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RESEARCH ARTICLE



## Becoming Hauntologists: A New Model for Critical-Creative Heritage Practice

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### ABSTRACT

This essay explores the generative potential of a particular concept – Derrida’s notion of “hauntology” – across a wide range of heritage domains. In doing so it addresses one of the central concerns of critical heritage, namely what it means to *practice* criticality and what the social and political implications of this process might be. The paper begins by examining the broad points of intersection between heritage and hauntology, before moving on to consider three more defined areas of thematic overlap. These encompass the ghosts of place, spectral aesthetics, and recent ideas emerging from the environmental humanities around more-than-human hauntings. While there is considerable crossover between these fields, each builds upon a different set of texts and micro case studies to show the distinctive ways in which Derrida’s concept has been taken up and reconfigured in diverse disciplinary contexts. The paper concludes with a summary of the possible implications for adopting (and adapting) hauntology as a mode of *doing* critical heritage.

### KEYWORDS

Critical heritage; hauntology; ghosts; aesthetics; more-than-human; critical-creative practice; Derrida; environmental humanities

### Heritage and Hauntology: The No Longer and the Not Yet

In 2017 the BBC invited author Hilary Mantel to deliver the Reith Lectures – one of the highest profile events on the public intellectual calendar in Britain. Perhaps most famous for her historical fiction, including the *Wolf Hall* series, Mantel’s chosen theme for the lectures – “Resurrection” – engaged directly with many of the longstanding concerns of heritage studies. How can the powerful presence of the past in contemporary social life be accounted for? What is memory beyond subjective personal experience? To what extent might fiction and art help us to comprehend real historical events? Mantel’s starting point for investigating these questions revolved around meeting the dead. “In imagination,” she argued, we often

chase the dead, shouting, ‘Come back!’ We may suspect that the voices we hear are an echo of our own, and the movement we see is our own shadow. But we sense the dead have a vital force still – they have something to tell us, something we need to understand. Using fiction and drama, we try to gain that understanding. I don’t claim we can hear the past or see it. But I say we can listen and look. There are techniques we can use. (2017)

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This essay is an attempt to outline one such technique for scholars and practitioners of critical heritage. The term practitioner is used to underline a specific interest in critical heritage as an applied art, with all the questions of process, method, materials and creativity this outlook implies. Where Mantel focuses on the historical novel as a tool for speaking with the dead, heritage practice offers a much broader range of opportunities for rethinking our relationship to the past, from conservation work and exhibition making to urban planning and archaeological site management. As well as being key areas of training and expertise, such practices are imaginative and creative endeavors, constantly weaving together past, present and future in a ceaseless transformation of what has gone before. Despite the often-rigid frameworks that define heritage as a discipline and industry, these fields are always open to critical re-imagining. This is an urgent task that demands closer co-operation between theorists and practitioners across various heritage domains. As Mantel (2017) makes clear, history is both “a set of stories” and “a set of skills [...] we need to pass on the stories, but also impart the skills to hack the stories apart and make new ones.”

Building on this challenge, this paper aims to re-purpose Jacques Derrida’s concept of “hauntology” to document and stimulate new modes of *doing* critical heritage. “Becoming hauntologists” from this perspective labels a certain critical comportment towards the work of heritage across various scales and contexts, from local museum displays to large-scale listing processes. To help develop this approach, the paper explores recent engagements with “the ghost” as a conceptual terrain in adjacent fields, including architectural history, art criticism, sociology and the environmental humanities. This mapping exercise is undertaken to define some of the key contours of a possible hauntological heritage practices. As a synthesis of current and ongoing work across a broad range of disciplines, the research presented here is exploratory and open to modification through future grounded experiments (in, for example, curating, archiving and interpretation).

While the argument developed in this essay is based on a prolonged engagement with Derrida’s texts, to be a “hauntologist” does not mean embracing a particular philosophical project. Nor does it signal a concern for the macabre or the gothic. Instead, the notion of the hauntological captures a broad range of attitudes and approaches towards the past in the present that demonstrates the political and ethical charge of critical heritage practice. Concepts, theories, practices and methods overlap and push up against each other in this reading, which may best be understood as an attempt to operationalize what many would consider an obscure and abstract philosophical position. Timothy Morton recognizes that “a truly theoretical approach” to any subject “is not allowed to sit smugly outside the area it is examining. It must mix thoroughly with it” (2007, 12). Taking this further, concepts are only useful if they help us move beyond critique to alternative modes of production. Rather than dismiss a term such as hauntology as arcane and unusable, this paper therefore examines the benefits of taking this concept seriously and addressing its implications via grounded heritage thinking and praxis.

To do this a working definition is needed. The term hauntology is introduced – along with the closely connected spectrality – in Derrida’s 1993 work *Spectres of Marx* (translated into English in 1994). The word itself relies on the sonic similarity of ontology (*ontologie*) and hauntology (*hauntologie*) when spoken in the original French. For Derrida, this aural affinity is useful because it “introduces haunting into the very construction of a concept” (1994, 202). Through this morphological transformation, being – ontology – is displaced

by the shadow of the specter of being – hauntology. In so doing a level of uncertainty and intangibility supplants the apparent solidity of the ontological. This is about more than simply destabilizing a word, however. As Fredric Jameson has written in a commentary on Derrida’s text, hauntology describes the recognitions and resurgences that undermine the solid foundations of the present (1999, 38). This does not rely on a conviction that ghosts exist, or even that the past is

alive and at work [...] all it says, if it can be thought to speak, is that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us. (1999, 39).

While Jameson is right to point out that a *belief* in ghosts is not a prerequisite for hauntology, it would be wrong to suggest that specters and phantoms do not figure prominently in Derrida’s thinking. Indeed, the concept of hauntology responds to this initial question of the absent presence: “What is a ghost? What is the effectivity or the presence of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum?” (Derrida 1994, 10). For Hans Ruin, who has written extensively on the meaning of the dead in modern society, what Derrida sought to demarcate with the neologism hauntology was precisely “a way of referring to the irreducible ontological ambiguity of the dead, their absent presence, and their present absence, and what this implies for a theory of history and tradition” (2017, 416–7). The ghost emerges here as a recognition of the presence of something that is no longer, but that still remains as an affective and sometimes irresistible force in the world. Hauntology in this sense names “the space in which we always find ourselves thrown, having to retrieve ourselves, our present, and our future, from a confrontation, excavation, and interpretation of those who came before us” (417).

Ruin’s mention of the future gestures towards the final (re)orientation that Derrida’s concept brings to the fore. While the figure of the ghost typically points to the past and to those who are no longer, the notion of hauntology also casts a critical lens on the future, or rather to the failure of certain futures to come to fruition. The first and most lasting of these is the specter of communism – highlighted by Marx and Engels in the opening lines of their manifesto as “a virtuality whose threatened coming was already playing a part in undermining the present state of things” (Fisher 2014, 19). Hauntology and spectrality from this perspective refer to “a trace that marks the present with its absence in advance” (Derrida in Derrida and Stiegler 2013, 39). Such traces can only be discerned tangentially; they resist direct apprehension, operating in the faultlines of received knowledge and authorized histories. Both the *no longer* and the *not yet* are to be understood in this way, as specters that haunt the present in their very non-being.

These three hauntological motifs – instability and uncertainty, affective absences, and failed futures – surface across the analysis developed in this paper. As Ruin makes clear, the spectral for Derrida designates an “indeterminate space between the dead and the living” (2014, 61). This space can be filled with many things, projecting our own concerns onto those who have come before, or – in the spirit of Mantel – listening for their voices in the ruptures and discontinuities of the present. To borrow from Colin Davis, the “ghost’s secret” for Derrida is not “a puzzle to be solved; it is the structural openness or address directed towards the living by the voices of the past or the not yet formulated possibilities of the future” (2005, 379). It is here that the political charge of hauntology begins to take

shape. Partially formulated in response to the oppressions, injustices and occlusions of global capitalism and liberal democracy, Derrida's interest in the haunting of being is less about dealing with "spirits from another world" than it is about uncovering a greater sensitivity to "modernity's phantoms – that is, the disturbances and lingering presences [...] through which current social formations manifest the symptomatic traces and uncanny signs of modernity's history of violence and exclusions" (Demos 2013, 13). In this sense, hauntology offers one potential response to Avery Gordon's important line of questioning in *Ghostly Matters*: "How do we reckon with what modern history has rendered ghostly? How do we develop a critical language to describe and analyse the affective, historical, and mnemonic structures of such hauntings?" (2008, 18). This essay can be read as an extension of such questions to the realm of heritage practice, which confronts the spectral in a multitude of ways (see Fredengren 2016).

Rather than hone in on a specific case study, this paper demonstrates the broad relevance of hauntology to heritage via a series of micro-examples that cut across architectural history, memory studies, critical heritage and the environmental humanities. The first part explores familiar notions of heritage and haunting as they relate to the ghosts of place, exposing some of the tensions that characterize conventional responses to the spectral within heritage thinking. Building on this, the second part introduces two recent approaches to (re)narrating histories of place that may be seen to constitute a form of hauntological heritage practice. In the third and final part contributions to the edited volume *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (Tsing et al. 2017) are critically examined to understand how heritage and hauntology may intersect in responses to the Anthropocene. These three empirical contexts bring to the surface issues of place, history, inheritance, materiality and memory in ways that challenge the work of heritage at various scales and across human and more-than-human worlds. Far from obscuring present inequities and injustices, the concept of the ghost provides a material and discursive anchor throughout this analysis, emerging as "a figure of clarification with a specifically ethical and political potential" (Blanco and Peeren 2013, 7). Here it is worth reiterating that the concept of hauntology is only useful if it helps us to do more than simply name a situation: it must direct us towards alternative modes of production and methods of critical engagement.

Given the dangers of over-theorisation that always shadow academic discourse, this "operationalisation" of a philosophical term is undertaken with some caution. The hope however is that becoming hauntologists might signal not an introspective hand-wringing, but a critical touchstone for thinking with the ghost as part of a broader emancipatory project of political and social change. Haunting, as Gordon reminds us, is a "constituent element of modern social life" (2008, 7). Developing a subtle response to the ghost as a figure of ethical and political concern is therefore vital for the grounded work of heritage at a time of rising social tensions and ecological uncertainty. This both tracks and expands upon a wider "spectral turn" in the humanities and social sciences over the past decade (see contributions to Blanco and Peeren 2013), positioning heritage as an important interlocutor in the ongoing politicization of modernity's phantoms.

## Ghosts of Place

Howard Jacobson's remarkable novel *J* (2014) is set in a dystopian future in which all remnants of the past have been greatly suppressed. Family heirlooms are prohibited,

monuments and memorials have been destroyed, and genealogical research is all but impossible, with every member of society having been given a new name and told to forget their origins as part of “Operation Ishmael.” As a result of this erasure it is a peculiarly depthless world: hollow forgiveness is encouraged over “recollection and penance,” while ancient churches have been “morally botoxed” through the smoothing over of gargoyles and other “evil” protrusions (119). Perhaps most tellingly, Proust is no longer read in this world (although the adjective Proustian somehow lingers on to describe an embalming of the past in “morbid memory”).

The reason for this active amnesia is never addressed directly. Instead, the reader is forced to piece together a vast collective trauma, violent and terrifying, through slips of the tongue and thinly veiled references. “WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED” (as this seismic event is described throughout the book) seems to have taken place “off-screen” – indeed, some characters begin to suspect that it may never have happened at all. Remembering the past becomes a thankless task in this context. History and memory are to be avoided at all costs, even while “fake vintage” artefacts proliferate in the faded markets of the capital, “a city seen through a sheet of scratched Perspex” (134).

This makes it all the more unsettling when the past does erupt into the present, forcefully, and without warning. As the main protagonist of the book Kevern Cohen stands before a derelict house in Cohentown, a district of the capital once occupied by wealthy families but now taken over by small industry, the past takes on a rawness and physical closeness it lacks elsewhere:

The disuse of this house suited him better than the subdued occupancy of the others. In the disuse he might reconnect to a line up of used-up Cohens past. He closed his eyes. If you could hear the sea in a washed-up shell why shouldn't he hear the past in this dereliction? You didn't begin and end with yourself. If his family had been here he would surely know it in whatever part of himself such things are known – at his fingertips, on his tongue, in his throat, in the throbbing of his temples. Ghosts? Of course there were ghosts. What was culture but ghosts? What was memory? What was self? (2014, 148).

Kevern knows the connection he feels in this place is tenuous – his name is a recent invention and effectively meaningless, after all – but his temples still throb. This corporeal reaction is bound up with both the quirks of nomenclature and the sensual force of dereliction. The ghosts of Cohentown surface through Kevern, but they also reside in the place itself, stubbornly resisting erasure.

Jacobson's contribution to a general theory of haunting captures and highlights one of the key conceptual tensions that arise in thinking through the ghosts of place. When sociologist Michael Bell tackled this subject over two decades ago, he began by acknowledging that landscapes are “filled with ghosts. The scenes we pass through each day are inhabited, possessed, by spirits we cannot see but whose presence we nevertheless experience” (1997, 813). At the same time however he maintained that such ghosts are “fabrications, products of imagination, social constructions [...] Although we generally experience ghosts as given to us, it is we that give ghosts to places. They do not exist on their own” (831). Any haunting from this perspective is a projection on the part of the haunted individual or the social collective. Tellingly, Bell relates this search for ghosts to the rise of the heritage industry in the 1980s and 1990s, a phenomenon he explains as a response to the disenchantments of modernity (Weber [(1919) 1946]).

While this view of the spectral may depend on the specific aura or atmosphere of a location, it is a human centered idea that effectively undermines any claims the past may make on the present. If all ghosts are the product of our imagination, then the power of the dead over the living is greatly reduced. Hauntology does not seek to overcome this tension so much as unearth the generative and ethical potential in its contradictions. Derrida after all was interested in the foundational paradox of an effectivity that is “ineffective, virtual, insubstantial” (1994, 10). In saying that this is always somehow *more than* a projection of the present onto the past, hauntology opens up a different mode of “being with the dead” (Ruin 2019). As Ruin argues,

What we perceive as ‘our’ society consists not only of the living, but also, and often more importantly, of those no longer alive. There is a fundamental social being with the dead that displaces the very idea that the world is made up of only ourselves and those currently alive. (Ruin 2017, 416)

Returning briefly to the world of *J*, we can see this hauntological comportment in Kevern Cohen’s response to the ruins of Cohentown. In the face of a widespread erasure of history, Kevern feels a responsibility towards the ghosts of *this* place – this specific historical site, now emptied of its former inhabitants. And yet even while his temples throb with the “anticipation of recollection,” Kevern recognizes the “folly” of his own imagination (2014, 149), which is unable to account for the vast absences of his dystopian present in any just or ethical way. When we talk about heritage and ghosts, it is usually this notion of haunting that takes precedence; the on-the-spot echoes of the past contained in the historical coincidence of someone having lived in a certain house, or a great battle having taken place in a certain field. The world of *J* is striking because it silences such reverberations in the services of a collective oblivion, but can we really say that our world – obsessed with memory, inheritance and origins – is really more alert to the power of ghosts?

This line of enquiry opens up a second point of tension in the thinking around heritage and haunting – namely that a concern with “ghosts” may in fact constitute a form of socio-political exorcism. Crucially, the *practice* of heritage has been the focus of sustained criticism in such thinking, with David McNeill for example claiming that “history as a séance, a conjuration, is as accurate a metaphor for the activities of National Heritage organisations as we are likely to find” (2001, 55). This is because heritage for McNeill depends on a process whereby “selected ‘friendly’ ghosts are trapped and condemned to a perpetual purgatory inside upholstered chaise lounges, bell jars, commodes, dados and stucco frames” while others are “sent packing” (ibid). Tim Edensor makes a similar point in relation to industrial ruins, arguing that practices of heritage management in which places are “cleaned up and subject to interpretative encoding” limit our capacity to “empathetically grasp” the ghosts of derelict spaces (2005, 151). While the affective experience of haunting may be vital to understanding why heritage matters, such critiques remind us that the very work of heritage is just as likely to smooth away the ghosts of place as reveal their full potency.

Issues of atmosphere, aura and affect can only take us so far in this respect. While themes of haunting capture something of the re-enchantment that Bell links to the ghosts of place, and Edensor locates in the ruins of industry, a further gesture is required to get at the ethical-political significance of the hauntological for heritage. To borrow

from Gordon, “following the ghosts” is about “making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look.” This action is undertaken not simply to pay lip-service to the past, but “to strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future” (2008, 22).

The engagement with hauntology advanced in this paper emerges from earlier research focused on the abandoned town of Varosha in Northern Cyprus, where the desire to “put life back in” can be discerned with great clarity in the desire for return articulated by Greek-Cypriot diaspora communities (see Sterling 2014). Through a combination of memory-work and political activism, the former residents of Varosha seek to re-inhabit the streets and homes they left in 1974, when Turkey invaded Cyprus, creating a “Dead Zone” that divides the Turkish north of the island from the Greek south (see contributions to Papadakis, Peristianis, and Welz 2006; Bryant and Papadakis 2012). Varosha – which was developed in the 1960s and early 1970s as a major tourist resort – lies just inside this border space, and is now home to a small garrison of Turkish troops. As Alan Weisman writes in his striking work *The World Without Us*, which imagines what would happen to the Earth if humanity suddenly disappeared, Varosha has now entered an advanced state of decay:

Its encircling fence and barbed wire are now uniformly rusted, but there is nothing left to protect but ghosts. An occasional Coca Cola sign and broadsides posting nightclubs’ cover charges hang on doorways that haven’t seen customers in more than three decades, and now never will again. Casement windows have flapped and stayed open, their pocked frames empty of glass. Fallen limestone facing lies in pieces. Hunks of wall have dropped from buildings to reveal empty rooms, their furniture long ago somehow spirited away. Paint has dulled; the underlying plaster, where it remains, has yellowed to muted patinas. (2007, 96)

As a result of this slow ruination Varosha has earned the dubious title of “ghost town” – a label that is attached to various spaces around the world to emphasize their eerie qualities of neglect and desertion. While the term may appear apt in this context, it is also highly problematic, and may even be said to occlude those “ghosts” who are still very much alive and actively pursuing the return and revitalization of the site. The evocation of haunting has more to do with an emergent tourist economy that sees Varosha as a spectacle of negative or dark heritage (Meskell 2002; Roberts and Stone 2014). The fact that Varosha is now included on many tourist itineraries of Northern Cyprus alongside historic sites such as the Medieval Walled City of Famagusta gives some indication of the processes through which heritage may “exorcise” ghosts rather than seek their radical politicization. This goes against the kinds of haunting Gordon advocates, in effect silencing the production of counter-memories that might enable alternative futures (Figure 1).

Like Cohentown, Varosha also brings to the surface a fundamental tension between ghosts as a subjective “fabrication” and the sensuous, melancholic and affective power of certain spaces. This problem is taken up by Yael Navaro-Yashin in her own investigation of the “abject” ruins of Northern Cyprus, a category which encompasses objects, homes and the wider socio-political environments people occupy (2009). Taking issue with the wholesale dismissal of social constructionism that has permeated the humanities and social sciences in the wake of the “affective turn,” Navaro-Yashin puts forward the



**Figure 1.** Abandoned hotel on the beachfront at Varosha (Photograph author's own).

metaphor of the ruin as a potential bridge between these two theoretical frames. The ruin “discharges an affect of melancholy” even while those who live with such objects and spaces “put them into discourse, symbolize them, interpret them, understand them, project their subjective conflicts onto them, remember them, try to forget them, historicize them, and so on” (15). This is important for our reading of hauntology not only because ghosts are so regularly associated with ruinous contexts, but also because critical heritage scholars have often prioritized one or the other of these theoretical positions rather than explore their reciprocity (although see Waterton and Watson 2014 for a valuable exploration of material-semiotics in heritage tourism). The discursive and the affective are not fundamentally opposed in hauntology, but rather reinforce each other in the work of speaking with the dead. It is impossible to comprehend the meaning or the power of the “ghosts” of Varosha (or indeed Cohentown) without this dual orientation.

How people respond to the ghosts of place is a vital question for heritage. Do they see such figures as merely products of the imagination, or can there be an acknowledgement that the dead have an active role to play in social life? Are these responses mutually exclusive or in fact complementary? Becoming a “hauntologist” – the noun developed here as an extension of Derrida’s concept – does not mean believing in ghosts as spirits from another world, but it does require a commitment to acting in the presence of those who are no longer in a way that admits their continued efficacy. This depends upon a mode of *doing* heritage that is more than “the passive enactment and reaffirmation of meanings we have inherited” (Diprose 2006, 437). As Derrida argued towards the end of his life, for any heritage to be “active” it demands “reinterpretation, critique, displacement, that is, an active intervention, so that a transformation worthy of the name might

take place: so that something might happen, an event, *some* history, an unforeseeable future-to-come” (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004, 4, emphasis in original). The “critical” in critical heritage depends upon this constant self-critique that actively transforms what is given, including the concepts and practices inherited from critical theory. Hauntology as praxis – “the actions and decisions that characterise politics and ethics” (Diprose 2006, 440) – responds to this injunction, which entails a certain level of responsibility towards what has come before as well as what might come after. To understand the grounded implications of this stance in terms of alternative modes of production, the aesthetic qualities of hauntology require further elaboration.

### Critical Heritage Aesthetics

David McNeill’s characterization of heritage as a “séance” or “conjunction” (quoted above) is important to the argument developed in this paper not just because it foregrounds the structural failure of heritage to adequately account for the ghosts of place, but also for the specific context in which it is offered: namely as a response to the work of artist Michael Goldberg, who seeks to “invite back the ghosts that sanitized history has banished” (McNeill 2001, 54). As an example of this practice McNeill describes an installation in the cellar rooms of one of Sydney’s grandest colonial villas, where the artist set up “a series of complex displays that serve to summon up the history of dispassion, privilege, pomposity and avariciousness that marks the history of our settler culture” (55). This intervention included artefacts, props and documents related to the original land grant for the house as well as the distant Palladian origins of its design. In another installation Goldberg placed half a dozen Royal Doulton figurines in an elderly display case purposefully situated in an unrestored room of the extravagant Elizabeth Bay House. At the bottom of the display a small adhesive label stated simply “Museum Exhibits Can Conceal Complex Personal Histories” (55–56). Such mediations for McNeill highlight the uncritical allegiance to “authentic” renovations and simplistic interpretation typical of heritage practice, which emerges in this reading as an all-too efficient mode of historical closure.

Over the past two decades (and maybe even longer) many artists and cultural critics have taken up the spectral as an analytical framework. This has often gone hand-in-hand with a subversion of the museum, the archive and the historic site as spaces of historical knowledge production. The 1990s work of Fred Wilson is an obvious touchstone here for the way it sought to “mine” the museum (in this case the collections of the Maryland Historical Society) in the service of a more ethical engagement with the past. As the artist wrote at the time,

museums are afraid of what they will bring to the surface and how people will feel about certain issues that are long buried. They keep it buried, as if it doesn’t exist, as though people aren’t feeling these things anyway, instead of opening that sore and cleaning it out so it can heal. (Wilson 1994, 34)

Can Wilson be retroactively claimed as a “hauntologist”? Certainly, the critical approach taken by the artist to confronting the past in the present chimes with the broader emancipatory project outlined in this paper. Neither is it problematic to label a certain aesthetic approach as hauntological, even if this term is not used by the artist themselves (this is what McNeill does with Goldberg after all). The key question must be: what are the

precise factors that enable us to discern a hauntological comportment in certain modes of production, even if the concept itself is not front-and-center in the artist's imagination? (A counterpoint to this would be the work of someone like John Akomfrah, who explicitly titled a 2012 exhibition at the Carroll/Fletcher Gallery in London "Hauntologies"). This line of enquiry is important as it can help to determine the forms, practices and positionalities that might enable heritage to "become hauntological." While artistic methods can provide guidance, however, this should not entail a wholesale lifting of concepts and approaches from one field to another. The "aesthetic" in this context signals a commitment to creativity in heritage productions, rather than a specific style or visual approach. Building on this, some tentative thoughts around what a *critical-creative* heritage practice might look like can be offered, alert to the generative potential of hauntology without necessarily being beholden to its underlying philosophical framework (see Sterling 2019 for a further discussion of "critical-creative" heritage).

Perhaps the most sustained engagement with an "aesthetics of the ghostly" comes from T. J. Demos, whose investigation of recent photographic and filmic practices addressing the lingering effects of empire in postcolonial Africa is documented in *Return to the Postcolony: Specters of Colonialism in Contemporary Art* (2013). Demos pays close attention to the different ways in which artists engaging with this context (including Sven Augustijnen, Vincent Meessen, Zarina Bhimji and Pieter Hugo) have sought to open up repressed colonial histories in the hope of engendering a "politics of memory in partnership with the dead in struggle" (18). "How *can* ghosts be laid to rest," Demos asks, "when the events that unleashed them are not entirely concluded, only repressed in the present?" (21, emphasis in original). Whilst it would be wrong to conclude that each of the projects Demos goes on to examine works in the same aesthetic register, he identifies an overarching "spectral" turn in postcolonial art that seeks to address "the haunting memories and ghostly presences that refuse to rest in peace and cannot be situated firmly with representation" (8). Building on the recent formulations of speculative realism (see Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman 2011), Demos characterizes such work by its commitment to "a different set of documentary possibilities that bring affect, imagination, and truth into a new experimental configuration" (2013, 9). The slow, meditative films of Zarina Bhimji – many of which focus on ruinous buildings across postcolonial Uganda – are a case in point, drawing as they do on in-depth historical research, fictional narratives and the sensuous qualities of light in interior spaces. As Bhimji has stated, this approach is less about gathering "scraps of evidence to support the assertion of history" than it is a process of recognizing "traces as symptoms of strange structural links between history, memory and fantasy" (quoted in Demos 2012, 20).

At the risk of making too great a leap between the worlds of literature and art (and between two very different socio-political and aesthetic contexts), Demos' formulation may help to identify the source of Kevern Cohen's ambivalent reaction to the ghosts of Cohentown. Put simply, whilst Kevern is able to *imagine* the past in the ruins and sense the *affective* presence of those who are no longer, he lacks the historical knowledge necessary to allow the *truth* of Cohentown to emerge. It is this "experimental configuration" that imbues the work of Bhimji and others with a certain critical-creative power that may be usefully described as hauntological.

While Derrida's theory of hauntology clearly has much to offer any engagement with hidden, neglected or repressed traces of the past in the present, it is also oriented towards

the future, and especially towards those futures which the twentieth century taught us to expect but that never came to fruition. This sense of lost futures has been a core concern of artists working in a range of media over the last decade. Indeed, in a wide-ranging analysis of British film and musical culture of the 2000s, Mark Fisher defines this period as one that could not help but confront “a cultural impasse: the failure of the future” (2012, 16). Hauntology emerges as a useful frame of reference here because it is concerned with that which “has *not yet* happened, but which is *already* effective in the virtual (as an attractor, an anticipation shaping current behaviour)” (19, emphasis in original). Crucially this extends beyond the realm of the arts to encompass social democracy as a whole. As Fisher explains,

the disappearance of the future meant the deterioration of a whole mode of social imagination: the capacity to conceive of a world radically different from the one in which we currently live. It meant the acceptance of a situation in which culture would continue without really changing, and where politics was reduced to the administration of an already established (capitalist) system. (16)

In making this claim Fisher establishes important links with Jameson’s concept of the “nostalgia mode,” as defined in the latter’s 1991 work *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. In a critique that echoes many of the heritage-baiting texts of the 1980s (e.g., Hewison 1987; Wright 1985), this “mode” – which may also be described as an aesthetic – is characterized by “a particular kind of anachronism” best thought of as a “waning of historicity” (Fisher 2012, 17). Seen through this lens, heritage and nostalgia are more than simply backwards-looking, emerging instead as key components in the rise of a conservative populism that effectively shuts down possible futures. It is worth noting that Fisher contrasts what he sees as the vital hauntological documentary work of a filmmaker such as Chris Petit – which “stirs up” some of the potentials late capitalism has closed off – with the “dreary heritage-industry kitsch that came to dominate cinema in the UK” (2012, 24). As he argues elsewhere in a statement that captures one of the main tensions between heritage and hauntology, “the spectres of lost futures [...] reproach the formal nostalgia of the capitalist realist world” (Fisher 2014, 27).

One area in which such tensions are currently manifest relates to the listing and widespread celebration of post-war architecture in Britain. Over the past decade a cottage industry of photographic books, detailed histories, small exhibitions, building tours and online resources has emerged with a clear purpose: to reinvigorate interest in a much-maligned period of British architecture characterized by concrete, tower blocks and large-scale urban redevelopment. Recent examples of this cultural reassessment include the exhibition *Brutalist Playground* held at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in 2015, John Grindrod’s popular memoir of life in the suburbs, *Concretopia* (2014), and the temporary opening by the National Trust of a flat in Balfron Tower – a 1960s brutalist tower block designed by Ernő Goldfinger. While these projects take different aspects of the post-war built environment as their core focus, most are interested both in the architectural qualities of key buildings and their utopian aspirations, which were “premised on the movement toward a scarcely imaginable future” (Fisher 2012, 18). This passage from Barnabas Calder’s *Raw Concrete: The Beauty of Brutalism* is typical in this regard:

Some of the most high-profile and widely admired architectural projects of the 1950s and '60s were social housing, including Park Hill in Sheffield, the Alton Estate in suburban London, and the Queen Elizabeth Flats in Glasgow. Whatever mistakes were made by those commissioning, designing, and building some of the blocks, and however difficult the following decades were for many such projects, real effort and thought went into producing good living environments and a sense of community for people who were not well off. Whatever else Brutalist architecture and clients may have been up to, this baseline of serious social endeavour should be taken as a constant background. (2016, 83)

What is particularly telling about such narratives is the constant evocation of a project left unfulfilled. The utopian promise of brutalism and modernism takes the place of Marx and Engel's communism as the specter that haunts current architectural practice. Nowhere is this made more explicit than in the title of an exhibition and accompanying publication from the Royal Academy: *Lost Futures: The Disappearing Architecture of Post-War Britain* (Hopkins 2017).

Against this cultural and historical backdrop, a series of prominent interventions around the listing of post-war buildings has taken place in recent years. Former head of English Heritage Simon Thurley for example has claimed that "the whole listed-building system, the legislation and everything based around keeping the fabric, is not relevant. These buildings are about ideas and other things. For the 20th century, you've got to have a different system" (in Alberge 2016). Although Thurley does not go so far, this raises the possibility of an alternative approach to built heritage, one based around acknowledging and perhaps even restaging the social aspirations of architectural forms, rather than simply conserving and protecting their physical fabric (Mould 2017). This approach – which may be labeled hauntological – would not be suited to every site, but in certain contexts the potential to move heritage beyond conjuration and exorcism might be explored through new interpretive strategies and listing processes.

The aforementioned Balfron Tower is a case in point. First listed by English Heritage (now Historic England) in 1996, this prominent East London landmark was recently upgraded to Grade II\* (the second highest designation) following a high-profile campaign by, amongst others, the Twentieth Century Society (Marrs 2015). This campaign was partly motivated by a proposed refurbishment of the building that would have seen original features removed and internal layouts significantly altered. Putting aside for a moment the controversy over the final outcome of this renovation (see Evans 2019), what is important is the missed opportunity for an entirely different strategy of heritage practice at the site: a strategy that might well be described as hauntological. Referencing the work of artist-architect David Roberts, this practice would not only "pay tribute" to the "egalitarian principles" of post-war housing, it would also "enact" their utopian aspirations (2017, 123). As Roberts argues, the fundamental misconception at the heart of both the redevelopment proposals *and* the heritage listing has been the idea that the past is something to be honored, rather than radically re-performed (144).

It is worth noting that Roberts was able to put this approach into action via a series of creative projects that intersect with and subvert various fields of heritage practice. This included staging small-scale exhibitions with facsimile material from the RIBA Archives inside the domestic spaces of Balfron Tower, re-enacting the brief period Goldfinger and his wife spent in the building when it opened with actors and contemporary residents, and lobbying the government to recognize the dangers of social cleansing in

the process of “decanting” the building for redevelopment. Like the work of Bhimji in Uganda, the spectral qualities of such counter-heritage practices are built around a commitment to in-depth historical research and creative re-workings of the material present. As Roberts has written on the exhibition of archival documents on-site,

Our restaging touched on the spirit of the original endeavour; a community was not just re-enacted but, if only temporarily, reconstituted. There was a considerable level of engagement with the material on display. Dressing a flat that is identical to residents’ homes as an archive makes it estranging and uncanny, and it forced people to see their own flats differently and acted as a trigger for memories. Alongside the informal theatricality, it created a setting where people stepped outside their daily routine into a mode of critical reflection, to re-examine their estate, their flats and themselves. (2017, 140)

The uncanny and the strange here acted as jumping off points for a renewed engagement with the past of the building – a site which was (and remains) a home to many different individuals and families. Using the archive to unsettle the domesticity of this space, Roberts brought forth “a different set of documentary possibilities” (Demos 2013, 9), opening the door to a sense of heritage beyond conjuration. It is no coincidence that this exercise gained a particular force in the home; as Fisher reminds us, “the OED lists one of the earliest meanings of the word ‘haunt’ as ‘to provide with a home, house’” (2014, 125). In emphasizing the domestic and the lived in, Roberts therefore re-enacted the haunting lost future of Balfron Tower *as a home*: a space designed to benefit some of the poorest members of society, but now subject to the whims of neoliberal housing policies and hollow heritage redemption.

### More-than-human Hauntings

So far this paper has taken a purposefully expansive view of heritage and hauntology to consider productive points of tension and critical-creative practices across literature, architectural history, museum displays and contemporary art. The aim of this synthesis has been to map out some of the key dimensions of the hauntological in the hope of demonstrating the grounded implications of this somewhat arcane concept for critical heritage studies. Rather than limit this scope in the final section, the reach of hauntology is expanded even further by investigating the significance of “the ghost” within emergent posthumanist thinking. While heritage scholars have begun to engage with this literature (see Harrison 2015; Fredengren 2015, 2016; DeSilvey 2017; Sterling 2020) the arguments and propositions of hauntology may provide a useful space for integrating heritage and the posthumanities further. This tentative work is based on a close reading of the edited collection *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (Tsing et al. 2017), which – as its subtitle suggests – takes the haunted and monstrous qualities of the current environmental predicament as its core focus.

The various ghosts recounted in the pages of *Arts of Living* encompass a multitude of materialities and subjectivities. Biologist Ingrid Parker for example describes the lost wildflowers of California as “like ghosts [...] the vision of their exuberance haunts me as I gaze upon the rolling hills around my home” (2017, M160). Writer Kate Brown meanwhile gives an account of the ghostly specks of radiation that permeate photographs taken inside the “sarcophagus” at Chernobyl – “tiny crystalline flakes that float through every scene of silent ruin, lending the photos a deep-sea feel” (2017, G41). For others

in the volume it is extinction – and specifically human-led extinction – that generates spectral legacies. As Jens-Christian Svenning elucidates in a chapter on the possible return of megafauna to certain landscapes, “wilderness and other natural areas around the world are haunted by ghosts of giant animals [...] their disappearance – which continues today, as seen in the rhino-poaching crisis in Africa – is tightly linked to us, *Homo sapiens*” (2017, G67). This in turn highlights the entangled nature of such hauntings: things do not evolve, thrive and disappear in isolation. As Thom Van Dooren reminds us in his own work on “spectral crows,” extinction “always takes the form of an unravelling of co-formed and forming ways of life, an unravelling that begins long before the death of the last individual and continues to ripple out long afterwards” (2014, 12). This applies to plants as well as to animals – a process anthropologist Andrew Matthews records in his ethnographic exploration of former agricultural landscapes in central Italy:

Through my practices of walking, looking, and wondering, I have been tracing the ghostly forms that have emerged from past encounters between people, plants, animals, and soils. These ghostly forms are traces of past cultivation, but they also provide ways of imagining and perhaps bringing into being positive environmental futures. (2017, G145)

The approach Matthews adopts – of walking, looking and wondering in landscapes that have undergone significant change – is a tactic deployed by many of the contributors to *Arts of Living*. Equally the combination of natural history, ethnographic enquiry and creative non-fiction is a common thread throughout the book. As the editors note in their introduction,

the monsters and ghosts of this book are observable parts of the world. We learn them through multiple practices of knowing, from vernacular to official science, and draw inspiration from both the arts and sciences to work across genres of observing and storytelling. (Swanson et al. 2017, M3)

Quite apart from the obvious thematic connection *Arts of Living* shares with the work of hauntology, a deeper kinship can be located here, one that leads us back to Demos’ concern for truth, affect and the imagination to be combined in new “experimental configurations” of research and practice (2013, 9). Indeed, Parker reaches a similar conclusion to Demos in discussing the need to “transcend amnesia” to remember the ghosts of lost plants and animals. To accomplish this, she argues,

we need to bring all types of research to the table, from anthropology and archaeology to historical archival research, as well as experimental ecology and molecular ecology [...] Perhaps with a combination of imagination, scientific inquiry, and conservation inspiration, we will see more ghosts come back to life. (2017, M165)

While in broad agreement with the aims and methods Parker imagines, the notion of bringing ghosts “back to life” evokes a form of conjuration that may be usefully critiqued through a hauntological lens. (Re)interpreting landscapes and ecologies to focus attention on the absent presences of earlier plant and animal life is an important task in the shadow of the Anthropocene, but this needs to work towards alternative modes of more-than-human inheritance, not straightforward resurrections. Hauntology can be differentiated from a nostalgic yearning for lost pasts through its commitment to just futures. This is about more than simply “remembering” the past, even if unearthing hidden (repressed, occluded) histories is a vital first step in recognizing the continued

power of the spectral across natural and cultural worlds. Critical heritage emerges as an important space of dialogue here, concerned as it is with issues of “taking on” and “passing down” differently. While there is no widely agreed-upon definition of heritage, the idea of engaging the past, in the present, for the future is a foundational tenet of the field. Crucially, the figure of the ghost haunts each of these temporalities. Excavating and negotiating the messy histories and possible futures of such spectral presences asks us to consider anew familiar processes of collecting, managing, preserving and interpreting the past in the present. In the context of archaeology, for instance, “novel materialities” are often revealed through excavation; materialities that “can be read as indices of a variety of relationships, precisely because they ‘trouble’ the present with objects and substances that have crossed temporal boundaries” (Fredengren 2016, 488). Always already more-than-human, the ghost in this context evokes the multiplicity of pasts that may haunt any present, from extinct creatures to radioactive signatures. Such inheritances cannot be rejected outright; instead new ways of taking on and passing down must be put forward that – in Derrida’s phrasing – might constitute a transformation worthy of the name.

The word hauntology appears only once in *Arts of Living* – without citation and in parentheses – in a characteristically wide-ranging contribution from Karen Barad that builds on the same authors earlier engagement with Derrida’s concept (2010). The reference (or lack thereof) arises in a passage on the politics of matter and quantum physics in the “nuclear age” (Barad 2017, G110). The atom bomb and quantum physics are “deeply entangled,” Barad argues, and it is this mutual constitution that marks out an “ontology (hauntology)” of the latter. Quantum physics is not inherently more neutral or more radical than Newtonian physics, but it is historically and materially immersed in the devastation wrought by atomic weaponry. It is this entanglement that leads Barad to explore the haunted temporalities of the nuclear, beginning with Hiroshima, where the clocks were arrested on August 6, 1945 at 8:15am. As Barad explains, such “landtimescapes are surely haunted, but not merely in the sense that memories of the dead, of past events, particularly violent ones, linger there. Hauntings are not immaterial. They are an ineliminable feature of existing material conditions” (G107). While this sense of material haunting is vital to understanding Barad’s engagement with ghosts, it pushes against familiar notions of the spectral. This is because from the perspective of quantum physics, “hauntings” are not part of subjective human experience, but are instead “lively indeterminacies of time-being, materially constitutive of matter itself – indeed, of everything and nothing” (G113). To be haunted is not a mere remembrance of the past in this reading, but a recognition of the dynamism of “time-being/being-time” in each and every moment. As such, for Barad any “injustices need not await some future remedy, because ‘now’ is always already thick with possibilities disruptive of mere presence” (G113).

This notion of disrupting “mere presence” is a useful point to end on – a reminder of the instability of ontology that first prompted Derrida to explore the hauntological as a mode of non-being. In their introduction to *Arts of Living*, editors Elaine Gan, Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson and Nils Bubandt ask how we might get back to the pasts we need “to see the present more clearly?” (2017, G2). The figure of the ghost emerges here as a way of returning to “multiple pasts,” a process that might equally be considered a thickening of the present. This potentiality invites a renewed consideration of the now

from different disciplinary perspectives in a way that might “transcend amnesia,” to borrow from Parker. By centering the ghost in possible responses to the Anthropocene, the scholars, artists, writers and scientists brought together in this volume do not absolve themselves from the urgent problems of the present, but rather acknowledge the continued reverberations of the past in current environmental inequities and injustices. These echoes and traces are rarely self-evident, even if their effects may be widespread and obdurate. Haunting after all is “quite properly eerie: the presence of the past often can be felt only indirectly, and so we extend our senses beyond their comfort zones” (Gan et al. 2017, G2). The more-than-human qualities of heritage come to the fore in this setting, as the past resonates with forces beyond comprehension, while the present and the future seethe with otherworldly threat and promise.

## Conclusions

An applied notion of hauntology demands an intersectional praxis of historical noticing and critical-creative heritage productions across human and non-human worlds. Storytelling – as Mantel would no doubt recognize – is a vital methodology, whether in the form of books, site biographies, curatorial displays, films, photographs, oral history recordings, performances, commemorative plaques or any other narrative device. Limiting hauntology to such discursive strategies would however be a mistake. While this paper has only touched on the wider implications of the hauntological for the heritage sector, there are important links to be made with ongoing work in architectural preservation, site management, conservation and museology. As Christina Fredengren notes, the search for a “more visceral, more affecting and, potentially, more moving heritage experience is key to driving altered curatorial practices” (2016, 492). This means looking beyond individual subjectivities and easily packaged stories. As this paper has shown, the ghosts of the present encompass collective histories of violence and exclusion, personal narratives of trauma and redemption, extinct lifeforms and vanished ways of being, failed political projects and imperceptible material traces. Each phantom requires a different mode of apprehension, a different hauntology. The practical implications of this stance for heritage are wide-ranging. For practitioners involved in site management or interpretation, there is a clear need to evoke repressed and hidden narratives alongside *and in conjunction with* new approaches to material inheritance. In the spirit of Barad, this “spacetime-mattering” might be considered a productive reconfiguration of the world, one which acknowledges that “our debt to those who are already dead and those not yet born cannot be disentangled from who we are” (2010, 266). For curators, conservators and other museum professionals meanwhile a hauntological approach may add an extra dimension to ongoing debates around ecological justice and decolonization (Sully 2007; Onciul 2015; Aikens 2016; Kidd et al. 2017), both of which seek to address a similar set of concerns related to acknowledgment, repression and intergenerational care. Hauntology is only useful if it pushes forward the transversal connections between such emancipatory agendas, which critical heritage should no longer view in isolation.

Some common themes and trajectories for this work can be discerned in the various responses to the spectral emerging across literature, anthropology, sociology, the environmental humanities and the arts. The extent to which these responses engage

directly with the notion of hauntology varies considerably. This however may be less important than the underlying motivations for such work, which routinely (if implicitly) share a concern with Derrida's call for a politics "of memory, of inheritance, and of generations" (quoted in Demos 2013, 43). This can be seen in Howard Jacobson's fiction, Zarina Bhimji's film works, and Karen Barad's fusion of critical theory and quantum physics. Mapping such diverse projects allows us to see how a critical-creative heritage practice might contribute to some of the most urgent debates of our time. As Derrida observed in *Spectres of Marx*,

no justice [...] seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some responsibility, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism. (1994, xviii)

The methods, questions and alliances required to address this responsibility cannot be reduced to a "toolkit" of critical-creative heritage practice. Bringing affect and imagination to bear on traces of the past represents an important line of enquiry, but this must not be at the expense of a politicized commitment to radical social change. It is only by *trans-forming* what is given that we can become hauntologists. Again, the word itself is less important for such work than the constant mode of self-critique it invokes. Following Diprose,

we cannot find comfort in nostalgia for Derrida, for works in his name, or for any other aspects of one's heritage, personal, biological, cultural, or philosophical. In the extraordinary responsibility of inheriting the future-to-come, it is all of this that we must continue to interrupt, transform, and put at risk. (2006, 446)

Like Kevern Cohen standing in the ruins of Cohentown, we listen for faint echoes of the past, our temples throbbing at the anticipation of a future not yet written.

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