall effect was unsettling – like seeing a real ghost.[46]

The 'not-quite-there-ness' of spectrality, manifested in shifting objects and bodies, renders space unfamiliar and unsettling. The unsettling nature of this repositioning emerges through lack of security of what actually causes the transformation. For some sitters the unsettling moment of hesitation was resolved and gave way to different explanations: for many enrolled into the spiritualist movement the disruption of certainty became expressions of the 'reality' or 'truth' of the spirit world, while for others hesitancy was transformed into the need to expose fraudulent mediums or disclose the supposed dysfunctional medical bases for mediumship.[47] As such both sets of séance goers seek to represent the séance as expressions of something else and resolve their hesitancy in the face of undecidability. Yet in dispelling hesitancy through decidability, we would argue, is to dispel the particular instants of excessive resonance that orchestrate spectral geographies. Indeed, it is this sense of being caught up in a surge of indeterminacy which gives spectral space its particular tone and its potentiality – two characteristics of haunted space we wish to explore as we conclude.

Conclusions: hesitancy, spectrality and enchanted analyses

One of the defining characteristics of the history of ghosts and haunting has been the many attempts to dissipate undecidability and make the unfamiliarity of spectrality familiar again. In various ways these represent attempts to control and bring fully into representation the absent-presence of ghosts. In addition to those examples already detailed in this paper, there

are a number of other attempts at determination worth briefly mentioning here. First, in the séance, it became customary to tie the medium to their seat (usually in a curtained cabinet) with string, rope and sometimes electrical wire in an attempt to remove the possibility of fraud and thus to prove (or not) the 'reality' of the contact and manifestations:

> It should be mentioned that Evan Powell [the medium] had been securely tied with rope, all the knots covered with sealing wax, and his thumbs tied with cotton. At the close all the fixtures were found entirely unaltered.[48]

For spiritualists, scientists and de-frauders (of which there were many) these controls, as well as those where tables and rooms were checked for hidden means of trickery, represent attempts to dictate and ultimately decide the truth of spiritualism. Second, ghost-hunting has often been achieved through various technologies. For the famous ghost-hunter Harry Price these technologies consisted of cameras, sealants for doors and windows and torches. For Baron Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, who spent five years investigating mediums, spirits and ectoplasm, evidence of the ghostly or otherwise was performed in a 'psychic laboratory':

> Schrenck-Notzing initially outfitted his studio with five cameras including two stereoscopic cameras, and wired them to photograph an event simultaneously. He later added four more cameras, raising the number to nine and ensuring that his studio contained a large audience of mechanical eyewitnesses.[49]

For the contemporary ghost-hunter these kits can include EMF meters, hydro thermometers and motion alarms. Such technologies can be seen as means to measure and ultimately to decide upon the causes of spectrality and the spaces they produce. Third, since the nineteenth century spectrality has been reduced to a product of the mind and the imagination: ghosts, it seems, are the result of an over-active imagination, or worse, the consequence of mental instability or various neuroses. This investigative path seeks certainty through a rationalist 'internalization of the spectral. For as long as the external world is populated by spirits – whether benign or maleficent – the mind remains unconscious of itself, focused elsewhere, and unable to assert either its autonomy or its creative claim on the world', which 'as if through a kind of epistemological recoil [results] in the spectral nature of our own thoughts – to figure imaginative activity itself, paradoxically, as a kind of ghost seeing.'[50]

These various diagnostics and means of surveillance wrestle with the ghost and haunting in order to find assurance in 'this-worldly' zones of intelligibility. In short, ghosts are seen here as *really* something else. Yet as often as these attempts revealed fraudulent mediums, deception, particular environmental conditions and mental 'disturbance', they also pointed towards undecidability and imponderability. Thus the technologies afforded an agency in the recording and making manifest of the ghostly still leave us in a state of uncertainty in that these devices can only trace the ghostly. For example, during Schrenck-Notzing's investigations camera flashes would make ecotoplasm disappear and thus, 'the technology that secured a lasting material record of the ghostly manifestation also eradicated the physical phenomena itself, reducing any material evidence of spirit activity to a mechanical tracing.'[51] From Machen's 'black heaven' stone to the frisson of uncertainty of a displaced table, anomalies and imponderables abound in the different forms of materialization and manifestation we have discussed in this paper. The various means by which ghosts make their presence known – displaced objects, certain affectual registers or different textual narratives – are always troubled by absences and

often uncertain causation. Even under the strictest test conditions, spectral geographies are shadowy and excessive affairs, never fixable, always caught between explanatory criteria.

It seems therefore there is always an excess to the ghost and the spaces they haunt. Spectrality and haunting is impossible to exorcise through the securing categories that have often been created for them. Ghosts and spectres appear and disappear, are both absent and present. They are incarnations which hover between secure accounting mechanisms: as Laclau states, '[t]he very essence [of spectrality] is to be found in this undecidability between flesh and spirit: it is not pure body – for in that case there would be no spectrality at all; but it is not pure spirit either – for the passage to the flesh is crucial'.[52] Inexplicability means that spectral geographies always produce and are produced through a degree of hesitancy. As such, haunted spaces and ghostly geographies often engender an interpretive position caught or frozen between a worldly or familiar explanation of events *and* a purely supernatural explanation of situations. This uncertainty and hesitancy is, we would argue, the specificity and particularity of spectral geographies. Indeed, the interpretative criteria we use to understand spectral geographies must likewise be hesitant. Ghosts can never be *fully* understood, represented or brought into representation.

How haunted spaces and ghostly geographies emerge through a specific refusal of classification is something we would like to see retained and explored in the so-called 'spectral turn'. Put differently, the specificity of locating haunting relies upon the particularity of ghosts *as ghosts* and the peculiar spaces assembled through and with them. Consequently, in taking up ghostly or hauntological understanding of spatiality there is a danger that some of the specificity of ghosts and spirit manifestation is lost. These dangers involve losing the particularity of spectral geographies to what Luckhurst calls 'the very generalized economy of haunting … [which] routinize[s] specificity beneath a general discourse regarding the spooky'.[53] Thus, retaining the particular and peculiar hesitancy of spectral geographies, manifested in various mysterious geographies, uncanny affordances, spectral corporealities and unresolved narratives, is and can be a very productive step forward.

We would argue that undecidability and hesitancy while at first a seemingly unproductive analytical manoeuvre, is full of potentiality for new ways of apprehending haunted spaces and spectrality more broadly. Take for example Tim Edensor's work on the industrial ruins of factories and warehouses: as he explores and moves through these marginal sites, ghosts enliven the assemblages of materiality, embodiment and space encountered producing myriad involuntary memories of childhood, ex-workers, habitualized factory routine and obsolescent pop culture.[54] These insubstantial, uncertain and indeterminate absent-presences disrupt and often lend little sense to space, yet they allow for different and contingent speculations and ways of thinking to emerge. Ghost herein 'motivate us to celebrate the mysterious, heterogeneous sensations and surprising associations of the past in the present and encourage a wanton speculation towards objects and places, encouraging contingent rather than causal connections to be made between remembered events, spaces, objects and places'.[55] This is precisely the power of ghosts and the contingent potentiality of haunted spaces to enchant, to make us wonder and in so doing usher forth new interpretative frameworks, to open up our epistemologies or even our ontologies in fantastic, strange and sometimes baffling ways: 'By definition, having proof means that otherworldly experiences are brought into the concrete world of clarity and legibility. But when this happens they are in danger of losing their mystery and power to make us wonder.'[56] Indeterminacy and contingency are both

consistent characteristics of ghosts and haunting and a potentiality for orchestrating new ways of thinking and apprehensions.[57]

Indeed the way these imponderable spaces show up as distinctive haunted assemblages means that we can never be prescriptive: the peculiarity of the enchanting charge of haunted space involves manifold resonances and energies for our thinking and practices which are impossible to set out in advance. As such we would argue for the enchantment of ghosts to be witnessed and apprehended in their particular and peculiar spaces: ghosts as they are made manifest through specific spatialized narratives and spatial assemblages of practice, embodiment and materiality, and we must be attendant to this geographical particularity rather than producing generalized analyses of the spooky. Perhaps the ghost then, in its spatial multiplicity and indeterminacy, could make us (and our apprehensions) more alive despite, or even because of, its association with absence and death. Hesitancy and imponderability, excess and ineffability – going ghost hunting offers the potential and opportunity for newly charged lines of thought and enchanted modes of apprehension in the social sciences and humanities.

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Notes

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