

## “Lead on, Spirit!”: The Potential of the Spectral Metaphor in 21st Century Heritage

Ellen Lillywhite<sup>1</sup>

Email: [ellenell90@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ellenell90@yahoo.co.uk)

### Abstract

In the 1990s, a ‘spectral turn’ in academia, influenced by Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* (1994), explored using the conceptual metaphor of ghosts and hauntings as a method of critically examining cultural and social events. This study critiques this method of navigating the disruptions facing today’s heritage sector, including the decolonisation of education and institutions, social justice, and the global pandemic. Ghosts are ideally suited to providing a meaningful link with the past, and, through analysis of four English ghost walks that the researcher attended, this study also explores their usefulness for navigating the challenges of the present and considering the future. The liminal nature of ghosts provides a space outside conventional discourse, encouraging new ideas and ways of understanding social and cultural events. The affective presentation of ghosts facilitates meaningful engagement with heritage and a feeling of responsibility towards the future, while a playful engagement with heritage can help visitors connect creatively with the past and navigate what it means individually to them.

Drawing on the examples noted on the ghost walks, this study concludes that the conceptual metaphor of ghosts and hauntings can be a valuable tool for the heritage sector to strengthen engagement and participation and enhance its sustainability in uncertain times.

### Introduction

The heritage sector – including museums, archaeological sites, archives, and conservations – faces significant disruptions in the present day. Disruptions such as the effects of the climate crisis, the global COVID-19 pandemic, and increasing awareness of social inequalities, which has led to efforts towards the decolonisation of education and institutions, have all had a significant effect on the heritage sector (Historic England, n.d.). This article examines the potential of the ‘spectral metaphor’ – coined by Derrida (1994) – as a means for the heritage sector to navigate current disruptions and consider actions for the future. The practical applications of the spectral metaphor are discussed through analysis of the ghost walk, and, more specifically, four ghost walks that the researcher participated in. The spectral metaphor

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen Lillywhite completed an MA in Cultural Heritage and Resource Management at the University of Winchester in 2021. They are currently researching for a book on the cultural history of paranormal tourism. Their main research interests are heritage interpretations of the paranormal, representation and diversity in heritage, Gothic literature, and psychogeography. In their spare time, Ellen enjoys deciphering vintage knitting patterns.

frames history as a living, adaptive concept which is resilient during times of disruption. With heritage being essential to the identity and well-being of communities, the heritage sector's ability to adapt and thrive in the midst of disruption is critical. As Smith (2006) notes, the meaning and value of 'heritage' are conferred on it by the public and by heritage management. Therefore, attracting and retaining the interest of a diverse audience is paramount if the heritage sector is to be sustainable.

## The spectral metaphor

The popularity of Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1994) and its use of ghosts as a conceptual metaphor is generally considered to have influenced a 'spectral turn' in the social sciences, humanities, and literary criticism in the mid-1990s (Bell, 1997; Luckhurst, 2002; Holloway, 2010; del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, 2013). Conceptual metaphors are used to evoke a whole discourse and method of understanding the concept it is being compared to. Derrida (1994) uses the metaphor of a ghost or spectre to critically examine the legacies of Marxism following a globally disruptive event – the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent fall of Communism in Eastern and Central Europe. For Derrida (1994), Marxism is a metaphorical ghost that will continue to haunt the present, and, like a vengeful spirit, it demands attention. This article uses the spectral metaphor to critically examine current globally disruptive events such as the climate crisis, the increasing awareness of inequalities, and the pandemic. Similarly influential is Derrida's coining of the term 'hauntology' – a portmanteau of 'haunted' and 'ontology' – to explain the concept of persistent elements of the past returning to haunt the present. Hauntology introduces concepts of atemporal time, disjointedness, and deconstruction to more traditional ontological views of existence, being, and reality. Time being 'out of joint' is a central tenet of hauntology, alongside the nature of ghosts to never be fully present, but to exist only in relation to something that has happened or will happen (Hägglund, 2008, p. 82). If time is no longer viewed as linear, the past becomes something that is always present, relevant, and emotionally engaging. The potential use for hauntology in making the past and future emotionally engaging is that it will help heritage professionals and visitors experience a closer personal connection to the past and present, which in turn can aid in successfully navigating uncertainty.

The spectral metaphor provides a useful language for exploring the emotional connection that people have with heritage spaces. Ghosts as a means of understanding individual subjectivity was introduced by Bell (1997: 815), who applied the language of "'ghosts' of place" to sociology to address the gap between objective generalisation and subjective particularism when discussing the concept of place. Ghosts are widely understood and generalised and can be used as a way of understanding the personal specificities of place. Ghosts are universally understood as a concept, but the nature of a ghost experience is highly subjective – no two people will have the same experience of a haunting, or even experience it at all. Ghosts are employed as a way of understanding place, and people's sense of place is intimately tied to its ghosts. De Certeau argued that "haunted places are the only ones people can live in" (1984, p. 108). For De Certeau (1984), 'haunted' functions as a metaphor for how memories visible only to the individual are layered beneath the visible places they inhabit, and how present places can invoke an absence when those memories are of something that is no longer there. The concepts of ghosts, place, and the emotional connection between people and place are increasingly intertwined concepts, gaining momentum in the early 2000s. Degen and

Hetherington use the term 'haunting' as a way of recognising that a space does not exist just in the present, but as part of the past and future as well (2002, p. 1). This study builds on the relationship between ghosts, place, and emotional connection by exploring the potential for the spectral metaphor in the heritage sector through its use in ghost walks. Drawing on both memories of the past and awareness of the future, ghosts are ideal for coming to terms with how the present has changed and what these changes could mean for the future. By using the language of ghosts to understand the emotional connection people have with heritage spaces, the heritage sector can navigate these changes to reflect the multivocal, diverse communities that interact with heritage, and emphasise the cultural benefits whilst minimising the harmful effects of financial, social, and cultural disruption. This will help the heritage sector navigate the laudable goals of decolonisation, diversity, and inclusivity. In turn, this will help heritage to be relevant and adaptable to social shifts.

The religious, social, and cultural history of people's interactions with and understanding of ghosts can also provide a useful framework for understanding broader intellectual, cultural, and theological changes, as exemplified by Davies' 2007 book, *The Haunted*. Davies (2007) notes the prevalence of hauntings that take place in liminal spaces, or ghosts who in life held liminal positions in society, revealing how important ghosts can be for promoting diversity. For example, disempowered social groups such as enslaved people are popularly depicted returning to sites of punishment after death, giving them an authority that they lacked in life (Davies, 2007). Thus, the discourse of ghosts is also the discourse of marginalised groups reclaiming their autonomy. This builds on Derrida's (1994) use of ghosts to illustrate the responsibility of those in the present towards past and future sufferers of oppression and violence. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, postcolonial, feminist, and queer theories have similarly used the metaphor of haunting to highlight repression, violence, and social injustices. Heholt (2016, p. 11) notes that "the ghost can bring into view that which is most usually hidden", drawing focus to marginalised communities and individuals. The need for the heritage sector to engage with and empower marginalised groups was exemplified following the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, by the controversy surrounding the removal of statues linked with the slave trade, such as Edward Colston's statue in Bristol. Building on Derrida's (1994) and Heholt's (2016) arguments, this article examines how ghosts can provide a way for the heritage sector to highlight the importance of responsibility and empathy towards marginalised groups of the past, present, and future.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, interest in ghosts and hauntings is "experiencing a renaissance" (Waskul and Eaton, 2018, p. 5). Media that deals with ghosts and hauntings are widely consumed, with a plethora of television series, books, films, and reality-style ghost-hunting programmes available (Edwards, 2019). Belief in the spectral is also widespread, with more than 60% of respondents to a 2018 survey claiming that they had seen a ghost (Business Wire, 2018). Contemporary engagement with ghosts can be explained through its social function of providing explanation or catharsis for frightening or unexplained events (Waskul and Eaton, 2018). In a world faced with global pandemics, social upheaval, and global warming, it is not surprising that people turn to the spectral for comfort. At the height of uncertainty over the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, the popularity of horror movies experienced a marked increase, and towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the craze for Gothic literature was driven by tensions and anxieties of a time when the very idea of national identity was being disrupted (Scrivner et al., 2021; Cowell, 2008). Ghost stories can also function as morality tales warning against the lasting evils of, for example, violence, slavery, and prostitution, making them ideal for helping individuals navigate and reach their own conclusions about current events (Waskul

and Eaton, 2018). This article recognises that the popularity of ghosts makes them widely accessible and as there is obviously a demand for spectral content, this offers the heritage sector the chance to meaningfully engage a large audience in inclusive and understanding debates about the issues that the sector is currently facing.

## Heritage studies

In 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, social and political changes spurred new attitudes towards heritage, just as they are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century today. When the Industrial Revolution refocused Britain's economy on industrial and mechanised manufacturing, buildings and landscapes of historic and archaeological importance were destroyed in the name of progress and modernity. One of the effects of this disruption was the increase in conservation movements and preservation societies, with the first laws protecting and conserving cultural heritage being passed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a developing interest in the cultural past, and a shift towards understanding historical monuments and artefacts as indicators of a culture's development and identity, rather than as curiosities or status symbols. Heritage became important to the creation and legitimisation of national identities, but unfortunately, this has not always been to the benefit of everyone. The destabilising effects of the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution, and an emergent mercantile middle-class created a need for "new devices to ensure or express social cohesion and identity and to structure social relations" (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 263). The ruling classes sought a national narrative to explain the nation's historical achievements and cultural formation. Historic buildings and monuments were positioned as material evidence of this history of European taste and achievement. Unfortunately, groups whose experiences challenged the grand metanarrative of the British Empire – such as colonised people, enslaved people, and Black and ethnic minorities – found their experiences negated or obscured. Museum collections and the protection of historic monuments came to prominence in the context of the Enlightenment idea of 'progress', a discourse used to legitimise and reinforce European colonialism and expansion. Anthropological collections were used to 'educate' the public about the racist and abhorrent 'natural order', which positioned Black people as less evolved than white Europeans (Fforde, 2004). Such ideas were used as evidence to justify slavery and colonial invasion, building a racist and colonialist legacy that heritage sites and museums are still haunted by in the present day. By addressing this colonialist legacy through the lens of the spectral metaphor, this article explores how the idea of ghosts can provide ways to navigate the decolonisation of presentation, collections and interpretation in the heritage sector.

The academic discipline of Heritage Studies began in the 1980s, drawing on methodologies and frameworks from areas as diverse as anthropology, archaeology, psychology, and tourism. Just as ghosts return to have an effect in the present, Heritage Studies as a discipline "investigates the role of the past in the present" (Sørensen and Carman, 2009, p. 17). Also in the 1980s, post-colonialism began to emerge as a political trend, and post-modernism and post-structuralism as academic trends. Post-modernism's awareness of the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political power stimulated critiques of claims of ownership over knowledge and access to representations of the past; critiques which continue to gain momentum in the present day and which the spectral metaphor can aid in understanding. As a part of this growing awareness, the 1980s saw the publication of many commentaries on heritage management and practice, the most influential of which have come to be described

as the 'heritage canon' (Gentry and Smith, 2019). In *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Lowenthal (1985) discusses how the past is preserved for reasons often more political and economic than academic or historical. These motivations can disenfranchise groups who are not a part of the dominant ideology, marginalising or overlooking their history. Lowenthal's work was the first real critique of how societies use and misuse their heritage and encouraged people to look beyond how the past is presented to what those presentations reveal about ideologies. Hewison (1987) views the emergence of the professional heritage sector in Britain as a symptom of political and economic decline, interested only in packaging a 'safe' vision of the past for public consumption, obscuring any links with political division or class unrest. This bland, conservative representation continues to haunt the heritage sector and shape public opinion of it, making the spectral metaphor all the more important for challenging people's perceptions of heritage management and encouraging them to view it as dynamic, radical, and relevant.

Although early commentaries on the heritage sector were often negative, in the 1990s investigations began to emerge into heritage's potential as a force for cultural and social good, a discourse that this article aims to add to. Merriman (1991) and Samuel (1994) examine the day-to-day ways in which people engage with heritage, often as a way of understanding self and community. By the 21<sup>st</sup> century, academics were studying the wider implications of heritage and its relationship to environment, nation-making, and conflict resolution; notions of identity and memory; and power relations. *Uses of Heritage* (Smith, 2006) is indicative of the interrogation of Heritage Studies' framework and methodologies that were taking place. The history of attitudes towards and management of heritage can be seen as an attempt to navigate political, social, and cultural upheaval. This article argues that the discourses of ghosts and heritage have more in common than might immediately be apparent. Both are "grounded in contemporary attempts to understand and represent the past" (Hanks, 2016, p. 23). Both deal with the past but are socially constructed in the present, and often reveal more about the society that created them than they do about the history being represented. Both are strongly influenced by times of disruption, uncertainty, and change. For example, it became popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for the English upper class to visit Scotland, often with the desire to see something out of the ordinary such as a ghost or spectre, as a reaction against the increasing transition into modernity and to "catch the past experientially before it was exorcised" (Inglis and Holmes, 2003, pp. 52-53). At that time, visitors' perceptions of Scotland would popularly have been informed by the writings of Sir Walter Scott, who "populated his fictions of Scotland with ghosts ... because he desired to keep folk-traditions alive in the present day" (Inglis and Holes, 2003, p. 54). Bell (1997) builds on this relationship between ghosts and heritage, suggesting that the growth of the heritage sector might mean that we are "coming to miss our old ghosts, to resist the loss of sentimental and social connections to places" (1997, p. 830). This would suggest that ghosts and heritage are of similar use to people in navigating - or in some cases resisting - change. Although it may seem that the language of ghosts is one of conservatism and longing for an idyllic representation of the past, similar to the criticisms levelled at the heritage sector in the 1980s, this study takes a more radical view of ghosts and heritage. Hanks (2016) refers to a "haunted heritage" or "disembodied heritage" in which ghosts emphasise multiplicity and allow heritage to sustain multiple interpretations of the past without privileging one over the other. Embracing the disruptive nature of ghosts can lead to a more democratic and cooperative way of understanding heritage. However, it is not enough to simply accept multiplicity; for it to be productive it must be used to actively encourage the pluralising of definitions and approaches (Heholt, 2016, p.



13). Ghosts are well suited to this, due to their liminal status. Their very nature as neither alive nor dead, present nor absent, functions to open up the 'betweenness' of concepts. Their liminality gives them the ability to deconstruct and transgress boundaries, allowing for new frameworks of seeing and knowing to develop in the gap they provide. This functions in a similar way to the "queering" method of analysis, which works through the challenging of normalisation to open the space to deconstruct existing logics and frameworks, and to dismantle dynamics of power and privilege (Young, 2012). Ghosts' position outside of everyday perspectives can similarly provide a framework and language for critiquing current events and presentations of the past, by speaking "from a space outside of discourse and its representations" and challenging convention (Degen and Hetherington, 2002, p. 2). The concept and nature of ghosts invite people to step outside the realm of the known and the fixed and to view it from an outside perspective. By operating in this way, heritage too can navigate disruption and remain relevant.

Traditionally, heritage sites have refrained from the use of the spectral to engage visitors, and in some cases have even actively discouraged it (McEvoy, 2016). The management at Berry Pomeroy Castle, which is owned and managed by English Heritage, has had to discourage ghost hunters and paranormal thrill-seekers to avoid Health and Safety concerns, and conservation issues. Yet, ghosts and engaging in heritage visits has a precedent in 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century guidebooks, which would repeat local tales of ghosts and haunting said to take place at historic sites to encourage visitors (Townshend, 2013). More recently, however, heritage sites have begun to realise the potential of attracting visitors through advertising their connections with ghosts and hauntings. During the Halloween period of 2019, the National Trust ran ghost walks on some of its properties such as Baddesley Clinton and Ham House and Garden, and during Halloween 2020 English Heritage ran a series of 'After Dark' events. This supports McEvoy's (2016, p. 178) argument that ghosts have become an "integral part of the National Trust's tourist strategy".

## **Methodology**

This study draws together the frameworks of hauntology and Heritage Studies to critically examine the conceptual metaphor of ghosts and hauntings' potential for helping the heritage sector navigate current disruptions and build a more meaningful and creative connection with its audience. To support these theoretical frameworks, the researcher participated in four ghost walks during July-August 2021. The decision was made to undertake the research as a participant rather than a detached observer to gain an insider view and draw on the ethnographic methods outlined by Waskul and Eaton (2018, p. 10) that such methods "necessarily involve participation... in an effort to see the world from the perspective of those being studied". Thus, the evidence presented draws on the work by Bell (1997) by taking the form of reflexive evidence that is drawn from personal and subjective experience. The researcher's subjective experiences and observations of the other participants are supported by informal interviews conducted in person and through email with the ghost walk guides. Informed consent was gained from the guides for the researcher to conduct these interviews. The guides were made aware in advance of the researcher's reason for attending and were supportive of it, but the other participants were not made aware until the end, to avoid them feeling constrained in their behaviour.

The ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic reduced the number of ghost walks available, and complicated travel arrangements such that the walks studied cover only small areas of Hampshire and North Devon. Without constraints, the ideal would have been to attend a wider variety of walks in terms both of geographical area and presentation style; to attend the same tours repeatedly over several months; and to attempt more in-person interviews and interactions. This would produce more statistically reliable data and permit comparative statistical analysis of the different styles of walk and participants' reactions to the experience.

### **Anatomy of a ghost walk**

Most 'ghost walks' or 'ghost tours' take place in the evening in a town or city centre, lasting 1-2 hours at an average cost of approximately £12. Typically, 1-2 guides lead a group of 4-20 participants around various public locations on foot, sharing a mixture of ghost stories, local legends, and historical information about the area. There are many variations on this setup – some ghost walks are more serious and historical in tone, some make a scientific attempt to contact spirits, and others employ elaborate costumes and even choreographed jump scares to entertain their participants. This study has tried to cover a range of ghost walk experiences to understand the diversity of what is on offer to participants and the variety of ways that the spectral metaphor is employed to navigate disruptive events.

### **Overview of the ghost walk providers**

Hidden History Tours of Devon offers ghost walks around several towns in North Devon (Pengelly, 2020). The guide also works as a psychic medium and is a strong advocate of feminism and the working class. The researcher participated in a Hidden History ghost walk around Bideford on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Haunting Nights is a team of events facilitators, ghost-hunting mediums, and historians (Haunting Nights, 2021). Based in Manchester, they offer overnight ghost hunts and ghost walks in a variety of locations across the country. The focus of the Haunting Nights ghost walk is on interactive ghost hunting and seeking paranormal experiences. The researcher participated in a Haunting Nights ghost walk around Salisbury on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021.

Salisbury City Guides are qualified Blue Badge guides, trained in tourist guiding (Salisbury City Guides, 2020). They present the history, myths, and legends of areas around Southwest England, with a mixture of historical, bespoke, and ghost walks on offer. The researcher participated in a Salisbury City Guides ghost walk around Salisbury on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Supernatural Tours and Events run interactive events, including theatrical ghost walks, in the South of England (Supernatural Tours and Events, n.d.). They also run murder mystery dinners, ghost hunts, and seance experiences. Their ghost hunts work with paranormal teams and mediums, and they collaborate closely with local businesses. The founders have backgrounds in acting, the paranormal, and mediumship, and the business was an extension of their supernatural research group UKPRS. The researcher participated in a Supernatural Tours and Events ghost walk around Winchester on August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

## Findings

### Transgressing boundaries

The liminal qualities of ghosts give them the potential to deconstruct and transgress boundaries, allowing for new frameworks of seeing and knowing to develop in the gap they provide, which can lead to new and creative ways of navigating current disruption. Ghost walks reinforce this blurring of boundaries by their focus on liminal spaces. Tour guides make frequent use of doorways, windows, and the opening of alleyways as storytelling locations. During one walk this was further reinforced by the guide unlocking gates to allow participants access to private spaces, such as a private residential and meeting space. Like a ghost, the participants have access to places that are normally off-limits and are thus invited to step outside of what is usual and 'known'. This encourages stepping outside of a discourse or framework and adopting a different perspective, making it easier to identify issues obscured when thinking within the parameters of a discourse.

Ghost walks take place in town and city centres, which Edensor (2000) refers to as 'heterogeneous spaces', meaning multi-purpose spaces used for a wide range of activities. Town centres are used simultaneously for residential, commercial, and tourist purposes, and more. Edensor (2000) compares this to 'enclavic spaces', such as museums and heritage sites, which have distinct entrance and exit points, strict boundaries on how visitors are expected to move around and interpret the space, and where behaviour is controlled and managed through social norms. Enclavic spaces are often purpose-built or have a clearly designed use. Edensor (2005, p. 830) identifies purpose-built spaces such as heritage sites and museums as 'memoryscapes', where authoritative meanings about the past are fixed. These heritage spaces "banish ambiguity and the multiplicity of the past" to present a straightforward historical narrative and a themed simulacra of a historical period (Edensor, 2005, p. 831). This has the effect of fixing the past and limiting the interpretative scope of both heritage professionals and visitors. Museum objects and staffed and themed presentations of the past are generalised as 'typical' or 'best preserved' of the period, which fixes their meaning and removes their semiotic and social contexts, which are multi-layered and complex. The fluid, heterogeneous space of a ghost walk encourages more nuanced and complex views of the past, making it easier to approach challenges from new perspectives.

The transgression of boundaries also allows for the adoption of multiple interpretations of the past, all given equal weight and value. Ghost walk guides were observed actively encouraging a democratic sharing of knowledge. Illustrative of this is an instance during the Haunting Nights ghost walk when a participant corrected a guide's presentation of a local legend. The legend was that dove- or swan-like birds circle Salisbury Cathedral's spire whenever the death of a bishop is imminent. One participant noted that the birds were locally accepted to be seagulls, and that the original fanciful interpretation was because seagulls were rare so far inland. The guide incorporated the seagulls into the remaining narrative, revealing the ease with which ghosts and hauntings can accommodate multiple interpretations. This simple exchange was an example of the open dialogue and cooperation that is possible between groups and individuals when boundaries are more flexible, and even actively challenged. Encouraging multiple narratives to co-exist can help the heritage sector be more resilient in the face of change, because new or even conflicting information can be incorporated equitably into existing information. In this way, challenging already known



information does not automatically threaten it, which is often when a backlash against change is observed.

The fluidity of the content of ghost narratives is also rooted in the way they are passed on through folklore and oral traditions. The oral repetition of a ghost narrative keeps it relevant, as it is changed to suit the time and circumstances. This process was observed actively occurring during the ghost walks, where the guides often repeated ghost experiences related to them by previous participants. A typical example was the Supernatural Tours and Events story of the 'clanking woman' who died trapped in a printing press, but whose fight to get free can still be heard. The guide followed this narrative with a recollection of a previous walk participant who seemed disturbed by the story and related that he used to hear clanks and bangs when working in the building where the tale took place. Thus, the narratives told on ghost walks are always being added to and updated; a living heritage continually shaped by those who engage with it, rather than a fossilised heritage that has become fixed and static. When the method of interpretation is organic and mutable, heritage becomes more resilient to times of change and disruption; something dynamic that remains relevant through cultural and social changes by adapting alongside them.

## Emotion

People use their emotional responses to heritage sites to inform their meaning-making process and form a personal interpretation of heritage (Zang and Smith, 2019). This emotional connection can help people navigate change and disruption by relating it to their personal experiences and interpretation. It can also be harnessed to highlight past injustices and protest social wrongs. For the Hidden Histories guide in North Devon, ghost walks are her way of addressing the way in which the existence and experience of the working-class poor – especially women – is obscured in museums and “sanitised” presentations of history; her tours are her way of giving a voice to people she feels had none (Interviewee #1, 2021). She begins her tours by relating how she was inspired to start conducting tours by the story of a local young woman tragically beaten to death by her employers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. She described being “so tired of sanitised history and museums and guides only focusing on the glossy top layer of society as though they mattered more” and that it was men in the past who wrote history down and “decided what to put in and what to leave out” (Interviewee #1, 2021). In a clear example of Derrida’s spectral metaphor, the ghosts of the working-class poor return through the guide’s narratives to haunt the present and inform the listeners of past and current ills. The guide noted during the walk that the marginalisation of the female working-class poor and the demonisation of sex workers are ongoing issues that need to be addressed. All the ghosts in her narratives were benign, with even the most sinister narrative used to emphasise that ghosts – like people – need to be respected and listened to. The real horror and unease came from how the ghosts had been treated in life. Empathy for a historically marginalised group can encourage more nuanced understandings of and more sensitive interactions with marginalised groups in the present and future. This is especially useful in times of social change when past wrongs are beginning to be recognised and addressed, such as in the case of the move towards decolonisation.

Compare the understanding and empathy provided through the framework of the spectral metaphor to the ‘woke row’ faced by the National Trust when they published a report about

the links between colonialism and slavery to the country houses in their care (Brown, 2020). This sparked backlash against the perceived disruption to the National Trust's interpretative methods, and internet commentators accused the National Trust of being too 'woke', despite the Trust's director general arguing that the "idea that history stands still is nonsense because you keep finding new things" (Sherwood, 2022). As has been shown, the spectral metaphor encourages the acceptance and inclusion of multiple historical narratives, and the call for responsibility can help people accept new ideas with more empathy and understanding. People online felt that the National Trust should not get involved in identity politics, and some claimed that the Trust was trying to make them feel uncomfortable when all they wanted to do was enjoy looking at historic houses and gardens (Young, 2020). The spectral metaphor has the potential to help people navigate and understand these feelings of unease since ghosts are expected to make people feel uneasy and disturbed, in contrast to the 'comfortable' image of the heritage sector that was critiqued in the 1980s. Change often feels uneasy, but the spectral metaphor can help people understand these feelings rather than reacting blindly against them.

## **Playfulness**

The darkness, supernatural content, and use of liminal spaces in ghost walks can encourage participants to step outside of themselves. The ghost walk can be a transformative experience that transports participants back to a state of childhood play. Inherent in the childhood enjoyment of telling and hearing ghost stories is the fear that they produce (Grider, 2007). Children often tell these stories in the dark, just as ghost walks often take place in the dark of the evening. Edensor (2005) argues that darkness can encourage a more expressive and playful disposition in participants, in contrast to the more self-contained adult way of moving through space. Although Edensor (2005) writes about this in reference to exploring industrial ruins, the same is true of a ghost walk. The somatic experience of childhood produced on a ghost walk can encourage an open-minded, curious, and receptive attitude to the information being presented, which in turn can make it easier to navigate and take meaning from disruption.

The effect of playfulness was observed during the Haunting Nights ghost walks when one of the guides, a psychic, was attempting to contact the spirits of the building. The group gathered in a dark basement while the psychic called out questions, a practice that she encouraged participants to join in with. Having asked without response if there was a male or female spirit in the vicinity, one participant asked if the spirit identified as non-binary. The shared space of playfulness encouraged participants to create a meaningful and creative connection with the past, and the atmosphere was one in which the participant felt comfortable enough to talk about the often-marginalised community of gender-nonconformists. This is further supported by the fact that the participant was not laughed at, dismissed, or ridiculed for presenting a minority interpretation. In fact, the psychic repeated the question with the same sincerity as when asking about traditional gender identities. In the state of playfulness encouraged by ghost walks, people are encouraged to approach concepts in a similarly open-minded and curious way a child does, reducing bias and encouraging adaptivity.

Although ghost walks do not require belief in ghosts from their participants – and in fact are designed to flexibly support pre-existing belief or disbelief – there is an expectation that

participants will play along with the possibility of ghosts being real (Hanks, 2016). This state of playfulness and of stepping outside of what is known invites participants to “step into unfamiliar terrain, where we can re-evaluate a past we thought we knew (or were happy to forget)” (Brewster, 2017, p. 313). On a ghost walk, the possibilities suggested by a ghost narrative are more important than its perceived truthfulness, which challenges and questions the lines between real and unreal, belief and disbelief (Holloway, 2010). By residing in a liminal space between objective, demonstrable reality and the imaginary space of subjective thought, ghosts emphasise the role of creativity and imagination in connecting with the past and can encourage a “wanton speculation towards objects and place, encouraging contingent rather than causal connections to be made” (Edensor, 2005, p 845). An example of this was observed when a ghost walk participant made a connection between a brick on a cellar floor and someone in the past being walled up behind a door, which reveals an emotive and intuitive leap between objective fact and subjective speculation. It is a clear example of a participant connecting their physical encounter with a speculative imagining to create their own interpretation of heritage. People who are encouraged to link their experience of a heritage site with creativity use the emotions elicited to develop their own messages and meanings (Zang and Smith, 2019). If participants are encouraged to navigate their own meanings of heritage, it provides more flexible and resilient interpretations.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates how Derrida’s spectral metaphor can help the heritage sector meaningfully and creatively navigate the disruptions it faces from ongoing upheavals in modern society. By their very nature, ghosts deconstruct and transgress boundaries, which can lead people to view a framework or discourse from the outside, making problems easier to identify and address creatively. This study has explored how the liminal qualities of ghosts stimulate multivocal interpretations of heritage, rather than presenting a fixed narrative, and that this multivocality will prove more resilient in the face of conflicting narratives. The spectral metaphor frames heritage as living and mutable rather than fixed and static and, by engaging people with heritage on an emotional level, this study suggests that the spectral metaphor has the potential to help the heritage sector navigate times of uncertainty with sensitivity towards multivocal, diverse communities. However, it should be noted that the social standing and background of heritage visitors affect how open to empathy they might be, which is unfortunately outside of the scope of this study but would be an interesting direction for further research.

Observation of ghost walks has shown how the playfulness, liminality, and emotion that are central to the idea of ghosts lead to emotional engagement that is meaningful and thoughtful, and to more nuanced and flexible responses to change. Similarly, this research has shown how the spectral metaphor’s focus on addressing past injustices provides a framework for engaging with debates on decolonisation and inclusivity, gives marginalised groups a voice, and encourages feelings of responsibility for addressing injustices of the past, present, and future. The playfulness that is encouraged by the spectral metaphor can help people make creative connections with the past that are individually meaningful to them. This helps people approach and understand change on an individual, personal level, leading to a stronger and more resilient interpretation.

This article has only focused on the niche group of ghost walk participants and guides but has hoped to provide a framework that can be applied to the broader scope of general heritage visitors and professionals. The article also aims to be a starting point for continuing studies into the relationship between heritage and ghosts. This study overall concludes that adopting the spectral metaphor as a framework will prove a valuable tool in helping both heritage professionals and visitors navigate disruptions while ensuring that heritage remains relevant and meaningful to a diverse, multivocal community.

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