

**Aura and Trace: The Hauntology of the Rephotographic Image**

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For a full record of all practice elements and research outputs relating to this thesis, please visit:

<http://www.michaelcoldwell.co.uk/auratrace.html>

Please note: the author of this thesis and associated outputs works as an artist and publishes under the alias Michael C Coldwell



## **Aura and Trace**

The Hauntology of the Rephotographic Image

by

**Michael Peter Schofield**

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## Abstract

This research utilises and deconstructs the contemporary practice of rephotography, investigating what it can tell us about the changing ontology of the photographic artefact, in a purportedly post-medium and post-digital culture.

The work uses scanned archival images, some of which have been badly damaged over time, alongside bespoke photography of the lost urban landscapes they depict, to create new digital media artworks which explore the representation of absence and the passage of time itself. These processes and their outcomes raise important questions about mediation in our digital representations of the past, about demolition and loss of cultural memory, and, most crucially for this research, they interrogate theory regarding the ontology of photography in the archive - specifically the Derridean notion that the photograph is intrinsically spectral, and that the archive is always under some form of erasure.

For Derrida all media was best understood as a form of technological ghost, continually re-haunting itself as media and practices change, but traces of the past return in new forms. This spectrality was always present but was seemingly accelerated by the digital turn, even as older analogue images 'felt' more auratic and haunting. In order to understand the photographic object in these shifting contexts, a 'hauntology', rather than an ontology, will be employed, to recognise what underlies these spectral media fragments - their absence/presence, their materiality/immateriality, how they are used in modern visual culture, their potential social meaning and political significance, as a form of haunting.

The practice research used two photographic archives of the same city, from the same time period (c.1900), and compared them through various deconstructions of the rephotographic form, examining closely the role played by their artefactual materiality, content and context (within both analogue and digital realms), looking for various signifiers of hauntological quality. The focus of these observations became the aura of the decaying medium, and the role this unique materiality plays in revealing the authenticity, age, absence and ultimately the spectrality of the trace. This then shifted to a wider consideration of how these 'analogue' surface features can become fetishized and simulated within various hauntological practices based on the digital archive, at a time of ongoing analogue revival and returning notions of medium in the arts. Alongside this written thesis the practice produced two other major research outputs: a photo book entitled *A Window on Time*, and a site-specific installation piece called *The Remote Viewer*.

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## Aims and Scope

This study examines the photographic trace as a paradoxical distortion of time, approaching it through the metaphor of the ghost. It seeks to unearth material explanations for this common spectral dimension to photography, through investigative creative practice and close textual analysis of images, using both appropriated archival materials and new photographic works by the artist. The practice of rephotography is used deconstructively to interrogate relevant theory: hauntology and aura, spectropolitics, erasure and the digital archive. In the creation and exhibition of new rephotographic works, the research poses questions regarding how such montages communicate and their “affect”, the differing ontology of analogue and digital images, the role of framing, opacity and movement, and multimodal contexts of presentation, including the use of sound alongside projected photography. The work highlights the interdependence of theoretical and practical inquiry, and how investigative practice can make critical contributions to theory.

As a practice-led thesis, however, its scope is limited in several ways. Firstly, it is a much shorter document than doctoral research projects without such a practice component, sometimes limiting the detail in which relevant theoretical concepts can be explored in the writing. Secondly, the findings and their interpretation are, to some degree, subjective. While every effort has been made towards critical and balanced argument, firmly couched in the established literature, certain creative decisions and readings were made necessarily through intuition.

Despite these apparent limits, the study provides unique contributions to knowledge in two key areas. Deconstructed rephotography is a new method and an original contribution to practice, a technique which could be adopted and explored further by other photographers and researchers. The thesis also brings photography theory into conversation with a range of other cultural practices for the first time, using a multi-theoretical approach, it makes new claims regarding the historical contingency of aura: how aura is affected by changing materialities and changing cultural uses of the media technologies involved.

While the research evolves from a simple philosophical question regarding photography, into a concentrated theoretical discussion regarding medium and aura in post-digital archives and cultures, it can all be traced back to my ongoing creative practice as a photographer. My main work concerns cities and man-altered landscapes, documenting how those spaces change over time, and the practical limitations of my chosen medium for that purpose. This context has unavoidably coloured that which is presented here: the writing and visual outputs of this research are part of that continuing exploratory journey. Nevertheless, these contributions stand on their own, as a distinctive body of experimental photographic works, and a clear progression of hauntology as a media theory.

## A Note on Materials Used

Two sets of archival images were examined in this research and used in the production of new works. All of the images used represent spaces and places which have disappeared since they were taken. The photographs were chosen for their location (much of my work explores the changing landscape of my hometown, Leeds); for their age (both sets of images are from approximately the same period, 1880-1910) and because of their relationship to a key essay in photography theory: *God's Sanitary Law: Slum Clearance and Photography in Late Nineteenth-Century Leeds* (Tagg, 1988: 117). In this work John Tagg explores the haunting absence of slum residents in these records, and questions the photograph's innate evidential authority.

The first collection of historical Leeds photographs was sourced from the extensive Godfrey Bingley archive, held at the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds. There are some 10,000 images by Bingley here, and they are "currently being digitised by the Leeds University Library Special Collections. Bingley donated this archive of his life's work to the University in 1913" (*Changing Leeds and the Mysterious Photographs of Godfrey Bingley*, 2018), after going blind. A retired industrialist, Bingley travelled extensively as a photographer, but his images of Leeds seem more limited, focussing on the rural, even bucolic scenes, to be found in the affluent northern suburbs of the city. Bingley's images neglect to show the encroaching urbanisation of these areas happening at the time.

In direct contrast, the second archive consists of images of urban deprivation, representing the seemingly empty slums of Quarry Hill in Leeds, just prior to their mass demolition. The original photographers are unknown – the photographs were commissioned by the state to make the case for clearance. The "unhealthy area" photographs are also held in the University's Special Collections (*Photographs of properties situated in the Quarry Hill unhealthy area. Taken Dec. 1900 & Jan. 1901*). These photographs are referenced directly in the Tagg essay (1988).

As well as showing us very different views of this lost city, the two archives also present us with different materialities of the image to explore. Bingley's crumbling original glass plates and cellulose nitrate negatives can be compared with the faded paper copies we have of the Quarry Hill photographs. I shall explore how these archives differ in terms of their apparent spectrality, their aura as differing physical artefacts and the absent spaces they represent.

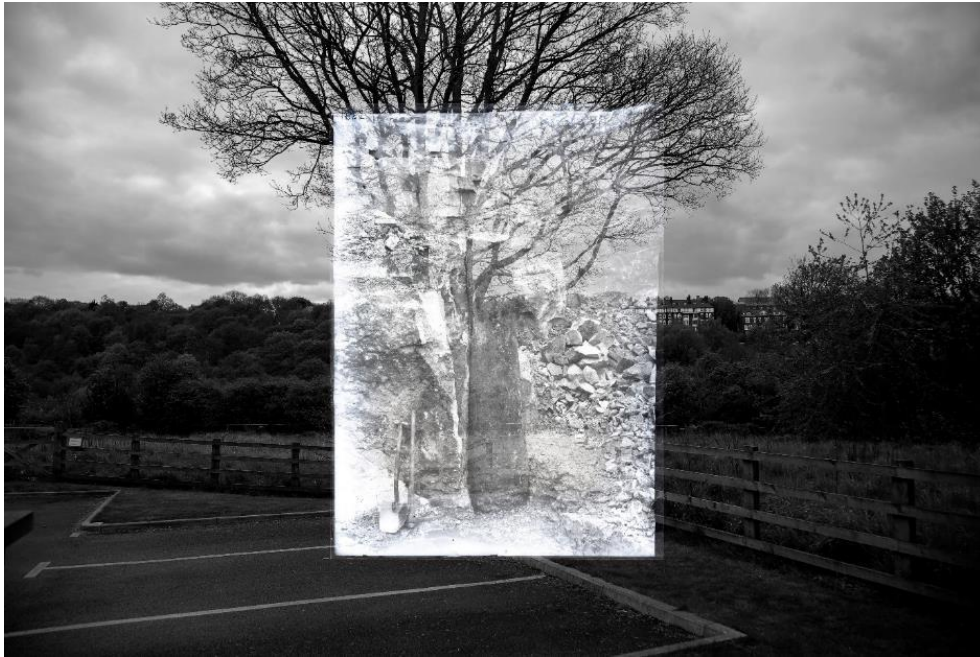


Figure 1 - Fossil Tree (Projection), 1895-2017

## Introduction

Photography functions as a fossilization of time - Hiroshi Sugimoto

(Matsumoto, 2014)

For the past five years my photographic practice has been dominated by ongoing research into the philosophy of time, how time is represented visually and how our experience of it passing is constantly mediated through images of the past. I became interested in how these tiny fragments of time, these 'temporal objects', might affect memory, alter our experience of time passing – how we perceive things changing, psychologically, socially and in the cities in which we live. The more I explored these areas the more I began to see the still photograph as a very strange temporal distortion – one which has become so normalised and assimilated into every part of everyday life, that we no longer notice it as such - but also one which effortlessly begets bizarre paradoxes as soon as we examine it closely, and our common-sense assumptions are left to one side. It was this philosophical preoccupation that eventually lead me to write this thesis, to explore the media theories of Jacques Derrida and the notion that we might conceive of all photography as some kind of haunting. I began to think that the

metaphor of the ghost might actually be the best tool we have to understand the enigma of photographic time – photography is a medium which distorts all duration, presents absence as a form of presence, and the past as a part of now.

What is presented here is, in essence, an ontological inquiry into these various oxymora. Using my creative practice as a landscape photographer as the main method of investigation, I aim to shed new light on these chronological problems and the shifting ontology of photography, an area in which there has been “little new theorizing since the 1980s” (Elkins, 2007). Photography theory often descends into an endless debate regarding the crisis of photography’s “truth claim” (Gunning, 2004), or whether we should ontologize the photographic object at all – a mere “transparent envelope” (Barthes, 1993: 5) we barely register – and concentrate solely upon photography as an evolving social practice (Kriebel, 2007: 5). However, a very common, if under-explored touchstone in much theoretical writing on photography is the key notion of spectrality; and it is this, paradoxically, that might unlock a unifying theory of the photograph as object – something which can be both true and not true, here and not here.

Although photography’s material base is a mechanical and chemical process, the medium offers a melancholy poetics – traces of things and places that-have-been, a capturing of time lost, a specter of our imminent death – imparting an element of romantic mourning to the very banal object. (Kriebel, 2007: 20)

Despite photography’s constant technological shifting and elusive classification, this eerie notion constantly recurs, pervasive to the point of appearing essential. And in the quotation above we start to see the key paradox at work, the time-travelling trace of the now immaterial referent brought to us by the material photograph, the real “ordinary object” involved (Barthes, 1993: 70). This notion of objecthood seems particularly important to us understanding any spectrality that may be at work in photography, especially as we now inhabit a post-digital culture in which these distinctions are increasingly blurred – in which most photographs no longer appear to have an obvious physical form themselves. Interestingly, this is also a culture undergoing a lengthy analogue revival, in which older physical media are increasingly seen as both more authentic and affecting.

The crucial question arises: how can the photograph be both an object and a ghost? Is it always both of these things regardless of the technology or the practices involved, or how might the photograph's unique objecthood somehow allow it this puzzling dual ontic state. And we have to be careful what we mean by 'objecthood' here. It is a loaded word in art theory, and my own use of it certainly requires further explication. In *Art and Objecthood* (1967), Michael Fried suggested a conception of the term almost in opposition to a definition of art – an object could either have objecthood, *or* it could be art (Fried, 1998) – as a “part of a system of valuation that valorises objects in the world” (Gibart, 2002). My own use of the word is much simpler than Fried's, and doesn't come laden with his aesthetic evaluations. Objecthood as defined in this research is possessed by any object with its own physical presence in space, any material thing with its own tangible surface, which of course includes most works of art, and much photography too. We can refer to the objecthood of the physical artefact itself but not its copy on screen, for example. The reason objecthood is important to these theoretical concerns is that it allows us to talk about the photograph as a physical thing in its own right, and the photographic trace as being something different, something almost parasitic – like a ghost haunting a material surface, perhaps. The re-evaluation of the photograph as an object in and of itself was an artistic tendency Geoffrey Batchen associated with a move towards what he called 'post-photography' at the end of the last century. In a seminal essay entitled *Phantasm: Digital Imaging and the Death of Photography* (1994), Batchen presented a new view of photography, on the very cusp of the digital turn and at the point at which photography was to change forever. Art photography was undergoing a new self-awareness and a porousness with other media, and photographs were increasingly presented as very physical works of art in the gallery, utilizing all sorts of strange materials; “solid photo-objects” that were “designed to be seen, rather than seen through” (Batchen, 1994: 50). When I talk about objecthood in relation to photography, it is this sort of materiality that I reference, and Batchen rather than Fried that I am invoking.

Twenty-four years after Batchen first prophesied the death of photography, the medium (or the amorphous set of technologies and practices, it has become), soldiers on undeterred. The technologies may have changed, as have the now countless practices – photography has certainly evolved and diversified immensely – but we have also seen the triumphant return of analogue photography, which was still very much the dominant form when Batchen originally wrote *Phantasm* (1994). He never proclaimed this death in any final sense, however, so much

as he examined a “convoluted temporality” (Batchen, 1994: 50) around notions of photography’s death – in which we might see dramatic transformations, and possibly equally dramatic returns – that force us to question the very notion of life and death.

Like a ghost, this photographic apparition will continue to surprise us with its presence, long after its original manifestation is supposed to have departed from the scene... Photography has been haunted by the spectre of such a death, throughout its long life, just as it has always been inhabited by the very thing, *digitization*, which is supposed to deal its fatal blow. In other words, what is at stake in the current debate is not only photography’s possible future, but also the nature of its past and present (Batchen, 1994: 50)

*Phantasm* (1994) is just one of many examples in the literature that allude to photography’s spectral essence – an “underlying ground” (Stimson, 2010: 41) which seems immune to all other change. This spectrality seems to counter any talk of the death of the medium, the profound technological shifts, and ontological uncertainty which we otherwise encounter in photography theory. This research will interrogate this apparent spectral commonality through rephotographic practice, through the use of both analogue and digital photographic objects together, both very old images and the very new – looking at their materiality, and the notion of their immateriality – looking at how they are different, how they are the same, and how they travel through time.

In this evidently philosophical endeavour we might find photography has more to bring to ontology than the other way around. Ontology “is the study of being qua being” (Stimson, 2010: 41), and photography seems to problematize *being* itself; as it *re*-presents that which no longer exists, it must hover between seemingly opposing ontic states – being and incorporeality, presence and absence, material and immaterial. For this reason, amongst others, I turn to what Jacques Derrida christened ‘hauntology’ – a deconstructive answer to ontology, in which ‘being’ and ‘presence’ cannot be apprehended without traces from an absent past. In the latent image, waiting to be developed and revealed – a transparent ghost on paper – we can see how such a phenomenon is materially explicable. The trace of the absent hiding below that which we can visually apprehend, suddenly materializing in the present.

# 1. The Hauntology of Photography

## Theory

Spectrality is at work everywhere, and more than ever, in an original way, in the reproducible virtuality of photography or cinema (Derrida, 2005: 158)

A “phantasm” denotes an image that wavers between the material and the immaterial (Gunning, 2007: 98)

### 1.1 The spectres of photography

This is a project about ghosts, but a belief in their literal existence is not required. For the purposes of this study the ghost can be theorised as something we might find in all recorded media – the seemingly immaterial trace of some past referent, appearing uncannily in the present. The ghost is a metaphor, then, but it is also something we *feel*. Again, this is not to ally with any belief in the supernatural, but merely to recognise that this haunting affect exists, as part of memory perhaps, as part of the social imaginary, as a glitch in perception or some sensuous knowledge of our surroundings that we experience, but that we cannot fully place.

Since the ‘spectral turn’ in the early 1990s (Blanco and Peeren, 2013a: 31), the ghost has been rehabilitated as a legitimate theoretical concern in many disciplines, from literary theory to cultural geography. The spectral is invoked to address “epistemological uncertainty” and “competing histories” (Weinstock, 2013: 64), disrupting simplified linear views of history, and destabilizing dichotomous thinking – the ghost’s ability to problematize these fixed ideas helped it become a recurrent “poststructuralist trope”. While the fashion for spectrality may have waned in certain subject areas, it continues to haunt others. The connections with psychoanalysis should not be understated, for if a ‘real’ ghost can exist anywhere it is hidden in the unconscious, as buried traces of our past that will not go away, as uncanny visitations, traumatic memories and ancient drives. But neither should its role be overplayed – psychoanalysis can easily “reduce haunting” and tends “to understand it as [solely] based on repression” (Frosh, 2013: 4) – and while this can go a long way towards explaining many haunting phenomena, it doesn’t cover everything. The tendency is to centre all on the mind, to the exclusion of matter.



That at its ontological base the phantasm exists on the “obscure frontier of materiality and immateriality” (Warner, 2006: 189) is the crucial paradox I wish to deconstruct in this work. And it is on this frontier that we find the physical photograph – a material object and a ghost that you can hold in your hand. How is this possible? We can theorise, perhaps, that the photograph is actually two things. It is both the spectral trace of the referent – the person or object that you see in the picture – and it is the ‘medium’ that materializes that ‘spirit’, the physical vehicle for the trace, whether a piece of paper, a video tape or an iPad. There is an ‘odd one out’ in that list, but we will return in detail to the issue of digital media later. Positing the photograph as some form of material ghost is not a new idea as this motif runs through much writing on the subject, and recurs in key works in the photography theory canon. Towards the top of any such reading list we might find *Camera Lucida* (1980) by Roland Barthes, and *The Ontology of the Photographic Image* (1945) by André Bazin. Both of these seminal texts utilise distinctly ‘spooky’ language in the name of realism, as they describe the nature of the photograph as they see it. For Barthes, the photograph contained “the ectoplasm of ‘what-had-been’: neither image nor reality, a new being, really: a reality one can no longer touch” (Barthes, 1993: 87) – ‘ectoplasm’ being a material for the physical manifestation of ghosts that features in many early spirit photographs. And in describing a “reality we can no longer touch”, Barthes certainly alludes to some intrinsic immateriality, even if it is not stated explicitly. We are deep into that “obscure frontier” between the material and its opposite (Warner, 2006: 189) with this characterisation of photography. We are certainly in that strange hinterland between absence and presence, too. André Bazin does not flirt with the notion of immateriality in quite the same way as Barthes, bluntly declaring the photograph “the object itself”, no matter how “fuzzy, distorted or discoloured” (Bazin, 1945: 14). But for Bazin, photography somehow appeared to “embalm” time itself too, and in this passage we subsequently start to see more ghostly metaphors appearing in his own ontological account:

Those grey or sepia shadows, phantomlike and almost undecipherable, are no longer traditional family portraits but rather the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration (Bazin, 1945: 14)

Hidden in Bazin's argument for the realism and objectivity of photography (which he thought underpinned cinema's realism too), there is an ontological uncertainty which continues to haunt photography theory. That the photograph can be a "hallucination that is also a fact" (Bazin, 1945: 16) is certainly a paradox. That photography somehow seems to inhabit a contradictory ontological space between absence and presence, materiality and immateriality, then and now, is the primary reason behind these continued spectral accounts of the photographic image in theory:

Once time is 'embalmed' in the photograph, it persists, carrying the past across to innumerable futures as they become the present. (Mulvey, 2006: 56)

All photographs are, in this sense, an after-shadow or visual echo of what has been. (Harvey, 2007: 42)

Those ghostly traces, photographs, supply the token presence... an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal (Sontag, 2002: 9)

every photograph is haunted, and further, is the occasion of a haunting (Sante, 1992)

technical images are phantoms that can give the world, and us, meaning. (Flusser, 2011: 32)

Regardless of the specific argument being made in these texts, the phantomatic allusions persist throughout the literature. We see the afterimage referred to almost as if it were an afterlife. Even Ulrich Baer, who was certainly critical of the "Benjaminian-Barthesian theorists" who saw "the referent's death lurking in every image" (Baer, 2005: 16), called his book on the subject *Spectral Evidence* (2005). Can we infer from all this that photography is inherently spectral, and if so, how can we possibly investigate such a supposition?

In *Each Wild Idea* (2002), Geoffrey Batchen drills deeper into photography's key ontological paradox by invoking Derrida.

As Derrida puts it, "This concept of the photograph *photographs* all conceptual oppositions, it traces a relationship of haunting which perhaps is constitutive of all logics." Photography it appears, is a logic that continually returns to haunt itself. (Batchen, 2002: 143)

For Jacques Derrida, a philosopher engaged in an ongoing deconstruction of ontology and what he referred to as the 'metaphysics of presence', photography was the ideal medium and seemed to offer material evidence for the very instability of presence. This uncertainty is temporal, with traces of an already-absent past always affecting

and even constituting that which we see as present. Derrida has written crucial texts on photography's innate spectrality, so his work will necessarily take centre-stage in these investigations.

I like the word "medium" here. It speaks to me of specters, of ghosts and phantoms, like these images themselves. From the first 'apparition', it's all about the return of the departed... *The spectral is the essence of photography* (Derrida, 1998: 34)

Derrida and Barthes may have agreed that the photograph was some sort of ghost, but their respective accounts of this spectrality were certainly divergent. One of the more obvious points of disagreement between them was the question of whether this phantomaticity carried over from still-photography to cinema. For Barthes the relentless movement of the moving image negated the haunting "punctum" (Barthes, 1993: 27) he sought in the photograph.

In the cinema, whose raw material is photographic, the image does not, however, have this completeness (which is fortunate for the cinema). Why? Because the photograph, taken in flux, is impelled, ceaselessly drawn toward other views; in the cinema, no doubt, there is always a photographic, but this referent shifts, it does not make a claim in favour of its reality, it does not protest its former existence; it does not cling to me: it is not a *specter*. (Barthes, 1993: 89)

The photograph's uncanny stillness must be part of how it haunts us for Barthes, but for Derrida the shifting referent of film did not negate the spectrality of the trace, and cinema was just as haunting a medium for him as photography.

The cinema is the art of ghosts, a battle of phantoms... In fact, it's because I wished to tempt the ghosts out that I agreed to appear in a film – Derrida in *Ghost Dance* (McMullen, 1983)

Derrida was not alone in disagreeing with Barthes on this point. Many theorists have talked about cinema in spectral terms, which should not be too surprising considering the close relationship between these two technologies, if not their respective practices. For some, the process of *re-animation* itself is the haunting quality – bringing the dead back to life on screen.

Like the enchanted portrait, each time the projector is set in motion these figures also step out of their frames and come to life (Nead, 2007: 1)

The images on the [cinema] screen carry in them something of the world itself, something material, and yet something transposed, transformed into another world: the material ghost (Perez, 2000: 28)

It seems that while cinema's spectrality may be open for debate, photography's is somehow now assumed, if not fully explained. But Derrida went one step further. This spectrality was not unique to photography being a symptom of all recorded media – and this argument can easily be made ontologically, as any recording must be a trace of the past unnaturally appearing in the present via some medium.

Spectrality... far from being reduced by the rationality of modern technology, found itself, on the contrary, amplified, as if this medium (photocinematography, teleperception, teleproduction, telecommunication) was the very site, the proper element of a fantastical phantomaticity... Every culture has its phantoms and the spectrality that is conditioned by its technology (Derrida et al., 2010: 39)

While the case can be made that all photographs are ghosts of the past, we certainly do not always perceive them as such. Some photographs are just more haunting than others. Some photographs do not evoke the absence of their referent at all, instead effecting a powerful illusion of their presence – rarely do the photographs used in advertisements and publicity haunt us, for example, and this is not merely due to their impersonal nature. Somehow this “realist mode hides its ghostly and phantomatic aspects” (Wolfreys, 2015: 641-642). To explore this qualitative variance of haunting further it is necessary to invoke Barthes and his differing method. While Derrida found photography and other media to be spectral through their deconstruction, arguably from a position of poststructuralism, Barthes briefly abandoned that school of thought in favour of a return to phenomenology, in order to conduct his own canonical examination of the photograph. Nevertheless, he still came to a similar conclusion: the photograph was a spectre. A key difference here is that while Derrida sees *all* media as structurally haunted, Barthes seems to be looking for those photographs which express haunting *phenomena* – which images have a haunting affect on *him* – an emotional impact he called the ‘punctum’. This notion is set up in opposition to that which he dubs the ‘studium’, a sort of general, aesthetic or intellectual

interest in the photograph which is socially constructed, but which lacks any substantial affect. For Barthes, what elevated the photograph beyond the everyday studium was “that accident that pricks *me* (but also bruises *me*, is poignant to *me*)” (Barthes, 1993: 27). While Barthes’ punctum may seem too subjective to be relevant to Derrida’s broad-spectrum theory, there is a crucial connection.

The essence of photography, the structure that allows and explains the functions of the punctum, is seen to reside in the idea of the spectral, as a haunting presence signifying an absence (Brunette and Wills, 2014)

It is only because there is this spectral structure to all photography that Barthes’ punctum can sometimes become visible in key photographs. So why is this spectrality hidden the rest of the time? For Barthes, this was to do with time itself. In his original conception of the punctum he saw an unexpected (and usually unintended) feature in the photograph as being the surprise that ‘pricked’ him. He later saw that he had missed a root cause of this, what he went on to describe as “*time as punctum*”:

I now know that there exists another *punctum* (another “stigmatum”) than the “detail”. This new punctum, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* (“*that-has-been*”), its pure representation. (Barthes, 1993: 96)

Some photographs reveal their spectrality by powerfully evoking the passage of time, by somehow signifying the real absence of the trace they present. These photographs can have a haunting effect or ‘punctum’ and are a guttural reminder of transience and mortality. So while every photograph is structurally about death for Barthes too, “every photograph is this catastrophe” (Barthes, 1993: 96), only some actually cause this intense affect, and this could only be revealed to Barthes through examining photographs phenomenologically. The infamous ‘Winter Garden Photograph’ was a key object of his contemplation (Barthes, 1993: 67). A faded sepia image of his mother as a child, it seemed to capture her lost essence where others had failed. This is a photograph we as readers never see, which increases its perceived spectrality. In lieu of an actual image we naturally project our own version into the scene, a suitable phantom substitute from our imaginations. While it is certainly the personal relevance of this image to Roland Barthes that makes it so affecting for him, the temporal punctum he experiences looking at it is only possible thanks to photography’s uncanny ability to capture and reanimate some

aspect of the past, if only briefly, and paradoxically by virtue of its death-like stillness. The image is structurally spectral, and this allows us to project ourselves into it in this way, as with Barthes and the Winter Garden Photograph. The photograph here is not so much a memory prosthesis, as is often theorised, but a material hallucination of time travel.

So what actually is it about the photographic trace that makes this ontologically possible? Is the photograph always the ghost of something now absent? For Derrida, all traces, including photographs, as echoes of the absent, must be immaterial and disembodied somehow – illusions of presence haunting what is material and present.

The trace is **not a presence** but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself (Derrida, 1973: 156)

Derrida's obsession with spectres and 'hauntology' in *Spectres of Marx* and with ghosts, ashes, spirits, and spirit in *Of Spirit* again show the importance of the trace: ghosts are both present and absent, a presence that marks an absence. (Eaglestone, 2004)

The theoretical immateriality of photography is wrapped up in various notions of the trace. The term 'trace' has a long history with photography theory, and the ontology of the image. Trace is often used interchangeably with the word 'index', a concept borrowed from semiotics to denote the photograph's unique physical relationship with what it represents.

A photo is also a physical trace or index of that reality. Authors agree that the index has a causal relation with its referent, such as smoke being an index of fire... This is why the index is also called a trace. (Gelder and Westgeest, 2011: 34)

But there are many issues with this conflation of trace and index. Jean Baudrillard, in an essay entitled *The Perfect Crime* (1996), undermines this 'indexical' connection to photography's referent with his conception of the photograph as 'simulacrum', of the image as an empty sign or a trace which can lead to nothing. In this conception we see a further dematerialisation in our understanding of the photographic trace.

Instead of defining a photograph as in semiotics as an index of something, Baudrillard uses the notion of trace in order to indicate how causal and formal resemblance are relative issues, which might ultimately refer to nothing. If this appears to be already the case in analog photographs, it is even more apparent in digital compositions. (Gelder and Westgeest, 2011: 38)

Here we might see the photographic trace as some disembodied temporal fragment – immaterial out of its context in time. The trace can be rendered an ‘empty sign’, so disconnected that it leads nowhere, at least not to a place that means anything anymore. In the last line of the quotation above we also begin to see another problem in trying to define an ontology of photography today: those constantly shifting technologies, and the multiple forms of the medium, which present ever-changing complications.

[in] the age of modernism, photographers – like other artists and art critics – still searched for the medium-specific characteristics of their field. They still believed they could define the ontology of photography. Since the late 1960s, however, both artists and theorists have arrived at the conclusion that a medium’s ‘identity’ is not fixed, but changes over time” (Gelder and Westgeest, 2011: 5)

Surely then, just as Derrida deconstructed ontology into ‘hauntology’, we must do the same with ontology in photography theory. If photography has died and come back to life<sup>1</sup>, we must examine all of its various spectres – its “shadowy ontological status” (Gunning, 2007: 103-104). Instead of trying to define what is *present*, or giving up on the notion of medium entirely, in the face of photography’s “expanded field” (Baker, 2005), we must look not only at how a medium fragments and mutates, but also at how it remains haunted by past versions of itself: how the plastic post-medium age is haunted by the idea of the authoritative fixed medium. A hauntology of photography should emanate from the Derridean realisation that we cannot pin down these subtle fluctuations to a linear narrative of technological or social progress, or to simple causality – as photography is constantly haunted by itself, so its past is almost certain to return in some form.

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<sup>1</sup> I’m referring to Batchen’s prophesised “death of photography” at the hands of the digital, and its reanimated corpse in the current analogue revival: Batchen, G. 1994. Phantasm: Digital Imaging and the Death of Photography. *Aperture*. 46(136).

Lee, L.M. 2012. Dreaming in Analog: The marriage of vintage photographic process and the contemporary world. *Post-Photographic Forms, Mutations and Digital Hybrid*. *Mid-America College Art Association Conference 2012 Digital Publications*. (9).

## 1.2 Materialization

To investigate through practice photography's spectrality, paradoxically I must focus on its materiality, in order to observe it – or more specifically, to observe how the spectre *materializes* through the medium. A material ghost must have a dual nature: the present object, the support or '*medium*' (which can often be invisible to us), and the spectral trace of the past that it channels – the usual focus of our attentions: the absent referent. While this spectral trace is all we habitually see, its spectrality is often not apparent. Only occasionally do we notice that the image is haunted by something now gone, as with Barthes' punctum. My hypothesis is that by making the hidden medium visible in some way, we might also reveal this oft-hidden spectrality at the level of its structure.

For Barthes, his temporal punctum was often hidden "beneath the abundance and the disparity of contemporary photographs", but was "vividly legible in *historical* photographs" (Barthes, 1993: 96). I began to wonder whether this 'legibility' was also something to do with their differing materiality. For, as well as temporal signifiers on the side of the referent, the physical medium itself is much more likely to be a very visible part of older photographic artefacts. And this certainly affects how we read them. The use of archive photographs in my own investigative practice as a photographer could be a way of exploring the importance of a visible materiality to this haunting affect.

When talking about historical photography's unique power to haunt it is impossible to avoid the concept of 'aura'. Walter Benjamin famously noticed a crucial change from "early photography" to later iterations of the medium which he claimed lacked this aura. For Benjamin, mechanical reproduction "withered" the unique aura of the work of art, of the original artefact, and of reality itself, when it was copied mechanistically by the camera or the processes of some other machine. In several passages in his crucial essay on this subject the aura of the old photographic artefact is referred to as if it were some haunting presence in the image.

It is no accident that the portrait is central to early photography. In the cult of remembrance of dead or absent loved ones, the cult value of the image finds its last refuge. In the fleeting expression of a human face, the aura beckons from early photographs for the last time. This is what gives them their melancholy and incomparable beauty (Benjamin, 2008: 27)



If this haunting aura was a unique feature of portraits and such “fleeting expressions” alone, there would be nothing stopping these auratic traits persisting into later types of photography too. The ‘cult value’ of photographs as mementos of dead loved ones, is also undiminished by changes in technology and the other more ‘disposable’ uses of photography that came later. So this unique aura must lie somewhere else. Some of the most haunting “early photographs” I have come across have actually been landscapes.



Figure 2 - A Forbidding Stand of Winter Trees, 1840, by William Henry Fox Talbot

In this early salt print by Fox Talbot (*Fig. 2*) the trace of a tree we see is simple – the tree itself could be from anywhere, any time – but it isn't. The crucial signifiers that let us know this are of the material medium rather than the trace itself, rather than what is actually depicted. The strangely worn surface and warm colouration, the odd frame and the atmospheric distance we feel between us and what we see, make the image haunting, and together constitute the aura of this photograph as a unique material artefact, from another time. We see the photographic trace as spectral, but it is the materiality of the medium alone which has signified this.

Imagine if exactly the same image of a tree were taken again, with a modern digital camera and in high resolution with perfect colour, and you will begin to see what I am referring to here.

What then is the aura? A strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a *distance*, however near it may be. (Benjamin, 2008: 23)

So it seems *A Forbidding Stand of Winter Trees* (1840) fits the auratic bill, despite being a landscape photograph and not a portrait. The “apparition of a distance” does seem to be a feature of the medium’s materiality here, making the trace seem further away in both space and time, signifying the absence of the tree we see. There also seems to be a close connection here with Barthes’ “time as punctum”, and one of the ways we can really feel that time-distance, that intense temporal disjuncture, is through damage to the medium – auratic signs of the unique artefact that has travelled through large quantities of time.

The most important aspects of aura appear to be some kind of relation to the original site of the work, the work’s materiality that changes through time, its uniqueness, and its cult value (Gelder and Westgeest, 2011: 41-42)

The other key component of aura is to do with *presence* (Yong). The object must be present and inhabit a particular space, have a specific relation to it and its history – in other words it must be unique, authentic and present. This seems like the opposite of a spectre. And if we are talking about the photograph as *auratic*, this jars with the fact that it is very much a reproduction, primarily signifying the absence of something else – the spectral trace of the original referent, which is *not* present. There are many that would say that all photography is inherently anti-auratic<sup>2</sup> for this very reason. But in these historical photographs we begin to see the relationship between the two poles of this binary opposition, and they relate to the dual nature I talked about earlier. In the decaying photographic artefact we see the physical *presence* of the photograph as an auratic object, exerting itself over the trace of the absent, as it fades and disintegrates. And in doing so, its materiality seems to reveal to us the very spectrality of that trace.

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<sup>2</sup> *Renouncing the Single Image* (2016) does a good job of setting out the anti-auratic position. David Cunningham critiques the fetish of the single image within art photography, and the aestheticization of physical photographs as if they were paintings – a fetish that is countered by a critical understanding of the importance of context in how photographs communicate and interrogate reality, and the consequent renunciation by that critical position, of all “attempts to restore an “aura” to photography as a condition of its “high art” status” Cunningham, D. 2016. *Renouncing the Single Image: Photography and the realism of abstraction. Photographies. 9(2)*, pp.147-165.

Decay is just one of many ways a printed image or photographic artefact might remind us of its own existence in time and its own unique objecthood. The material photograph attends to other senses too, olfactory and haptic stimulus are part of the experience of handling these objects, and could easily be conceived of as part of a printed photograph's aura. And in turn those experiences of the presence of the photograph as object may well heighten the sense of distance between you and what the picture actually represents, rendering the trace haunting.

aura and photography are not simply cast as mutually exclusive opposites [within Benjamin's writings] but are in fact engaged in a complex process of interaction... the seemingly paradoxical notion of a photographic aura (Duttlinger, 2008: 80-81)

This paradoxical aura can possibly be explained in terms of this dual ontology – the material object and the trace it carries. But in an age in which photographs are increasingly made and consumed as digital objects, as images without their own physical existence as original negatives or even printed copies, we must surely see a further withering of any photographic aura that once existed. The digital trace may be no less spectral – quite the inverse in fact, existing only as *disembodied* code – but the auratic reminder of that spectrality withers as the photograph dematerializes completely. Derrida alludes to this change in his invocation of the word *subjectile*, with regard to the digital image and its new ontology.

In *Copy, archive, signature* (2010), Derrida states that digital photography is “without a subjectile” (Derrida et al., 2010: 14). A fundamental difference therefore exists between analogue and digital images – but what does he mean by this? Derrida is calling on an obscure term which originates in the writing of Antonin Artaud. The subjectile can be thought of as the material support and substrate of an image (the canvas and paints in oil painting, for example, or even the stone or clay in sculpture), but it also infers a broader sense of medium including the conventions of working with a certain set of a materials, or even within a given genre. The subjectile is therefore restrictive (or resistive<sup>3</sup>), and it is something the artist must fight against in order to realise a new idea. This implies something more than inert matter, but something which “haunts the supports, the substrata, and the substance” (Derrida and Caws, 1994: 157) of all art.

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<sup>3</sup> “The subjectile resists. It has to resist. Sometimes it resists too much, sometimes not enough. It must resist in order to be treated finally as itself and not as the support or the fiend of something else, the surface or the subservient substratum of a representation.” Derrida, J. and Caws, M.A. 1994. Maddening the Subjectile. *Yale French Studies*. (84), pp.154-171.

So if the digital photograph is without such a subjectile, as Derrida proclaims, what does this really mean for digital photography<sup>4</sup>, and digital art? Is there a link between photography's aura withering and the changes in its subjectile, its lack of a unique physical surface?

With each new stage of technological development, the properties and values of the previous stage have been exposed to questioning and redundancy. Just as Benjamin made use of the new era of technological reproducibility to interrogate the significance of aura, Derrida also turned back towards analog photography as soon as digital photography began to emerge (Walton, 2015: 16)

Art and photographic practices change and respond as technology advances, seemingly creating ever-new levels of dematerialization of the image, but what is lost during this process of change, and to what extent are those practices driving those changes? For Jeremy Walton, writing on the relationship between aura and subjectile, we see that both of these are apparently withered or even eliminated by contemporary forms of reproduction, but that both still haunt digital media and notions of its immateriality. It seems these concepts refuse to die. Even if the digital image is without an auratic surface of its own, it has the uncanny ability to capture and haunt us with the ghosts of other surfaces long gone. And in Walton's writing there is the sense that the digital image can be "re-aurified" by its use in a specific place and time. Benjamin himself seemed to acknowledge this, "in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced" (Benjamin, 1935). But we still have the problem of the digital photograph's total lack of a physical surface, lack of a subjectile that resists, lack of its own objecthood, its own authentic life and death, as it moves and decays through time.

Through my own creative practice, and use of appropriated images from the archive, I will show what role a *visible* subjectile plays in signifying the spectrality of the photographic image. If the analogue image is rendered haunting by this materiality, what does this then mean for digital photography, which does not seem to have any? What about digital scans of analogue photographs? Can a digital image ever haunt us in quite the same way?

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<sup>4</sup> For Peter Benson it means that "the digital photograph *is not a photograph*". Benson, P. 2013. The Ontology of Photography: From Analogue to Digital. *Philosophy Norw.* (95). p.19

### 1.3 Hauntology and theories of media

Derrida's aim is to formulate a general 'hauntology' (hantologie), in contrast to the traditional 'ontology' that thinks being in terms of self-identical presence. What is important about the figure of the specter, then, is that it cannot be fully present: it has no being in itself but marks a relation to what is no longer or not yet. (Hägglund, 2008: 82)

technicity is hauntology, in that technical artifacts haunt their users with the possibility and actuality of absence (Gere, 2016: 205)

If all media is spectral, as Derrida maintained, why are analogue and digital photographs so different in this regard? How can we develop a "general 'hauntology'" of the image, aligned with Derrida's aim, which also addresses this problem? In an essay entitled *The Hauntology of the Digital Image* (2016), professor of media theory Charlie Gere attempts to do just that. Because "digital imagery breaks with the idea of the image as that which makes what it depicts present... [what] digital imagery requires is not ontology but 'hauntology'" (Gere, 2016: 204). However, just as Gere seems to alight on the crucial difference between these media epochs, he then correctly points out:

Inasmuch as they are always a trace of something either potentially or actually absent, *all representations are hauntological*. The digital image is not more hauntological than its analog predecessors (Gere, 2016: 204)

If anything, in the various cultural incarnations we see of hauntology today, we can observe the opposite of this being the case – in the obsession with analogue technologies and obsolete media<sup>5</sup>, the analogue is presented to us as "more hauntological" than the digital at almost every turn. But is this just because it is the media technology of the recent past? Before we go much further it is necessary to draw a distinction, as well as further connections, between two different uses of the term hauntology.

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<sup>5</sup> "Interference and Defects: A particularly hauntological medium is an obsolete, archaic medium (such as audio or videotape), because it imparts a new spirit to dead matter." Drenda, O. 2013. The Alphabet of Hauntology. *Czas Kultury [Time of Culture]*. (2/2013).

In the quotations from Hägglund and Gere above, we see the word used very much in the spirit of Derrida, as a deconstruction of ontology and a problematisation of presence itself. Hauntology in this instance is really a philosophical term, but it has evolved and taken on new meanings since its inception. Largely thanks to the epithet's use in contemporary music criticism and cultural theory, by the likes of Simon Reynolds and Mark Fisher, hauntology is now not only an established music genre, but also a trans-disciplinary phenomenon which we see manifesting in everything from the visual arts to politics, from television to literary criticism<sup>6</sup>. What ties these various cultural strands together is a distorted or re-imagined view of the recent past – often exploring how mediation of the past (or past media itself) affects our memory of it, and our relation to it in the present.

Within hauntological-related work there is also often a deliberate mis-remembering of the past, filtering it through your own personal vision, reimagining it in your own form (Prince, 2018: 123)

This process often involves the sampling, appropriation, or recreation of artefacts of the past, but in ways which present an altered view of it. In Stephen Prince's recent book, we are taken on a journey through "spectral fields", folk culture and misremembered transmissions, which coalesce in a view of hauntology as a recognised British subculture. In fact, Prince seems to define the confines of hauntology as a genre in fairly rigid terms, characterising it as primarily exploring a lost "post-war, utopian, progressive, modernist future", but one which references folk horror and scary children's television from the 1960s and 1970s, nostalgia for early electronic music, particularly library music and the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, brutalist architecture but also bucolic villages, a quaint but unnerving parallel Englishness - "a Midwich-ian Britain" (Prince, 2018: 27-28). This particular view of hauntology seems *very* culturally specific. But Prince also hints at the fact that this specificity and aesthetic narrowness is part of a broader artistic concern we can observe in much post-digital culture, one which regards technology and how it remembers (or misremembers) on our behalf – that hauntology is probably best used as a "starting point, rather than seeing its codified elements and references as unanswerable guidelines" (Prince, 2018: 31). As hauntology comes of age as both an academic and cultural trend, it certainly has the potential to ossify in the same way many other music genres and art movements have before, but that seems to run counter to an understanding of hauntology as an ongoing deconstructive project, rather than a mere style.

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<sup>6</sup> A very quick introduction to these cultural uses of hauntology can be found in *The Guardian*. "At its most basic level, it ties in with the popularity of faux-vintage photography, abandoned spaces and TV series like *Life on Mars*." Gallix, A. 2011. Hauntology: A not-so-new critical manifestation. *The Guardian*. Friday 17 June 2011.

What is most relevant to this investigation with regards to cultural hauntology is its regular preoccupation with the analogue, the haunting of cultural memory by old and obsolete media, and their specific ghostly materiality. Why is this such a feature of hauntological practices, and does it have an explorable basis in these Derridean notions of ontological spectrality?

Whilst there is a marked preference for analogue technologies running through Ghost Box and some of its hauntological associates, this is not a form of analogue fetishism that automatically leads to a rejection of the digital (Sexton, 2012: 577)

Here Jamie Sexton notices a common trait of hauntology through one of its leading exponents: the use of analogue/digital hybridity. As an aesthetic tendency, hauntology might look backwards to old formats for inspiration, but always through the idea of media as universally haunted. Analogue and digital are used together, revealing different types of spectrality in different technologies, different memories and different practices. Indeed, there is a good case to be made that these hauntological concerns are a direct result of, or in direct response to, the digital turn. The digitisation of past cultural artefacts allows these analogue traces to have an extended afterlife and an expanded ability to haunt the present.

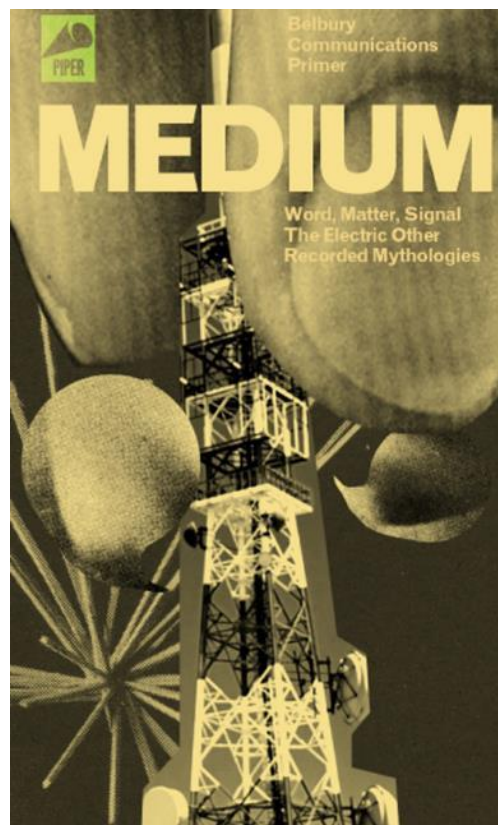


Figure 3 - Artwork for Ghost Box records by Julian House, 2009

For Mark Fisher, the cultural theorist largely responsible for popularising Derrida’s obscure neologism, hauntology was not only an unspoken artistic (and political) move against both the digital and postmodernism<sup>7</sup>, but also a direct descendant of those things, haunting the “digital cul-de-sacs of the twenty-first century” (Fisher, 2012: 16) with the lost futures we remember from the twentieth, the analogue utopias that failed to materialise – socialism, the space race, mass communal living, even modernist art and architecture (truth to materials etc.) – indeed, the very idea of a socially progressive future. And this use was certainly in-keeping with Derrida’s original dyschronic<sup>8</sup> intention, in *Spectres of Marx* (Derrida, 2006), where hauntology was conceived to describe the way the spectre of (failed) communism was still “haunting Europe” (Marx et al, 2002), and will continue to, until the social and economic contradictions that originally led to it are resolved.

Fisher made the most convincing case for this type of hauntology in the arts, in his observations of electronic music, where digital styles were being deliberately haunted by nostalgic analogue memories – sounds from a modernist time when electronica was still innovative and forward-looking. And as with Derrida and Batchen’s early responses to digital photography, we see a hauntological reaction happening almost as soon as digital music arrives. Boards of Canada started making ghostly and nostalgic analogue music as early as 1986.

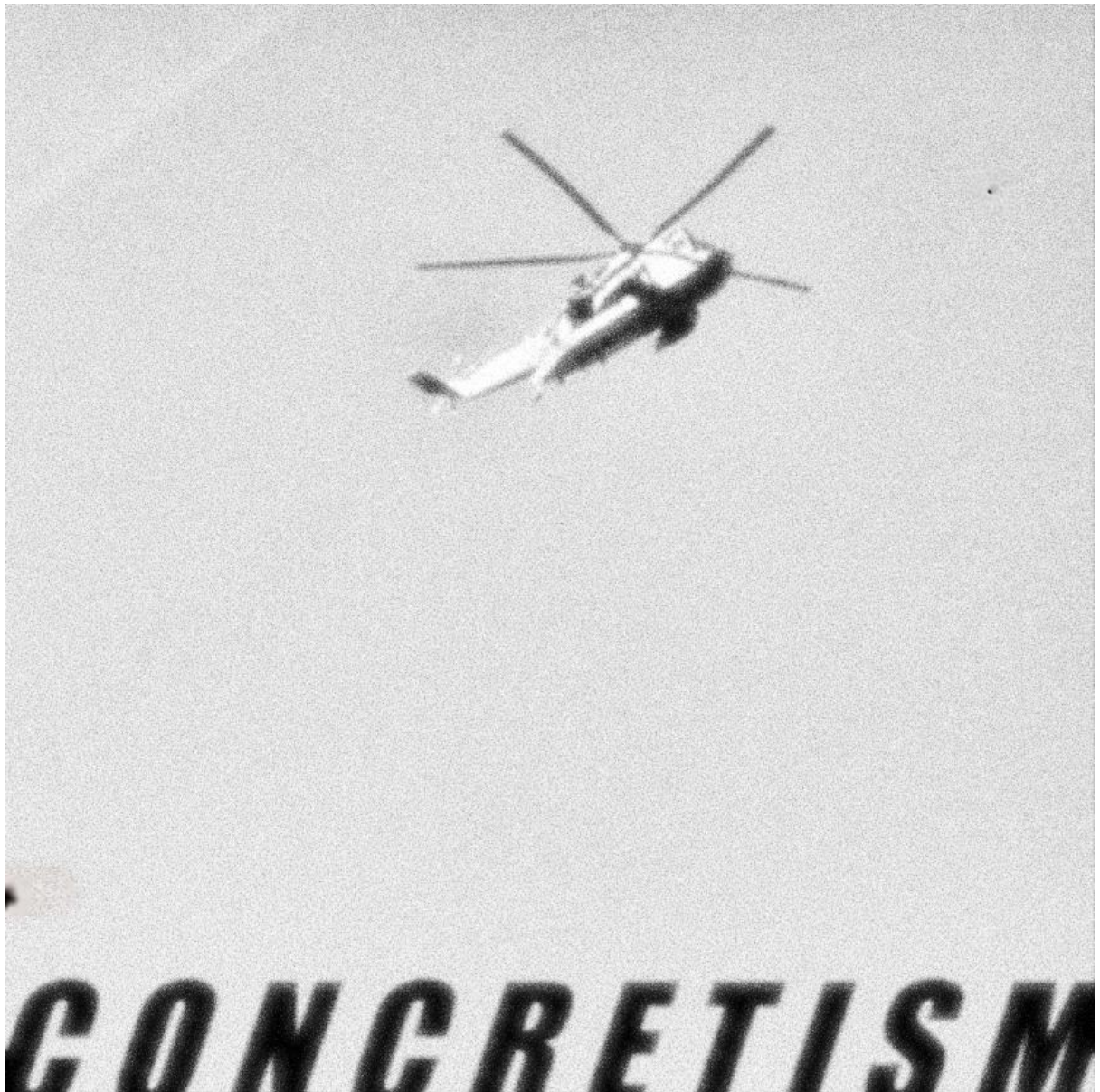


Figure 4 - Artwork for Tomorrow's Harvest by Boards of Canada, 2013

<sup>7</sup> For Mark Fisher “postmodernism glosses over the temporal disjunctures” made possible by recording technologies, while “the hauntological artists foreground them” Fisher, M. 2013. *The Metaphysics of Crackle: Afrofuturism and Hauntology*. *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture*. 5(2). p.46

<sup>8</sup> “Dyschronia is Reynolds’ name for the broken-time proper to hauntology, in which it is no longer possible to securely delimit the present from the past, in which the traces of lost futures unpredictably bubble up to unsettle the pastiche-time of postmodernity.” Fisher, M. 2013. *The Metaphysics of Crackle: Afrofuturism and Hauntology*. *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture*. 5(2).





It is this sense of *temporal disjuncture* that is crucial to hauntology. Hauntology isn't about the return of the past, but about the fact that the origin was already spectral. We live in a time when the past is present, and the present is saturated with the past. Hauntology emerges as a crucial - cultural and political - alternative both to linear history *and* to postmodernism's permanent revival. (Fisher, 2006c)

In Fisher's writing on electronic music we can also observe the idea that the *form* of analogue media (or even the recording technology's physical *subjectile*) possesses crucial signifiers of spectrality that the digital lacks.

the metaphysics of crackle is about dyschronia and disembodiment. Crackle unsettles the very distinction between surface and depth, between background and foreground. In sonic hauntology, we *hear* that time is out of joint. The joints are audible in the crackles, the hiss... The surface noise of the sample unsettles the illusion of presence (Fisher, 2013: 48)

What we hear, then, in the decaying surfaces of these recordings, is the absence of the trace. And if this is true sonically, then why not visually? Surely the grain, blur, fading and yellowing of an old photograph is signifying spectrality in much the same way – revealing a temporal disjuncture, an auratic distance between you and the referent. If the material presence of such noise helps convey the dyschronia of recorded time, emphasising the real absence of what has been recorded, what other qualities or methods could be employed to this end? Surely such a hauntological strategy could be fully defined and applied to photography, too?

That such strategies might result in any progression or new knowledge seems like a contradiction for many. For those critics, cultural hauntology seems retrograde or even reactionary – and this seems to be a fairly common criticism of all turns towards spectrality – that they are conservative propensities driven by nostalgia alone.

Hauntology feels like a symptom of future shock, a reaction... I think my problem with hauntology is that it deals with the problem of the future by going back to the past. And that is fine: but it will not save us. (Bridle, 2011)

What this argument seems to overlook is the deferred focus of much hauntology. As with retrofuturism in science fiction, it is often the present day that is under scrutiny – past and future combine in some satire of the current political situation, for example. By bending time and looking at alternative futures from the past, we can potentially open up new possibilities in the present, resuscitating notions of progress. Another unheeded aspect regards hauntology as an unavoidable cultural response to digital hyper-mediation and the “eternal present” (Ritchin, 2009: 50-51) of a digital archive that we not only frequent, but now live permanently inside (otherwise

known as the internet). We are “saturated with the past” (Fisher, 2006c) to such an extent that this becomes our only view – so it is only by looking backwards that we might find some way forwards again.

Jeffrey Sconce’s work on *Haunted Media* (2000), and the influential Roger Luckhurst essay on the “limits of the ‘spectral turn’” (Luckhurst, 2002) proffer weightier criticism of hauntology as a possible media theory, particularly with regard to notions of any universal spectrality and its roots in postmodern media “occultism” (Sconce, 2000: 5). For Sconce, any semblance of immateriality in modern reproduction must be a discountable illusion, part of an ongoing tendency for us to attempt to explain material communications technologies as if they had “mystical powers” – something which has been happening since their invention in the 19th century<sup>9</sup>.

In the end we are always left with a material machine at the heart of such supernatural speculation, a device mechanically assembled, socially deployed, and culturally received within a specific historical moment (Sconce, 2000: 20)

While I certainly agree with Sconce that there must always be a material explanation underlying or physically supporting these spectral traces of the past (this is in fact the focus of my current practice), to discount the theories of Jean Baudrillard and Jacques Derrida in the name of staunch materialism is to throw the baby out with the murky bathwater. It is simply not possible to explain all the effects and *affects* of these traces solely in reductionist terms, or to explain away spectrality as a paranormal fantasy. Sconce’s materialism is almost the opposite approach to examining haunting phenomena through a solely psychoanalytical lens, as both take a polarised position with regards to the binary opposition of materiality and immateriality, rather than attempting to deconstruct it, or understand how such contradictions might be constituted in the first place. Having said this it seems prudent to ground my own practice-led studies very much in *material* investigations of the photograph. A Sconce-level of scepticism is not necessarily a bad thing, and does not negate the deconstructive intent.

If Sconce is compelled by materialism, Luckhurst’s criticism of spectrality could almost come from the opposite direction – a defence of the ghost itself. For Luckhurst, the Derridean view of spectrality as generally pervasive in modernity, diffuses any power of the ghost, and the specific meanings that ghosts have represented culturally, and have embodied historically.

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<sup>9</sup> Warner, M. 2006. *Phantasmagoria: spirit visions, metaphors, and media into the twenty-first century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

the generalized structure of haunting is symptomatically blind to its generative loci (Luckhurst, 2002: 528)

By examining images and artefacts which are not obviously haunted on the side of the referent, and looking for signifiers of spectrality within them, we may discover to what extent Derrida's notion of constitutive spectrality holds up against such criticism – and we may also see what role those aspects then play in images that *do* have a more obvious punctum, or a haunting backstory to communicate.

Hauntology isn't about hoky [sic] atmospherics or 'spookiness' but a *technological uncanny*. (Fisher, 2006c)

Sconce's criticism of postmodernism's deconstructive (read: destructive) ends could in fact provide a way forward. *His* view is certainly bleak - "where there was once 'meaning', 'history' and a solid realm of 'signifieds', there is now only a haunted landscape of vacant and shifting signifiers" (Sconce, 2000: 171). But my intention is to explore that shifting and haunted landscape with my camera, looking for new meaning, new views of history and the "solid" material realm which gives rise to such ghosts.



Figure 5 - Avalon Theatre, Catalina Island, 1993, by Hiroshi Sugimoto

#### 1.4 Hauntographic practices

The spectral is that which makes possible reproduction, even as it also fragments and ruins the very possibility of reproduction's apparent guarantee to represent that which is no longer fully there (Wolfreys, 2015: 642)

If the photographic image is *ontologically* haunted, it should be possible to reveal this structure without recourse to the obvious 'spooky' clichés, the gothic settings and the wraithlike figures: without featuring any people at all, in fact. In my own practice as a landscape photographer people are often missing from the image entirely. And this forms its own kind of spectrality. Haunting must always concern some key absence, as much as we might consider it a strange sensation of presence when we encounter it.

There are many visual tropes that we might associate with the idea of haunting, and many aesthetic styles associated with related themes of memory and loss. Black and white or sepia colours, shadowy chiaroscuro lighting (*Fig. 6*), blurred or indistinct figures, damaged or faded Polaroids, grainy Super 8mm footage (*Fig. 7*) – are all recognisable aesthetic approaches to the ghostly. I began to wonder whether these specific tropes, some of which have certainly become hackneyed over time, only function connotatively through semiotic association with ghostly narratives, or whether they may have some underlying common ground to do with an essential spectrality of the image being rendered visible.



Figure 6 - Untitled #77, 2000, by Trent Parke

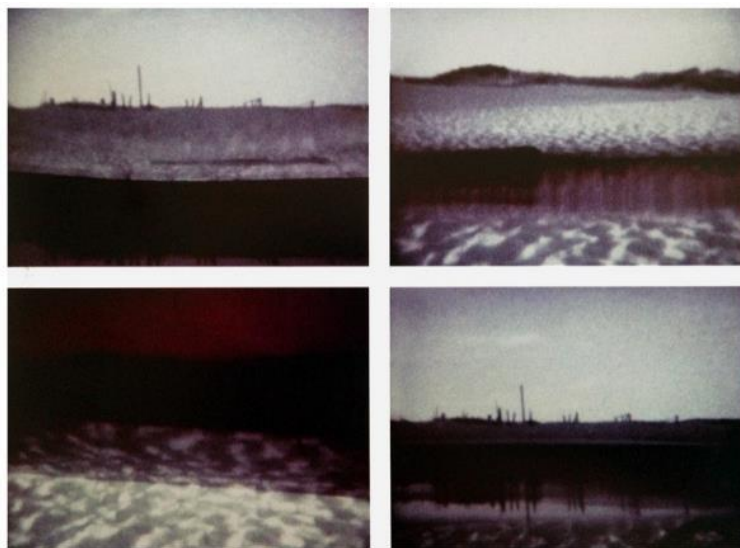


Figure 7 - Stills from My Very Beautiful Movie, 1972, by Derek Jarman

Perhaps it is because these distortions and surface aberrations of medium “unsettle the illusion of presence” (Fisher, 2013: 48), revealing what we see as a temporal illusion, an uncanny visitation from another time. As with hauntological music, a disjuncture which is hidden in the technology’s normal mode is then brought into focus through a foregrounding of that format’s own objecthood and noisy surfaces.



Figure 8 - Fading Memories, 2012, by Dean Chapman

In the damaged photograph above we can see this underlying ghostly matter without the need to know its origins. The associated story of disaster contextualises and renders poignant something the image already possesses – a visceral realisation of the absence of the trace we see. This series of photos, collected by Dean Chapman in the aftermath of the 2011 tsunami in Japan, form a striking metonym for the greater loss and destruction that produced them.

The rain and heat was quickly corroding what was left, and gradually, Chapman notes, ‘the small, personal details of everyday life in Rikuzentakata are lost forever’ (McNeill, 2012)

These are haunting found objects, and their decay is somehow very beautiful, but it is too difficult to abstract the exact role materiality may be playing in communicating this spectrality, as the powerful context of such a devastating event overwhelms these objects, and us. However, another clue may also come from Japan, in the work of photographer and artist Daisuke Yokota.

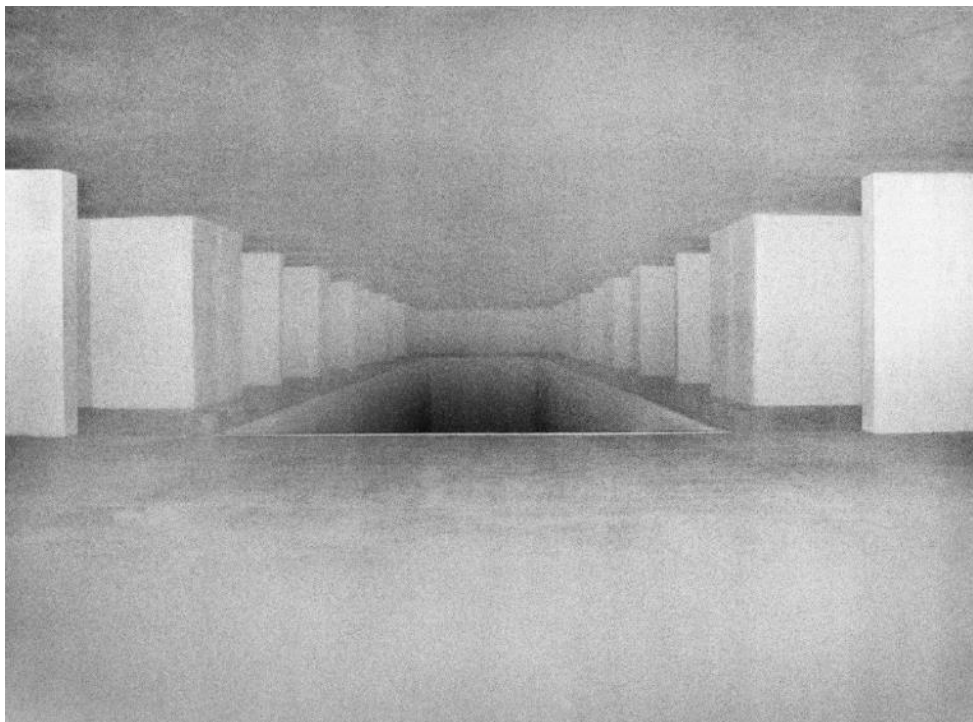


Figure 9 - Untitled, (Site 09), 2011, by Daisuke Yokota



Yokota's purely analogue works explore photography's "dead materiality" (Grieve, 2017: 39), the strange physical surfaces, chemicals, and machines, which allow these ghostly traces to remain present.

"Both the process and the meaning are important" says Yokota. "But it is difficult to include the process in the image itself. In other words, if the picture was taken in a severe situation, it can record the severity. But photography never includes it. To include this process into the final output, I tried to maintain the textures, sounds and smells to give the physical feeling of the process." (Grieve, 2017: 49)

And for a photographer Yokota's work is certainly very physical. These images have a distinct objecthood, a powerful presence of their own, as unique works in the gallery. They possess an aura that most photographs do not, and they are all the more haunting for it.



Figure 10 –Matter #16, 2015, handmade book by Daisuke Yokota

Yokota's images seem to operate at the fringe of photography as a medium, but there is nothing un-photographic about his processes. He merely pushes existing methods to extremes, and the objecthood of photography into new territory. In doing so, he reveals the medium's latent strangeness, its powerful subjectile and accelerates the physical photograph's entropy. We then see an aura which all material artefacts will begin to disclose with time.

Clear manipulations of photographic time are another way of revealing this spectrality, and we can see this in the work of Alexey Titarenko, whose long exposure photography creates some extraordinarily spooky forms (*Fig. 11*). Again, there is nothing un-photographic or artificial about this work. Convention and the desire to create a pin-sharp image – to present an effective illusion of presence in the photograph – determines the shutter speeds we routinely adopt. But here the camera's ability to capture time passing within the still is made disconcertingly visible. This is something which all cameras are actually doing behind the lens, but in the rapid speed of the ubiquitous snapshot, this aspect is hidden if not completely lost.



Figure 11 - Untitled, From *City of Shadows*, 1994, by Alexey Titarenko

With such long exposures the photograph is revealed as a temporal trick, the metaphysics of presence are challenged, and figures are rendered ghost-like, or disappear completely. This is something we saw much more often in ‘early photography’, when long exposure was required to create any image at all. In Louis Daguerre’s ground-breaking photograph of the *Boulevard du Temple* (1838) in Paris (*Fig. 12*), we see the first ever photographic representation of a human being. The busy city street is emptied by the ten-minute exposure time required. This desolation is a symptom of the photograph, not the scene that was before the lens.

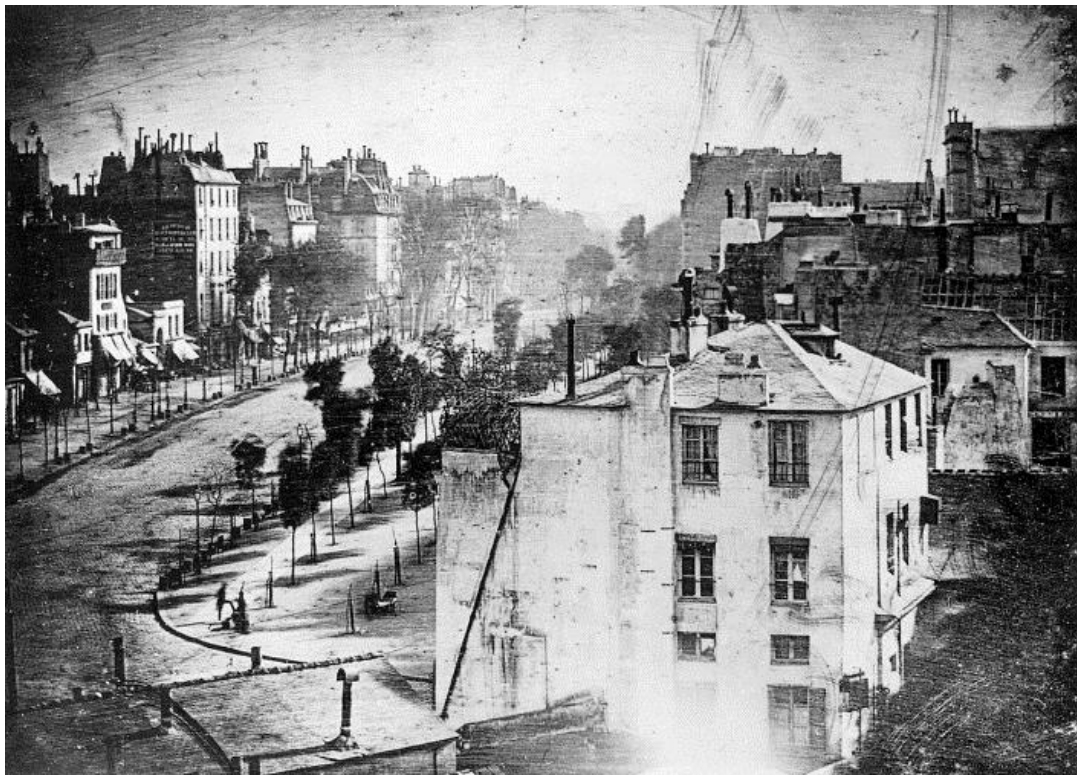


Figure 12 - Boulevard du Temple, 1838, by Louis Daguerre

The two things that epitomise all these images, and the universal spectrality they embody, are time and absence – the photograph’s unique capacity to represent absence and haunt us with the absent past. But so far we have only looked at single images. The use of multiple images is another potential haughtographic strategy, as we then begin to see how time is really represented *through* photography, and how we see time passing in these discrete fragments (or disjunctions)<sup>10</sup>. The act of taking the same photograph multiple times, or *rephotography*, is the practice which best exposes this atomistic structure.

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<sup>10</sup> “photography criticism remains invested in the model of time-as-river and assumes that it is the shutter that fragments the world” Baer, U. 2005. *Spectral evidence: the photography of trauma*. Cambridge, Mass;London;: MIT Press. p. 6



Figure 13 - Escape and No Escape, 2017-2018, from *Return to Nowhere* by Michael C Coldwell

Rephotography is a technique I have been using in my own practice for some time (*Fig. 13*), particularly in the documentation of modern ruins – their disintegration and disappearance. The fragmentary nature of photography becomes most apparent when you attempt to use it to represent change. The image represents vanishing well enough, but a mysterious vacuum opens up between the thin slices of time presented. The fact that we can never know from the photographs alone what happened between these moments, is an absence present in all such sequences.

A lack of change, stasis or persistence seem to characterise the still photographic mode as much as transience, perhaps by virtue of the camera's ability to freeze or fix time into a seemingly static object. This is then only re-animated by that object's own temporal journey and eventual decay as a physical artefact. This profound temporal limitation is visible in the work of landscape photographer Frank Gohlke, who alongside representing landscapes of emptiness, aftermath and loss, also attempts to show the passage of time itself in his topographic pictures of America's central plains. Perhaps Gohlke had this same realisation regarding photographic stasis when he took *Ten Minutes in North Texas* (1995) (*Fig. 14*), a rephotographic sequence which is not so much about the stasis of an eternal landscape, as it is the total lack of time in a still image – haunting us with a different type of absence yet again.



Figure 14 - Ten Minutes in North Texas, No. 4, 1995, by Frank Gohlke

When we appropriate old archive photographs and use them rephotographically, this becomes a more obvious hauntological strategy, and we can explore both the temporal aspects and features of the artefact's materiality. Many rephotographic projects attempt to recreate the original photographs exactly, down to the specific lenses and film stock used. Perhaps this is more like pastiche than hauntology, in its fetish for precise imitation. In Christopher Rauschenberg's rephotography of Eugene Atget, however, we can see the changes that have taken place much more clearly – not only on the streets of Paris, but in the photographic medium too.



Figure 15 - Paris Changing, 2007, by Christopher Rauschenberg

The moody, intricately textured Paris of Atget and Brassai is mostly gone. Like the dead relatives and friends preserved in the family album, whose presence in photographs exorcises some of the anxiety and remorse prompted by their disappearance, so the photographs of neighbourhoods now torn down, rural places disfigured and made barren, supply our pocket relation to the past. (Sontag, 2002: 16)

While rephotography is often a participant in a nostalgic mode consistent with what Susan Sontag describes above, the form can also present jarring and haunting changes in the landscape and our cities, traumatic transformations, forgotten screen memories – but as we shall see later, such a deconstructive rationale can push the form to its limits.

With the passage of time the original motive for the making of a photograph may disappear, leaving it accessible to being 're-framed' within new contexts (Wells and Price, 2004: 70)

The past became not so much a source of inspiration as a source of material to be worked with (Fontcuberta, 2004: 13)

to photograph is to appropriate (Sontag, 2002: 4)

Appropriation from the photographic archive is certainly not unique to rephotography, or a uniquely hauntological activity, indeed the re-use of previous cultural artefacts in new works is part of something you might even call a postmodern tradition. Sampling and remixing has been a part of both music and art since at least the 1980s, and continues to feature very strongly in contemporary culture. This creative "exploitation of history" as Fontcuberta calls it, while no longer an artistic novelty, still has something to offer in terms of how it can question how we view history and the passage of time.

Over and above their ironic stance, these projects are in their entirety doubly relevant here because they possess the value of showing us that just as every image derives from some other image that preceded it, so all histories, too, derive from other histories... Histories, like any other human product, are governed by conventions, beliefs and circumstances of time and place. The deconstruction of the historiographic discourse thus becomes an indispensable previous condition" (Fontcuberta, 2004: 13-15)

The difference between hauntology and postmodern pastiche is its relation to the past and the traces we have of it – the former explores absence, loss and forgetting, as much as it does nostalgia and the fetishization of past artefacts and technologies, while the latter always seems to place history in some anachronistic or atemporal simulation, the digital illusion of permanent presence, the "eternal present in which they are... ephemeral, omnipresent, never decaying, gratuitously bestowing a facile attempt at immortality" (Ritchin, 2009: 51). For postmodernism there are no temporal disjunctures to explore, nor losses or absences to evoke, as everything is present and accessible for eternity in this digital afterlife. But in effect, the disjunctures are not denied by pomo so much as "glossed-over" (Fisher, 2013: 46) – and hauntology seeks to deconstruct that fabrication.

My own use of archive images attempts something similar: an exploration of absence and the materiality that underpins photography's spectrality, deconstructing its illusion of permanent presence. It is an investigation of the photograph as ghost and of the background signifiers which begin to reveal this haunted nature. In terms of contextualising this move within existing art practice, one could certainly draw connections with the media art of Shimon Attie and his projections of archive photographs physically haunting the streets of Berlin (*Fig. 16*).



Figure 16 - Linien Strasse 137: Slide Projection of Police Raid on Former Jewish Residents, Berlin, 1991, by Shimon Attie

You could also situate the work next to Douglas Gordon's various temporal deconstructions in video installation, or the material explorations of film's spectrality that we saw in the structuralist work of Michael Snow or Tacita Dean. But for the most part, the hauntological imperative has not been explicitly explored in photography. Its spectrality, while almost universally alluded to in theory, is rarely unambiguously studied through practice. What I would really like to achieve for landscape photography, is similar to what *The Caretaker* or William Basinski realised for electronic music: an opening up of the medium to all new spectral possibilities.

What is mourned for most keenly in [this music] it often seems, is the very possibility of loss... The story of Basinski's *Disintegration Loops* - tapes that destroyed themselves in the transfer to digital - is a parable (again almost too perfect) for the switch from the fragility of analogue to the infinite replicability of digital. (Fisher, 2006c)





Figure 17 - Untitled, 2017, from 'Failures of Presence'

## 2. The Spectrality of Place

### Subject

The subject of my photography is often the changing city – the urban “non-places” (Brogden, 2007) and the strange voids and traces left behind in the man-altered landscape. In this chapter I turn to the ‘affective’ and ‘spectral’ turns in cultural geography, to see if there are parallels and connections between the haunted spaces of photographs, and the notion of a haunted landscape itself.

Landscapes are cultural objects through which time is materialized, marked by a sense of time passing, both historical and mythical (Edwards, 2014: 179)

There is no landscape... that is not inscribed, erased and re-inscribed by histories and ghosts  
(Riley, 2016: 23)

## 2.1 Spatial hauntings

There are two haunted spaces under consideration in this work. There is the spectral space of the photographic image itself, which we have already discussed in detail, and then there is a marked spectrality on the side of the referent in my images – these are landscapes haunted by their traumatic past and by the prospect of disappearance. As a photographer primarily of spaces and places, rather than people, it came as a surprise to me how important a role the ghost would end up playing in my work. But perhaps it should not have: ‘haunts’ are *places*, rather than people, after all, particularly once the people have left (*Fig. 17*).

For Ruth Heholt writing in *Haunted Landscapes* (2016), “the ghost *is* the landscape; there is no separation between ghost and place” (Heholt, 2016: 5). The spectre is therefore a ‘site-specific’ entity, always associated with a strong sense of place, a very specific location. From a psychoanalytical perspective this idea is commonly tied-up with notions of home, the *unheimlich* and the haunted house, as we see in the writing of Mark Fisher:

**Home is where the haunt is:** The word 'haunt' and all the derivations thereof may be one of the closest English words to the German 'unheimlich', whose polysemic connotations and etymological echoes Freud so assiduously, and so famously, unraveled in his essay on 'The Uncanny'. Just as 'German usage allows the familiar (das Heimliche, the 'homely') to switch to its opposite, the uncanny (das Unheimliche, the 'unhomely')' (Freud), so 'haunt' signifies both the dwelling-place, the domestic scene and that which invades or disturbs it. The OED lists one of the earliest meanings of the word 'haunt' as 'to provide with a home, house.' (Fisher, 2006b)

haunting implies places, a habitation, and always a haunted house (Derrida, 1996: 86)

But what if the house has been totally demolished<sup>11</sup>, does it take its ghosts with it? Are homes the only ‘haunts’ we might consider in the built environment? After all, “experiences of absence in presence are most of the time revealed *when places are changing*” (Degen and Hetherington, 2001), which does not seem to suggest that a disrupted or effaced landscape (or home) is exorcized, but quite the opposite. For answers to these questions we might turn to the discipline of cultural geography, another subject area in which the phantomatic has become an increasingly valid area of investigation since the ‘spectral turn’. And it is here we might begin to draw connections between the object and the subject, the haunting form and the haunted referent, of rephotography.

A growing interest in spectrality has recently emerged within cultural and historical geography as scholars rethink the manner in which spaces, events and practices disrupt notions of presence and absence... Disrupting the very fabric of space-time are traces that persist – of bygone structures (both physical and social) (Hill, 2017: 75)

In his influential work on industrial ruins, Tim Edensor examines the aesthetics and materiality of spectral spaces and traces, contemplating derelict sites which act much like ghosts themselves, wavering between being present and absent, present and past. Divorced from their original time period and social purpose, these spaces then become subject to the “natural temporalities imposed by decay” (Edensor, 2005: 125)

Ghosts flit across space; they cannot be captured or classified. Bearing traces of the past, they cannot explain it, but they allude to forgotten sensations and thoughts. By virtue of their partiality – they are not whole bodies or coherent, solid entities – ghosts are echoes which refuse reconstruction, traces which only lend themselves to speculation and imagination, fragments which kindle half remembered understandings, elusive feelings. They are apparitions which suggest avenues via which we might remember the past but provide no map. These ghosts inhabit the defamiliarised, spaces previously attached to the city. (Edensor, 2001: 48)

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<sup>11</sup> “Where Derrida’s words are compelling is in coming to an often near-impossible realization that home is a process of ruin from the outset, and permanence is only and always an ideal state of that architectural form. It is always dissolving before our eyes, transforming, altering into something else, something new” Hornstein, S. 2013. *Losing site: Architecture, memory and place*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd. p. 83

Edensor extols the virtues of these haunted urban spaces as they provide a valuable and affecting link to a rapidly disappearing past, and to nature and natural cycles within the urban. He highlights the danger of effacing these sites of memory in the name of constant development and regeneration of the built environment. But what if these evocative traces disappear or are removed from the land, naturally or in the name of progress? How do we not misplace those ghosts, lose that “staining of place with particularly intense moments of time” (Fisher, 2014)? If those traces, those remains, are the foundation of haunting, and indeed of cultural memory, does that mean that demolition is the same as forgetting?

Photographs are also traces of the landscape that persist, that often out-live memory and haunt our view of place, but not enough is written about their role in perpetuating the sort of spatial hauntings we read about in ‘spectral’ geography (Heholt, 2016), or the their role in keeping alive the ghosts of places which have been effaced and completely regenerated. There are certainly many urban locations where the only clues as to what came before are photographic – but the Deleuzian influence and the move towards “affect” and “non-representation”<sup>12</sup>, in these geographic studies, places their focus on embodied experience rather than mediations of the landscape.

The role of affect is no less relevant to landscape *photography*, as the “affective atmospheres” we read about in relation to a phenomenological experience of space (Thrift, 2004) are also experienced in, and informed by, the ‘atmosphere’ of aesthetic objects (Anderson, 2009: 79). These objects must certainly include photographs, alongside other representations of place. Photographs can be powerfully atmospheric, affecting, and colour or inform our sense of place more than any other medium.

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<sup>12</sup> “Attempts to move beyond issues of representation and re-focus cultural geographic concerns on performativity and bodily practices are linked to the inception of what Nigel Thrift describes as ‘non-representational theory or the theory of practices’ Patchett, M. 2010. A Rough Guide to Non-Representational Theory. *Experimental Geography in Practice*. [Online]. [Accessed 26th June 2018]. Thrift, N. 2008. *Non-representational theory: Space, politics, affect*. Routledge.

The decision to focus on this specific school of geography here, where others may have had more to say about photography and landscape *representation*, was the overlap with notions of haunted space, materiality and absence, that we find in ‘spectral’ geography.

The affective turn in geography can very occasionally be seen to acknowledge the role of photography in creating ‘landscapes’ in the social imagination without ever actively exploring how this might work. In *Real Cities: Modernity, Space and the Phantasmagorias of City Life* (2005), Steve Pile states that “the images and representations of a city have much to do with how they feel” (Pile, 2005: 2) contributing to what he calls ‘urban imaginaries’, a term he uses in close association with Walter Benjamin’s idea of ‘phantasmagoria’ – “the ghost-like or dream-like procession of things” (Pile, 2005: 3). What is the relationship between this illusory quality that cities possess and our photographic representations of them?

...old photographs, and the like, created a variety of phantasmagoric experiences. Not only was the real life of cities, such as Paris, phantasmagoric, Benjamin suspected that modernity itself was phantasmagoric” (Pile, 2005: 20)

The ‘phantasmagoric’ nature of modernity and the role photography (and other media or methods of mechanical reproduction) might play in creating this illusory space, form a common spectrality between cultural geography, Benjamin and Derrida. The phantasmagoria of Benjamin is rooted in Marxist theory, in the powerfully illusory urban space created by capital, that is so “suggestively real” that we move through it as if it were perfectly natural to do so, “when in fact it is a socioeconomic construct” (Jennings, 2006: 14). For Benjamin photography enabled this spectral construct to some degree – the phantasmagoria as an illusionistic distraction which alienates us from our material condition, by “greatly expanding the sphere of commodity exchange” (Benjamin, 2006: 35), and by curating very specific views of reality to suit its own needs. If the modern city is such an illusory phantasmagoria, the material ghosts of photography must be a key spectral ingredient – in the omnipresence of advertising, if nowhere else.

The “haunted landscapes” traversed in Ruth Heholt’s book are explored as much through the ‘affective turn’ in geography as they are the ‘spectral turn’ – and despite some use of photography in the essays<sup>13</sup>, the affect of the spectrality of landscape *representation* was not fully examined in this work. But these academic trends are certainly similar and overlap to a large degree. Both ‘turns’ are faced with a problem of exposition in that “there is no stable definition of affect” (Thrift, 2004: 54) *or* “the spectral”, which is “a concept without concept” (Wolfreys, 2013: 70) according to advocates of deconstruction. Both are attentive to the felt and the atmospheric, as much as anything tangibly material (whilst usually proclaiming materialism) – the idea that atmospheres are “felt in the body” (McCormack, 2008), that there is no haunting without affect, “no haunting without feeling” (Heholt, 2016). Both are largely subjective rather than objective concerns in this regard, and explore the psychological and emotional aspects of space, even the ‘psychogeographic’ (although these are certainly different schools of geographic thought). Also, both explore the spaces between the imagined and the perceived, the real and the virtual, the conscious and the unconscious, and both are potentially deconstructive as a result: “haunting breaks down binary distinctions: visible / invisible, present / absent, alive / dead, here / there.” (Heholt, 2016: 13) “...a haunted landscape deconstructs itself” (Heholt, 2016: 6)

The landscape photograph is in fact one of the few things that allows us to grapple with this spectrality of place in a remotely objective way, even as it elusively slips through our fingers at the very moment of capture. We can never *re-present* the changing city, exactly as it is – or as anything other than elusive ghostly fragments, snatches of views, echoes of transformation and traces of memory.

Landscapes shift and move, ‘collapse and cohere’, as we traverse them. This makes the static representation of place, catching the essence of the landscape, impossible (Heholt, 2016: 4)

So while there seems to be something inherently intractable in the photographic capture of urban change, it is fascinating to see exactly how the image fails to represent it – to observe how these two spectral spaces interact and begin to deconstruct one another.

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Riley’s essay in *Haunted Landscapes* focuses on the haunted ‘terrain’ of Heidegger’s hut, through his camera lens, and the through the lens of Celan’s poetry – although it should be noted, neither his photographs nor their own haunting qualities are overtly discussed in the essay. Riley, M. 2016. Place as Palimpsest: Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger and the Haunting of Todtnauberg. In: Heholt, R. and Downing, N. eds. *Haunted Landscapes*. Rowman and Littlefield International.



Figure 18 - London, 1994, by Patrick Keiller

## 2.2 Hauntology and the psychogeographic

Like its close relative psychogeography, hauntology originated in France but struck a chord on this side of the Channel (Gallix, 2011)

Exploring the notion of haunted landscapes, you often find yourself in psychogeographic territory. Psychogeography<sup>14</sup> and hauntology are similar in that they are both disruptive practices aiming to reveal the hidden and the spectral, where the latter often focuses on memory and technology, the former concerns itself largely with walking (the *dérive*) and embodied experience of the land. It should come as no surprise, then, that mediation of psychogeography, in film in particular, often adopts a certain hauntological air. We see this in the work of Patrick Keiller (*Fig 18*), who explores the “ghostly city” of London with similar methods and intentions to Ian Sinclair<sup>15</sup>: “like Sinclair’s, Keiller’s London is also phantasmatic, except his London is haunted by a London that never happened. Keiller’s work is as much about the *invention of memory* as it is about really looking at the city” (Pile, 2005: 8) – this quotation could equally well describe cultural hauntology.

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<sup>14</sup> “In broad terms psychogeography, as the word suggests, describes the point at which psychology and geography collide, a means of calibrating the behavioural impact of place” Coverley, M. 2018. *Psychogeography*. Oldcastle Books Ltd.

<sup>15</sup> Much of Sinclair’s recent work consists of an ambitious and elaborate literary recuperation of the so-called occultist psychogeography of London. Wikipedia

Adam Scovell is a filmmaker and prolific writer on both hauntology and the psychogeographic. He often approaches these two subjects through the medium of landscape film, both his own experimental shorts in this genre and detailed analysis of the work of others, such as Keiller and Derek Jarman. There is something symbiotic going on in all of these landscape films, where the film is haunted by the land, and the land is haunted by its representation on film.

[in *A Journey To Avebury*] Jarman seems to fully interpret the landscape to his own needs. The footage has aged but the colours seem to be derived of their own accord. Avebury is transformed into a hyper-reality of green with a burnished yellow sky; perhaps these are the colours of the countryside but through the filter of Jarman's own perception of memory. The fact that this is no ordinary landscape also suggests an otherness that is beyond the simple capture of Jarman's walk. (Scovell, 2014)



Figure 19 - Still from *A Journey to Avebury*, a landscape film by Derek Jarman, 1971

This “otherness” and the “hazy aura of the unknown” surrounding Derek Jarman’s Super 8 films (Greenhaigh, 2014), can be read psychogeographically and hauntologically – the land filtered through memory and the imaginary, this hazy aura is as much a product of the spectrality of the analogue medium as it is of the landscape



itself. For Scovell this goes beyond a filmic documentation of landscape and becomes a study of perception, and “the potential of [the landscape’s] weird past to bleach through into the chemicals of the celluloid” (Scovell, 2014). He goes into this examination of Super 8’s ghostly materiality much further in his essay entitled *The Ghost in the Grain* (2016). Here he talks about obsolete media “summoning a literal ghost in the machine” and the “imperfect facets [of analogue film] highlighting that it is *not* the original perceptive event” (Scovell, 2016). This is film’s noisy subjectile spectralising what we see again, creating an auratic distance to the represented landscape, and revealing the trace as something haunting us from the past, a temporal disjuncture, something from another world. This idea of the ghost being embedded in the materiality of the medium – in the grain, in the noise, in the cracks and imperfections – is very similar to my earlier muse on the aura and subjectile of analogue photography, and certainly resonates with Mark Fisher’s discussion of sonic hauntology and the metaphysics of crackle and dust.

I wanted to show a common fit between the phantasms found in the landscape and their ability to be conjured by such analogue equipment (Scovell, 2016)

The common fit is rendered visible in Scovell’s work but not fully explained. There are certainly connections here, between the haunting materiality of old media, hauntings of the landscape, and the spectrality of film becoming part of our mediated view of place, and indeed our cultural memory of the land, but the joins are as hazy and vague as the spectral forms we find on damaged film. Through practical exploration of where these themes overlap I hope to bring their relationships into greater focus. Surely the most spectral of all landscapes are those which have been lost forever, and now exist only as haunting photographic traces.

### 2.3 Lost landscapes

What happens with the memory of a house that no longer exists? That house is demolished... The process of deconstruction of the sign that marks the disappeared facility leads to the fact that even this patch will not remain there long; it will be whitewashed or overbuilt like some illegal graffiti – *The Urban Palimpsest of Nina Todorovic* (Jovanovic, 2017)



Figure 20 - Architecture of Memory/Inner Landscape, exhibition by Nina Todorovic and Svetlana Volic, 2013

How can we approach, photographically, the idea that landscapes change, or even disappear entirely? Walking these spaces, on some psychogeographic *dérive* or other, we may be drawn to traces of the past we stumble across in our surroundings – their documentation could easily become the source material for a project dealing with urban change and the spectrality of the landscape – particularly with the caveat mentioned in the quotation above: these traces too will one day disappear. In her work, Nina Todorovic seeks out such traces and moments of erasure – the strange patterns left behind on the ground or the sides of adjacent buildings, when most of some structure or place has been removed or irredeemably damaged. Her images of a scarred Belgrade certainly present a haunted landscape deconstructing itself (Heholt, 2016: 6), and her manipulations of glitched photographs (*Fig.21*) show how media technologies play a role in the recording and altering of its memory – these traces too are under palimpsestic erasure.

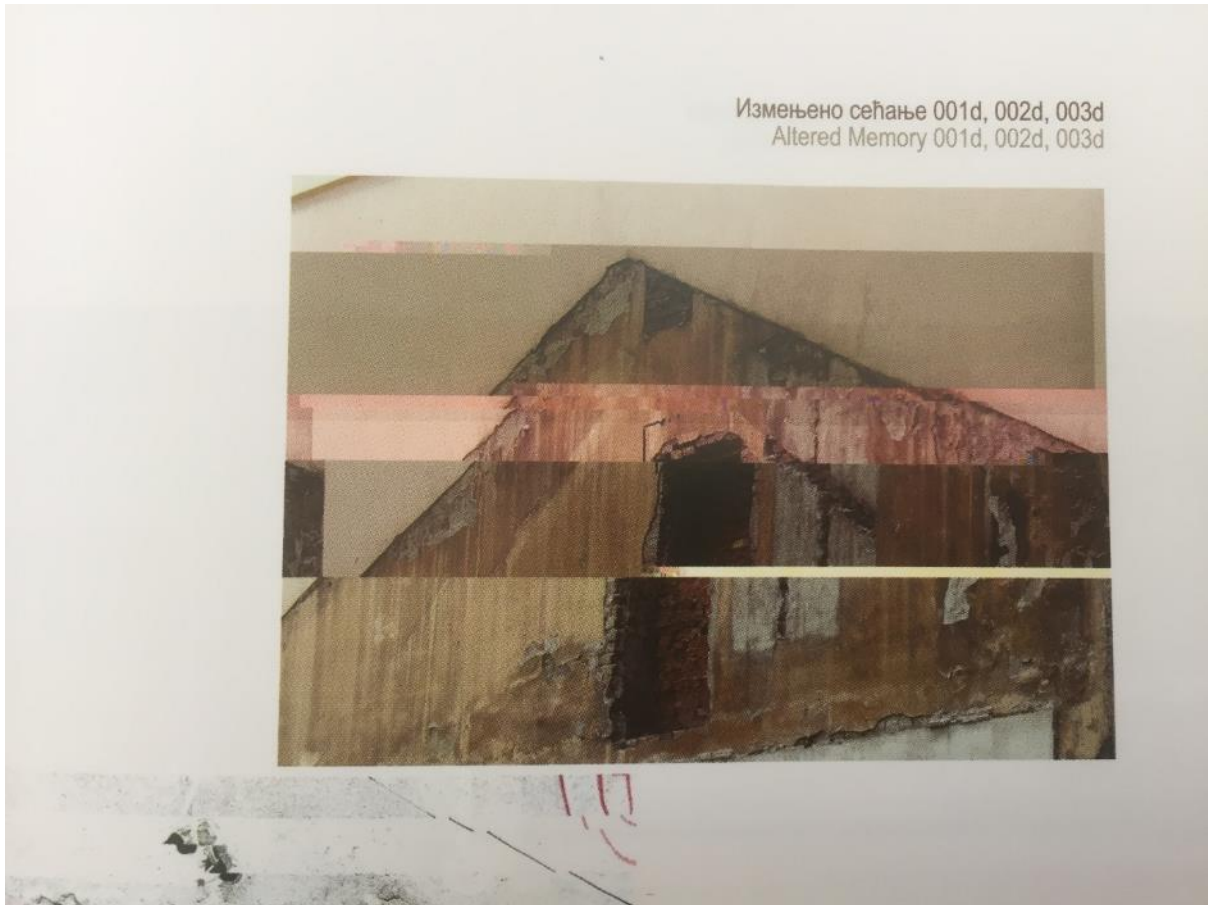


Figure 21 - Altered Memory 001d, from Mapping of Deconstruction, 2017, by Nina Todorovic

The auratic surfaces of buildings in a state of change or disrepair are presences that mark an absence, the site of something that was once very different, haunted by these reminders of upheaval. While Todorovic's work deals with haunting, I do not think it is completely hauntological. What is not always apparent in *Mapping of Deconstruction* (2017) is a palpable sense of *time*, either passing, lost or disjunctive, or the (time)scale of these changes in the city as a whole. This somehow thrusts us into a present-tense inspection of these fragmentary traces as abstracted forms and surfaces, which can sometimes seem too 'present' to haunt us with Barthes' temporal punctum. However, Todorovic is just as focussed on the spectral role of materiality as me, printing her layers of photographic trace on transparencies and other carefully chosen materials (*Figs. 20 and 22*). I began to wonder whether the somewhat neutral 'presentness' detected herein was a feature of the digital media underlying much of her work, as I noticed that some of her earlier experiments with analogue slides and found photos, seemed to evoke the *affect* of absence much more successfully (*Fig. 20*) – the presence of that hazy aura of spectrality which seems to frequent celluloid, could be the difference here perhaps.



Figure 22 - Mapping of Deconstruction by Nina Todorovic, solo exhibition, 2017

The truly lost landscape cannot be captured like this. This particular deconstructive approach is still predicated on the recording of visible remains, as was much of my own urban photography and the work that influenced it, epitomised by an exploratory flâneurism, traversing and documenting the abandoned “Non-Places” (Brogden, 2011: 1) and liminal voids left behind by deindustrialisation. My research turned towards the photographic archive for traces instead, once I realised that in the locations I was most interested in photographing, little-to-no visible evidence remained of what came before. The land had been totally effaced.

One such location was Quarry Hill, in my adopted hometown of Leeds. As an undergraduate I was introduced to the photography of Peter Mitchell and his work has had a lasting influence on my own. He gave a guest lecture on his work documenting the demolition of Quarry Hill flats, later published as *Memento Mori* (Mitchell, 2016). In these collected images we see the gradual erasure of the largest social housing complex in the country, juxtaposed with archive images of when the estate was new (*Fig. 23*) and the original blueprints, alongside the thoughts and feelings of the displaced residents. In retrospect this certainly seemed like a hauntological approach to representing the sense of loss, and the massive urban transformation that engendered it.

“I photograph dying buildings and Quarry Hill was terminal by the time I got to it. Times change and I know there was no point in keeping Quarry Hill Flats. But what it stood for might have been worth remembering.” (Mitchell, 2016)



Figure 23 - From Memento Mori, originally published in 1990, by Peter Mitchell

My interest in Quarry Hill was piqued yet further when I discovered that the demolition of Quarry Hill flats in 1978 was just the last wave in a long history of slum clearance that dated back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. This inner-city district had been repeatedly effaced over its lifetime, and in 2017 its final death-knell was sounded, as it was announced that the area was to be ‘rebranded’ as SOYO<sup>16</sup>, the new ‘cultural’ sector in the city.

Quarry Hill also played an important role in the history of photography theory and the politics of landscape representation. In John Tagg’s seminal book *The Burden of Representation* (1988), he used archive photographs of the area, taken at the turn of the last century, in his questioning of the photograph’s authority and evidential power, its “contentious legal realism” (Tagg, 1988: 144). The images in question were commissioned by Leeds Corporation to make the original case for slum clearance, proving it was “unhealthy” – and this is the only view we have left of this lost urban landscape.

<sup>16</sup> SOYO – The new Leeds cultural quarter - <https://soyoleeds.com/>

While we will never know to what extent they misrepresented the slums, I decided to use these archive images of Quarry Hill as my new source and inspiration, and to attempt to rephotograph those streets which have long since disappeared.



Figure 24 - Allison's Buildings, 4th March 1909. Off Charles Street, part of the Quarry Hill 'unhealthy' housing area, a faded notice on a wall gives official notification of forthcoming demolition for residents. 1909, photographer unknown.

In Tagg's writing another area of the city is mentioned, as a point of contrast. "From the heights of *Headingley*, Quarry Hill seemed a nether world lost in satanic fumes" (Tagg, 1988: 131). The Special Collections archives at the University of Leeds also hold a vast collection of photographs by industrialist Godfrey Bingley, many of which depict the rural village of Headingley, where he lived in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – just prior to its rapid urbanisation. My work will use both of these archives to explore different types of effaced landscape, different photographic visions of the same city and different haunted media (one archive is held as the original glass negatives, the other only as paper prints). To what extent can we time-travel through photography and see if these two spaces really were as dissimilar as heaven and hell? As these locations no longer exist rephotography in the normal mode will not be possible. These old photographs will have a more symbolic role to play in the new works. They will stand-in for what has been irretrievably lost, rather than what has been found – what is unknowable, absent, and yet what has uncannily persisted into the present – haunting us, but severed from a context which has long since vanished.

## 2.5 Maquettes



Figure 25 - Godfrey Bingley impossible rephotography test 1, 2016



Figure 26 - Godfrey Bingley impossible rephotography test 2, 2016

## 3. Deconstructing Rephotography

### Methodology & Practice

A repeat photograph, or 'rephotograph' is a photograph made to duplicate selected aspects of another... The new image typically repeats the spatial location of the original (Klett, 2011: 114)

Brought back to where it was made, the photograph evokes the captured event as a haunting presence permeating that place. (Munteán, 2017: 133)

#### 3.1 Rephotography as a practice

The various practices of rephotography are particularly apposite to an examination of both the temporality and materiality of the photographic object. The rephotograph presents two different exposures, two different times in a single image, haunting a photographic representation of the 'present' through its juxtaposition with a photographic artefact from the past. Through my own use (and deliberate misuse) of this technique I hope to gain further insight into what Derrida considered to be photography's innate spectrality – the relationship between the apparent immateriality of the trace, and the materiality of the photograph itself – the relationship between its presence now as a photographic object, and the absent past to which it refers and defers. For rephotography is a practice which is predicated upon the photograph's ability to act like a window on a lost world, as with Barthes' "transparent envelope" (Barthes, 1993: 5), but which is equally reliant upon that image being a material artefact that exists in the present – although a simple model of this is problematized when the physical archive object becomes a digital one. Through the repurposing of the photographic artefact, and through revisitation, this practice also demonstrates that the photograph is always a trace of some performance, but one which is largely absent from the trace we can see in the frame. The act of rephotography is a process which attempts a sort of ritual time-travel, by using the artefact to re-stage a prior performance of the photographic act. I will make the case that rephotography actually fails to accomplish what it often attempts both geographically and archaeologically – the montaging of then and now offers little in terms of additional



historical evidence. What it does succeed at, however, is the formation of an ontological bridge between the photography of the past - the archive and its artefacts - and contemporary photographs and practices. It does this by creating new images which contain both of these worlds, allowing us to compare them. The old photograph is held up in front of the same scene as it now stands, and a new photograph is taken (or the two views are composited digitally), forging a new connection between images, between times: links are made between different forms, media and their presence today. This might tell us more about practices of photography, and how photographs work ontologically and temporally, than it reveals specifics about places, histories or memories.

Rephotography asks us to live in the seams of uncertainty, where the layers of past, present and future overlap (Kalin, 2013: 175)

For Jason Kalin writing in *Visual Communication Quarterly*, rephotography is not a medium concerned with the recollection or representation of *real* memories of place, so much as it is a “practice of actively *constructing* and inhabiting memories” (Kalin, 2013: 168). Although this is true of all photography, to some extent, this construction of imaginary memories through layering, is also the synthesis of imaginary spaces and times. The subsequent illusion is due not only to what Kalin (via Lev Manovich<sup>17</sup>) calls “composite time” or “ontological montage” (ibid., 174), but also to the spatial fixation of that composition and its reliance on permanent reference points. This, I shall argue later, leads to a sense of perpetuity rather than transience, and a fictitious certainty, rather than the “seams of *uncertainty*” that Kalin suggests the medium of rephotography inhabits.

I first began to use rephotography as a method in 2014. Its use then was chiefly pragmatic – a way to show how the city was changing, how spaces and buildings were disappearing. Indeed, this was the original intention of rephotography as a ‘professional’ practice: it was a cartographic method of charting the transforming landscape over time, to support empirical research in geography, as we see employed by the likes of Mark Klett and his *Rephotographic Survey Project* in the late 1970s<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Manovich, L. 2001a. *The language of new media*. Cambridge, Mass; London;: MIT Press.

<sup>18</sup> “The Rephotographic Survey Project ran through 1979 and made thousands of images. The resulting exhibition and book of 120 rephotographs, *Second View*, as it’s called, was an astonishing feat of mathematical accuracy, cultural geography, history, and art.” Fox, W.L. 2001. *View finder: Mark Klett, photography, and the reinvention of landscape*. UNM Press.

This pioneering form of rephotography is quite different in both form and intention, to the various cultural practices we see online today<sup>19</sup>, which I term ‘vernacular’ rephotography, due to their use of found amateur photographs as source material and their context as a largely recreational social practice.

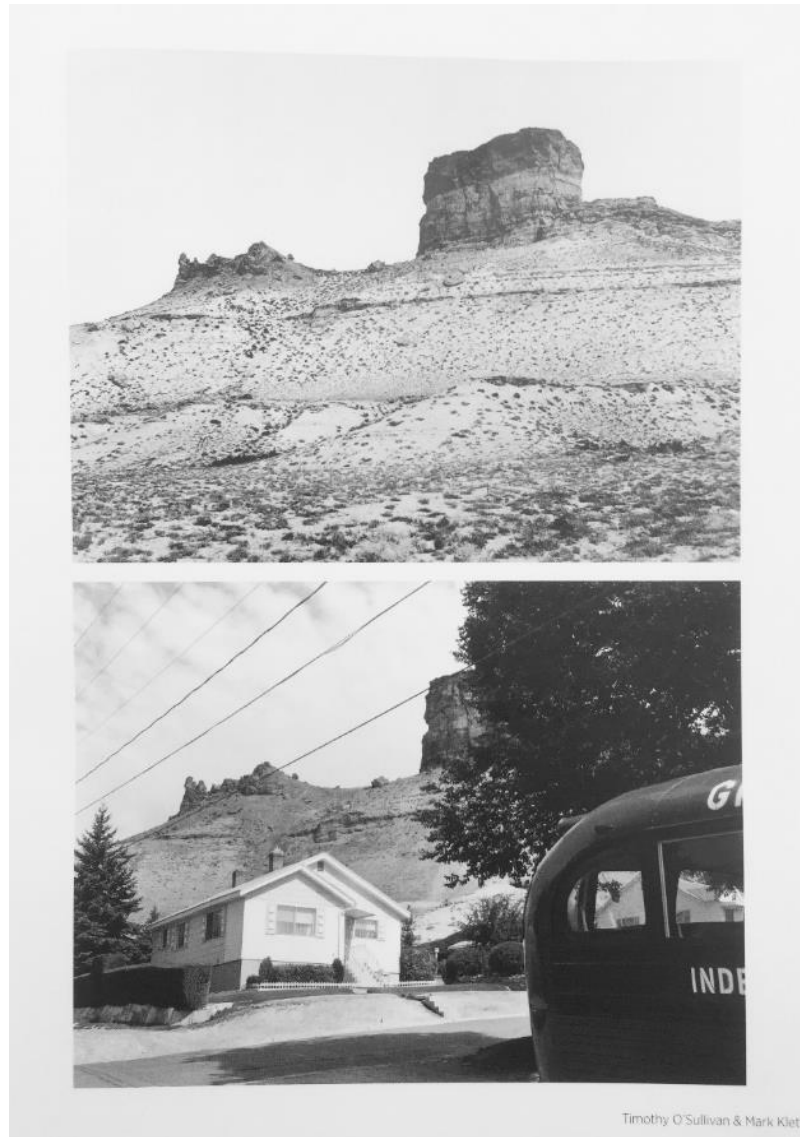


Figure 27 - Photographs by Timothy O'Sullivan and Mark Klett, The Rephotographic Survey Project, 18?? - 1977, from Photography Masterclass (Lowe and Norfolk, 2016)

The original form of the professional technique usually placed the two photographs side by side as a diptych for easy comparison, in what we might call “spatial montage” (Manovich, 2001a: 323). This form of comparative

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<sup>19</sup> Jason Kalin goes into this in more depth in his study of rephotographic practice: Kalin, J. 2013. Remembering with Rephotography: A Social Practice for the Inventions of Memories. *Visual Communication Quarterly*. 20(3), pp.168-179.

rephotography was the one I used in my own landscape photography until recently – the identical composition in each frame allowing you to ‘spot the difference’, as it were, as buildings and other features seem to magically appear or disappear from one depicted time to the next. But this key feature was also the problem.

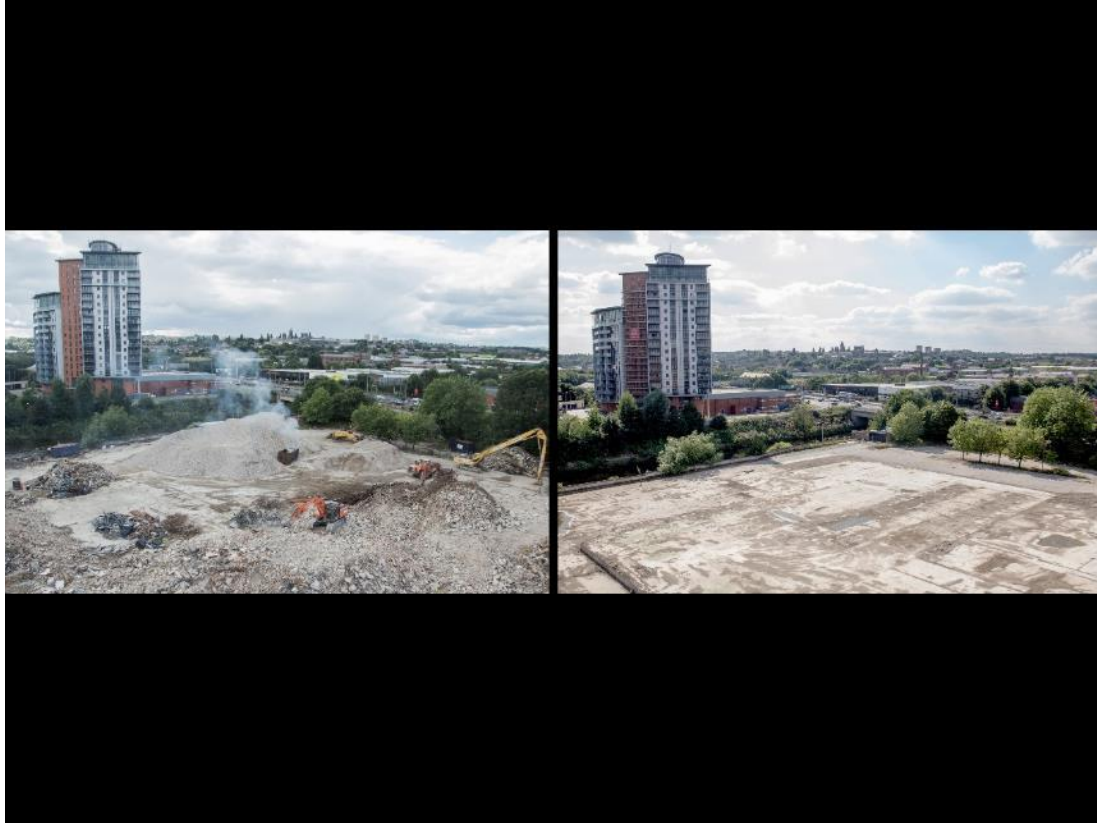


Figure 28 - The Yorkshire Post-Demolition, 2014-2015 by Michael C Coldwell

The photographs act like bookends to the time in between, and the combination raises questions about what is not seen, as well as what is seen in either photo. (Klett, 2011: 114)

As Mark Klett himself attests, the processes of transformation are completely lost in rephotography – from these images we know nothing about what happened in the intervening time, we see only these ‘book ends’. Anything else we may infer by looking is an act of the imaginary. This is something I attempted to address in my own work by rephotographing locations as they were being actively transformed (see *Fig. 28*). Of course the same problem arises despite the focus on the period of change itself – this is an ontological conundrum to do with the

intrinsic temporality of the still photograph – it can only ever capture a very partial moment in the flow of time, most of which is always-already lost. The gap between the two exposures vastly eclipses any time actually recorded, and that thin sliver of actual time that constitutes the photographic trace will necessarily go on to represent so much more than what was originally recorded by the camera. This temporal disjunction and the loss that it represents is not foregrounded by this style of photography at all, despite being fundamental to it ontologically, such that the impression given to us by this process is usually one of completeness and certainty – the past transplanted seamlessly into the present. The temporal disjuncture and absence of the subject to which the trace “displaces and refers”<sup>20</sup> is completely ‘glossed over’ by this form<sup>21</sup>. This is even more true of contemporary ‘vernacular’ rephotography which composites or layers the two exposures (ontological montage), rather than placing them side by side (spatial montage).

photography’s potential to document reality is complemented, as well as complicated, by the experience of time that has elapsed between the two layers of the photographic palimpsest (Munteán, 2017: 133)

The key difference we see in rephotography which layers or composites the two exposures, is that a third space (and by extension a third time) becomes implied by what László Munteán calls “the photographic palimpsest” – the trick creates a simulation of reality, not a document of it – the moment depicted and the space we see never existed as such. We suspend our disbelief here, and see this as a single moment because of our faith in the photographic trace (the index) as evidential, and because of the focus on spatial continuity between these two separate indices. Precisely registering the two views using landmarks or reference points which have stayed the same creates the sense of one unified scene, one trace, to be observed at one time. The illusion of temporal continuity in both types of rephotography is maintained by this focus on spatial continuity. Because the two scenes integrate spatially, we can read them as co-present, dissolving any real sense of intervening time, or the vast changes which have taken place during it.

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<sup>20</sup> “The trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself.” Derrida, J. 1973. *Speech and phenomena, and other essays on Husserl's theory of signs*. Northwestern University Press. (p. 156).

<sup>21</sup> For Mark Fisher “postmodernism *glosses over* the temporal disjunctures” made possible by recording technologies, while “the hauntological artists foreground them” Fisher, M. 2013. The Metaphysics of Crackle: Afrofuturism and Hauntology. *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture*. 5(2). p.46



Figure 29 – From “Photos and myths of the Soviet-Finnish war” by Sergey Larenkov  
(Link of times / Link to the Past, 2016)

This is particularly true of contemporary practices of rephotography whereby the past is ‘seamlessly’ blended with the present digitally, airbrushed together as we see in *Fig. 29*. The performative aspect to the vernacular rephotographic practices which involve a physical photograph being taken back to the original location, offsets this spatial synthesis to some degree, as we are made aware of the archive photograph’s separate objecthood as an artefact, but the focus is still on *space* rather than time – it is on those crucial points of registration which allow the rephotograph to be constructed at all. The unintended consequence of this, is that those key features are subsequently rendered atemporal. The image is framed and determined by what has stayed the same, rather than by what has changed. The inadvertent emphasis, therefore, is on space and permanence, rather than time and transience, although these are the key themes this form of photography is usually presented as exploring.

Because past and present are both there and not there, what becomes important is what things *persist* and what patterns can be identified to make the place recognisable (Kalin, 2013: 176)

Things that are recognisable in the photograph and surroundings play a crucial role as reference points – landscapes, streets, buildings and certain household fixtures and furnishings tend to remain stationary and may have out-lived human lives. Their identification is key to the experience of place (Munteán, 2017: 136)



Figure 30 - Fern St, 1979-2014, from *Tracking Time* by Camilo José Vergara

Vergara's rephotography of slums in Camden, New Jersey, is an exceptional example of the practice actually managing to communicate large-scale transformation of the city, but even here we see the importance of that enormous tower block at the vanishing point – a clear persisting feature between photographs, allowing us to construct that continuing sense of place. This determines the form.

For Munteán, writing in *Spectral Spaces and Hauntings: The Affects of Absence* (2017), these reference points are not only fundamental to the construction of rephotographs, they are “auratic objects” and “time-bridges”, which allow us to be haunted by the past through this practice. In this hypothesis, haunting must be an ‘affect’ of presence rather than absence, and rephotography can only ever start from an assumption of permanence, of the immutability of at least some features of the landscape. This characterisation neglects to account for the types of location I gravitated towards in my own work – spaces which have been subject to vast transformation, and even total destruction. Can rephotography really respond to such cases of absence or transience, if it is ontologically wedded to these enduring ‘auratic’ reference points? In opposition, fundamental change, and indeed effacement, negates the possibility of a continued experience of place – the temporal disjunction of the photograph is then mirrored by a spatial one, in landscapes which have changed beyond all recognition. Here it is the effacement of our sense of place itself, which haunts.

time-bridges enable the spectre to infiltrate space and, by way of becoming a ghost, turn it into place  
(Munteán, 2017: 138)

Munteán’s notion of auratic “time-bridges” and their ability to haunt and transform our perception of space, certainly has some resonance with my own research into this area, but surely photographic objects themselves are the “time-bridges” in rephotography – the central assumption behind Roland Barthes’ “that-has-been” is that this is the “*noeme* of photography” (Barthes, 1993: 76-77) – and surely a photograph of something that has disappeared completely, or someone who has died, has the potential to *haunt* us just as much, with or without the precise spatial orientation necessary to synthesise a continued sense of place. I want to explore how the aura in the haunting photograph can also be semi-independent of its subject and how it can have as much to do with the way the photograph can disclose itself as a material and temporal object, a time-traveller itself, subsequently emphasising the spectrality of the trace that it carries. The spectrality of the trace moves beyond a Derridean abstraction and into the domain of affect, when, as with Roland Barthes’ ‘punctum’<sup>22</sup>, it represents something which we *feel* is now irredeemably absent: something which is lost forever.

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<sup>22</sup> Barthes, R. 1993. *Camera lucida: reflections on photography*. London: Vintage.



Figure 31 - The rocks that William Bell photographed in 1872 along Route 89A, Vermillion Cliffs, Arizona, 2008  
by Mark Klett and Byron Wolf

Somewhat ironically, the possible role of the materiality of the image in this process of haunting was most clearly demonstrated to me by a rephotograph in which hardly anything has changed (*Fig. 31*). The desert landscape depicted does seem eternal, to the degree in which the whole archive image can act like one of Munteán's timeless reference points. The rephotograph in question is part of a more recent body of work by Mark Klett, who now seems to favour compositing over spatial montage, a form we might associate with more 'vernacular' rephotographic practice. Long before you notice the subtle changes that have happened, the appearance of the road in the desert, the *past-ness* of the overlaid image is clearly signified by its visible material differences. Perhaps because so little has changed over the 136 years represented by this montage, these material differences are clearly accentuated – a hauntological foregrounding of physical medium. The archive image stands out because it is black and white, grainy, because it has a visible patina and is clearly damaged around the edges – this *frames* it spatially and temporally, making its separate objecthood very clear, revealing rather than glossing-over the temporal disjuncture between the two scenes, without which we might not even realise that this is a rephotograph at all.

The "auratic object" in this case could easily be the archive image itself, the original glass negative, an object *sui generis*, rather than the desert mountains that are represented here as unchanging. This aura could be signified by the object's unique surface qualities and aberrations – what we might call the "auratic texture" of the photograph as artefact – and it is this, rather than anything specific about the subject, that renders this a



haunting scene. Without these signs of material decay and ageing – properties of the image support rather than the trace that it carries, or the subject represented in the frame – we would be unaware that we are glimpsing back in time, or more accurately, that a spectral trace from another time is haunting a material image from the ‘present’.

If Klett, in *Fig 31*, has successfully managed to evoke the passage of time by rephotographing a landscape that has hardly changed at all, I wanted to do the opposite – evoking the passage of time, and the transience of our surroundings, by rephotographing landscapes which have changed beyond all recognition<sup>23</sup>. I shot where no continuous sense of place was possible, in areas which had undergone waves of slum clearance, rapid urbanisation or deindustrialisation. My practical method could be called ‘impossible rephotography’, where two views can no longer be reconciled, where no ‘permanent’ spatial reference points remain. By unmooring the two views spatially, destroying any sense of synthesis or continuity in the montage, rephotography necessarily deconstructs itself – and we might see then, what role the archive photograph’s materiality plays in signifying the passage of time. Does it possess aura in the way we have discussed previously, and what can this reveal about the materiality of the photographic object, and the immateriality of the photographic trace?

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<sup>23</sup> Other rephotographic projects have had to deal with the challenge of applying this practice to landscapes which have undergone fundamental change, but as the priority is always seen as spatial orientation for the viewer, this again dictates the final form... “*Conroy’s rephotographs adopt a similar strategy to that of Mark Klett in his San Francisco project After the Ruins (2006). Klett, in attempting to rephotograph the Kohl Building found that the difference between past and present was too great. To establish a stronger relationship between the two images, Klett applied a thin rectangular line to indicate the position of the original image within the contemporary one.*” Why is a ‘stronger’ relationship needed, if there isn’t one? Surely montaging two images together forces the two images to enter a relationship? And if that relationship is problematic surely that has something to tell us about the change which has taken place, the temporal disjunction which is taking place, in making such a montage. “*Likewise, Conroy encountered a similar problem where archeological ruins had been removed, rebuilt or the surrounding areas developed. Furthermore, Woodhouse’s compositions were deemed by Conroy to be rather confusing when trying to establish a visual connection with the contemporary images. To solve the problem, Conroy arrived at the decision to place right-angled crop marks demarcating the position of the original within the contemporary image.*” McLeod, G. 2012. *William John Woodhouse Rephotography Project | Rowan Conroy*. [Online]. [Accessed 11th December 2017]. Available from: <http://rephotography.ning.com>



Figure 32 - Headingley, house, drive, donkey and sleigh, 1888, by Godfrey Bingley

I have chosen two contrasting sets of archive images for my own rephotography fieldwork, both from approximately the same period in history (1880-1910), and both from the same city, a place which was undergoing rapid urbanisation at the time they were taken. They are nonetheless very different, both in terms of the types of landscape depicted, and the material condition of those artefacts. The first set are from a vast archive of glass plate negatives (*Fig. 32*), lantern slides and cellulose nitrate negatives<sup>24</sup>, donated to the University of Leeds by Godfrey Bingley, in 1913. His photographs are now being meticulously digitised by the Special Collections team before they deteriorate irreparably, and despite being the works of an ‘amateur’ have been considered “probably the most magnificent collection ever made of lantern slides illustrating Architecture, Archaeology, Geology and scenery in all parts of England” (Jones, 1987: 118). Many of these slides are badly damaged, and the supplementary information kept about them is somewhat scant. Perhaps this adds to the sense of mystery one feels when encountering some of these images for the first time. My own interest was piqued by the realisation that many of them seemed to capture a lost rural ‘idyll’ in the city just a few years before rapid urbanisation was to eradicate that rural landscape completely.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://leedsunilibrary.wordpress.com/2016/04/>

A different narrative of urban effacement surrounds my second set of archive images, which document the slums of Quarry Hill at the turn of the last century, primarily to make the case for mass demolition<sup>25</sup>. In contrast to Bingley's Headingley, this area of Leeds has always been one characterised by poverty and deprivation, several waves of slum clearance having taken place here since the industrial revolution. These photographic prints are in much better condition than Bingley's plates, and so perhaps do not signal their own materiality and decay as objects in quite the same way – but the buildings and spaces they depict are in a visible state of decay themselves. So rephotographing and comparing these two locations also becomes an interesting way of seeing whether the subject or the object (or which combination of both) is creating the haunting affect.



Figure 33 - Cornhill, East End (Quarry Hill), 1901 - photographer unknown

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<sup>25</sup> See previous chapter for more information on this historical context.

In rephotographing these scenes we can observe to what degree it is the palpable absence of these lost spaces in the city today, or the presence of these accompanying historical narratives, which add to, or subtract from, the notion that we can still be haunted by what has been erased – and the degree to which photography itself is the primary medium by which such hauntings are perpetuated materially.

Rephotography as ontological montage evokes in one frame two seemingly incompatible worlds that we not only look into but also look out from. (Kalin, 2013: 174)

In deconstructing this practice, in making ‘impossible rephotographs’, which haunt us with profound absences and irreconcilable differences, I am exploring the true incompatibility of those temporal worlds, and what that might really mean, not only for how we look into the past using images, but also how we look out from the present.



Figure 34 - House, Drive, Donkey and Sleigh, 1888-2017



Figure 35 - From North To Valley (Projection), 1889-2017



Figure 36 - Looking North, Snow (Projection), 1889-2017

Some rephotographic montages are more ‘impossible’ than others. Where sufficient features of the landscape remained for me to precisely align the two views in the normal mode, I did (examples above). In others, despite the two photographs being from the same location, there were no common reference points between them (examples below). These rephotographs border on absurdity, but demonstrate a crucial deconstruction of the form.



Figure 37 - Beck Near Lane (Projection III), 1889-2017



Figure 38 - Section I (Projection), 1891-2017

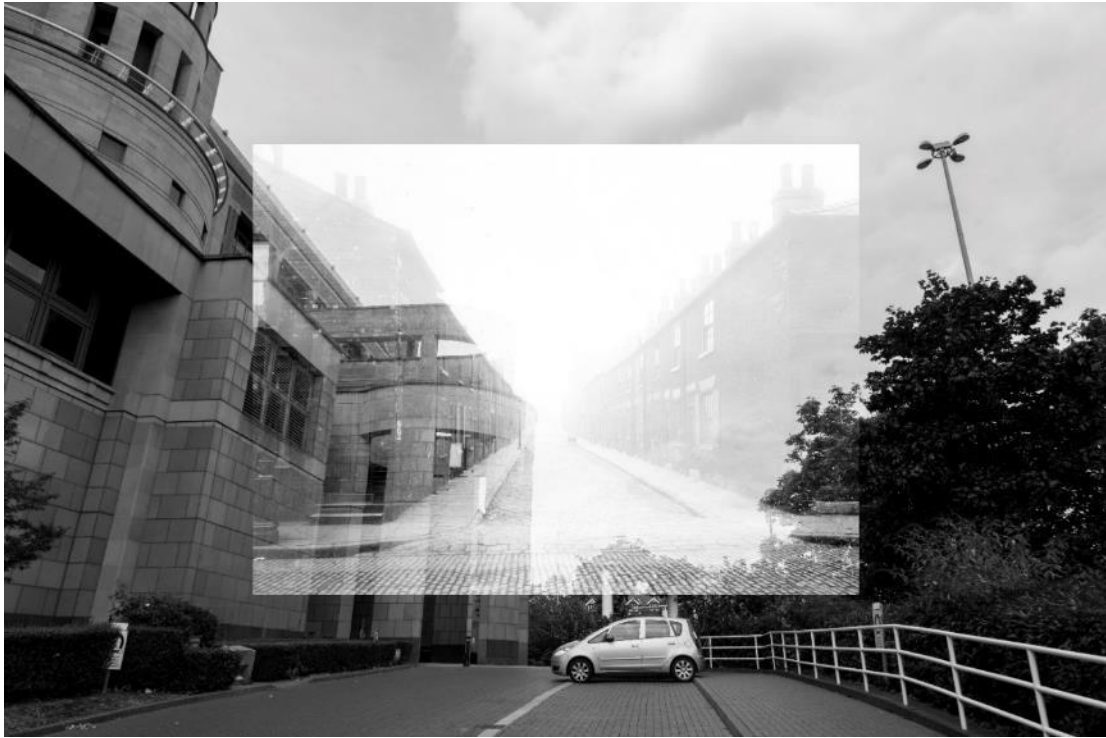


Figure 39 - Vienna Street no longer exists, 1908-2017

### 3.2 Deconstruction as a method

Photography can be used to deconstruct the visual world, “decompose, re-compose, splice together, split apart” (Derrida et al., 2010: 45)

Deconstruction locates certain crucial oppositions or binary structures of meaning and value that constitute the discourse of ‘Western metaphysics’ (Furuhashi, 1996: 3 - referring to Christopher Norris)

For Derrida “deconstruction is not a method, and cannot be transformed into one” (Derrida, 1985: 3), but this certainly has not stopped many people trying over the years, and deconstructive *art* has been previously characterised as almost always following the same three-stage process<sup>26</sup>. The ‘artist’ is usually ‘removed’ and replaced by the commonly accepted ‘truth’ or metaphysical construct to be destabilized. The second step is then to set this up against its opposite, and the third step is “to reverse the supremacy of the first term with the

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<sup>26</sup> Morrison, E. 1997. Three Steps in the Demise of Deconstruction. *Variant* (Variant 4 Autumn 1997).

second, to show how they are mutually dependent on each other for meaning” (Morrison, 1997: 7). The metaphysical dichotomies of materiality / immateriality, presence / absence, here / there and then / now, are certainly destabilised by this work on rephotography. But in a more concrete sense, we are also dismantling the method and form of it as a medium and practice – splitting it apart into various constituent elements, but along these same metaphysical lines. We can exemplify this split in terms of a division between the ‘aura’ (of the medium itself, as characterised in terms of its materiality, authenticity and presence) and the ‘trace’ (that which is represented by the image, as characterised in terms of its immateriality, spectrality and absence). Walter Benjamin’s own ‘deconstruction’ of these terms reveals something paradoxical about this binary opposition:

The trace is the appearance of nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. The aura is the appearance of distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace we gain possession of the thing; in the aura it takes possession of us (Benjamin, 1999: 447)

Now in this investigation of *aura* and *trace* there is some necessary conflation of terms in order to both arrive at a working set of concepts to explore through practice, and also to make connections through the use of these words. By the term ‘trace’ we are referring to the indexical photographic trace, but also have in mind Benjamin’s use of the word, as we see above, defined here in opposition to aura, as well as Jacques Derrida’s use of the term in deconstruction<sup>27</sup>. All of these uses of ‘trace’ have in common the notion that a mark or path is left behind by something now absent. The trace then represents, or becomes a metonym for, what has now gone. The trace, in all of these conceptions, must be partial and immaterial in some sense – but immaterial in such a way that it needs a material support to exist (or persist) at all – be that mud for the footprint, paper and ink for the written word, or silver halide crystals for the photographic trace to register on film. The trace in photography is an indexical sign, ‘immaterial’ light from the referent once ‘touched’ and altered this material surface – but it is the material surface we are actually looking at, as the referent as seen no longer exists. I wish to argue that the aura of the photographic medium is experienced when the support asserts its own materiality over the trace it carries, and we realise that we cannot ‘possess’ what has gone even though we can see it, that the trace it carries is a

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<sup>27</sup> “A trace [in deconstruction] is what a sign differs/defers from. It is the absent part of the sign’s presence. In other words, we may now define trace as the sign left by the absent thing, after it has passed on the scene of its former presence” Prasad, J. 2007. *Some Key Terms*. [Online]. Available from: <https://newderrida.wordpress.com/2007/11/19/some-key-terms/>



temporal illusion, projecting a ghost into the present. We are haunted by it – we are ‘possessed’ by it. This could be Benjamin’s auratic ‘appearance of distance’.

The indexical dimension of aura’s relation to the past is not necessarily a matter of continuity or tradition; more often than not, it is a past whose ghostly apparition projects into the present and (to invoke Roland Barthes) “wounds” the beholder” (Hansen, 2008: 341)

Through the deconstruction of rephotography I aim to cast light on the degree to which aura might operate as part of the materiality of the photographic object, the image’s support or subjectile<sup>28</sup>. The conspicuous presence of a material support reveals the *distance* or absence of the signified of the trace it carries. The illusion of photography is then shattered: when we can *see* the grain of the chemical residue, when the artefact is damaged or faded or blurred. The auratic quality of Godfrey Bingley’s damaged glass plates show us the potential haunting ‘affects’ of such decay (*Fig. 10*). The death of the image itself points back to the original death – Barthes’ *other* “punctum”, the “stigmatum” of time itself (Barthes, 1993: 96). As the trace fades towards a second death for this signified, we can see how one day the materials which make up the medium will be all that remain of this artefact – the image too will be gone.

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<sup>28</sup> “[The Subjectile] is the material or material support on which a painting or engraving is made. More generally, it is, writes Mary Ann Caws, ‘the underlying support of canvas, paper, text’, or that which makes the image, the text, the representation possible... despite its materiality, it is immaterial to most conventional discourses on art. We might suggest that the subjectile is therefore a ghost of sorts” Reynolds, J. et al. 2004. *Understanding Derrida*. A&C Black. p. 85



Figure 40 - Headingley, Ash Lea to fields, 1889, by Godfrey Bingley

The trace is always the finite trace of a finite being. So it can itself disappear. An ineradicable trace is not a trace. The trace inscribes in itself its own precariousness, its vulnerability of ashes, its mortality...

The trace is not a substance, a present existing thing, but a process that is changing all the time.

(Derrida, 2005: 159)

In a materialist understanding of haunting, even ghosts must die. Nothing can be immortal or immutable, the photograph merely provides a short afterlife for what is 'traced' by the photo-sensitive surface, until it too succumbs to entropic forces, and 'dies' transforming into some other material. In direct contrast, digital media do not readily reveal this material and mortal base to the image. The hyperreality and illusion of digital photographs lies in their effacement of a visible medium, rendering the trace permanently co-present, unchanging, and by implication, immortal. This is an illusion born of a profound disconnect between the trace and its material support. This is why Derrida describes the digital photograph as an image "without a subjectile" (Derrida et al., 2010: 14). We can no longer see, or even easily access, the material supports of our images – our photographs no longer fade unless we chose to make them do so algorithmically – the physical condition of a

solid state hard drive tells us nothing about any image it might contain. Digital technology has rendered the photograph fully transmutable.

By simply placing an old archive photograph over a new digital one, as we do in rephotography, we problematize not only the materiality / immateriality of any resulting montage, but also this bifurcation between analogue and digital domains, questioning the role aura might now play in digital media. Can aura itself be 'traced', scanned, digitised, copied, assimilated into the simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1994) – or is that a contradiction in terms? If so, is the digital realm still haunted by the idea of aura, perhaps by materiality itself, because it so fundamentally lacks these qualities?

So how can we begin breaking apart the rephotographic form? As we have seen previously (*Fig. 31*), the archive image can signify its past-ness without the need for clues from whatever subject/scene is depicted – its own auratic objecthood can seemingly do this. This is one element of how the rephotographic form works and this is where we might theorise the presence or absence of aura. In order for this to become constructed as a rephotograph, the old photograph must be 'projected' into the new scene, or onto the new image – this act of projection (whether performed, composited or literally projected) is a second element. The spatial registration of the two scenes could be considered another distinct part of this process, a key component in and of itself. Finally, most rephotographs are also usually accompanied by some supplementary text, even if it is just a title, which helps us anchor the montage temporally, creating a sense of narrative, however slight – this might include the name of the location or some famous event, a date-range to help communicate the sense of elapsed time, or historical significance, or any other background information placed alongside the rephotographic image in order to lend it meaning: to borrow another term from Derridean deconstruction, I shall call these supportive texts 'supplements'.

So, using the binary oppositions materiality / immateriality, then / now and aura / trace, here are my deconstructed elements of rephotography:

- “TRACES”: NEW DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS – these are my own images, taken while trying to find the original locations, looking for traces of the past in the present, using maps to orientate myself as closely as possible to where the archive pictures were made (this is sometimes very approximate). As these are digital photographs they could be considered almost ‘pure’ trace, as Derrida said they are “without a subjectile” (Derrida et al., 2010: 14), they consist of transmutable data without any accessible material presence of their own. Are these objects: *Immaterial? Now? Trace?*
- “AURAS”: OLD ANALOGUE PHOTOGRAPHS – Details will be taken from Godfrey Bingley’s glass plate negatives and the Quarry Hill photographs (paper prints) in order to isolate signifiers of their materiality and age. The physical artefacts have been scanned at high resolution so we can study these features – what makes these objects auratic and how does this affect the trace we can see – paradoxically, we have to *digitise* the slides and prints in order to examine them closely enough. How is the medium affecting the trace? Is this *material?* Is this *then?* Is this *auratic?*
- “PROJECTIONS”: OLD AND NEW TOGETHER – Projecting the archive photograph over the new one in some way is the key act of rephotography – what happens if the two views cannot be precisely registered, if the two scenes are now completely different? What happens if we can clearly see the two images as separate, or if they merge? To what degree is this projection performative? *Material* projected into the *immaterial* or vice versa? *Then* projected into *now* or vice versa? *Aura* projected into *trace* or vice versa?
- “SUPPLEMENTS”: SUPPORTIVE TEXT – Descriptive text which is used to form a narrative or historical context for the resulting image – what happens if the text fails to establish a clear narrative, or there isn’t enough information to provide meaning. What if this text is under erasure or is fragmented as part of a palimpsest of unprocessed information? Does this affect how we read the image? Is it *more* or *less* haunting? This is another area where comparing the two different archives is going to be interesting, as the amount and quality of information associated with the two sets of images is very different.

## “TRACES”

The first step in creating a new rephotograph is always to attempt to find the location of your chosen archive image. As discussed earlier, in normal practice this initial selection is often made on the basis of persisting features of the landscape: these are the spatial reference points that allow the historic scene to be recreated in the present. As the urban landscapes I have chosen to rephotograph no longer exist as such, my selection of archive images was not affected by this concern, and my own photographic responses were not beholden to the usual processes of spatial alignment and mimicry<sup>29</sup>. The photographs I took were my own exploratory responses to the spaces I found before me. They were taken with a digital SLR camera in black and white. Monochrome was chosen for several reasons. It was a simple way to conform the images, and it was necessary to foreground (once ‘projected’ with the archive image) the subtle changes in colouration we see on Bingley’s glass plates – which, of course, were originally monochrome B&W images too, but are now haunted by colour, a material signifier for their decay. Use of digital colour photography here would have swamped these subtleties, and was deemed an unsuitable distraction for this hauntological exploration of medium and materiality. After homing in on the archive photograph’s originary site, I then tried to look for any traces of what might have come before, any buildings or features that survived from the time period in question, or any clues as to how the landscape may have been transformed to such an extent. I documented this entire process photographically, taking as many as twenty digital images for each archive photograph selected. I wanted my photographs to be able to stand on their own as documents and as works worthy of exhibition. I was letting the archive images inspire my creative practice, without them precisely dictating it, as with the usual rephotography formula. The resulting ‘traces’ all have something to say about that urban space and how it might have changed over time, with or without their incorporation into rephotographic montages.

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<sup>29</sup> In many high profile ‘then and now’ rephotography projects, such as Douglas Levere’s work on the photographs of New York by Berenice Abbott, the original photographic processes are recreated exactly. “Douglas Levere has been returning to the original sites with the identical camera Abbott used, an 8X10 Century Universal, shooting those sites at the same time of day and year.” Yochelson, B. and Levere, D. 2004. *New York Changing: Revisiting Berenice Abbott's New York*. Princeton Architectural Press.



Figure 41 – Searching for York Road (Trace II), 2017



Figure 42 – Searching for Boynton Street (Trace I), 2017

## “SUPPLEMENTS”

While this is principally *visual* research we must also acknowledge the role of other text(s) in attributing meaning to the photographs: captions, titles and context all have a huge impact on how an image is read, both in terms of how we understand it (*studium*) and the emotional affects of the photo (*punctum*). The term ‘supplement’ signposts the role supplementary texts play in giving an image any definable meaning at all.

Derrida takes this term from Rousseau, who saw a supplement as “an inessential extra added to something complete in itself.” Derrida argues that what is complete in itself cannot be added to, and so a supplement can only occur where there is an originary lack. (Prasad, 2007)

The requirement for a photograph to have a title is an indicator of an “originary lack”, an intrinsic partiality of all photographs. But how does the title/caption affect how the image haunts? Is more or less information haunting? A ‘spooky’ title may encourage such a reading, as might a certain accompanying narrative, but might that “originary lack” be part of how a photograph haunts in the first place? Perhaps a title with a certain amount of ambiguity, or lack of its own, could help highlight this ‘abyssal’<sup>30</sup> quality of the photographs.

I have taken two different approaches for the sake of comparison – approaches which reflect the amount and type of information associated with the images from the two different archives. The chosen Godfrey Bingley images are characterised by a lack of metadata. The “details in the notebooks are scant” (Jones, 1987: 120) – vague locations, gaps in the records, gaps and ambiguity in the images themselves. Meaning is already under erasure in these records, and this is reflected in the titles I have given to the associated ‘traces’, ‘auras’ and ‘projections’. I used Bingley’s original descriptions, but I have removed any words which might hint at a sense of place – so place names are eroded, for example “Meanwood Wood and Park” becomes “Wood and Park” – the particular is then rendered general. For the Quarry Hill images I decided to keep the particular street names. The records are much better here and it really seemed that it was the landscape itself, rather than the archive, that was under greater erasure. Keeping the names actually seemed to highlight the primary absence involved – these streets no longer exist. The naming convention of date ranges we see in much rephotography<sup>31</sup> has been kept in these too. By keeping these I hope to emphasise the very thing the rephotograph attempts and fails to communicate – the intervening time.

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<sup>30</sup> “Signs, like photography itself, are always both present and absent – present on the page and in our minds but also constantly withdrawing from an endless deferred and absent textual field that makes their meaning possible. Plissart’s book is thus *abyssal* for the very reason that nothing exists outside the photographs that might secure its meaning” Gerspacher, A. 2013. *Photography Deconstruction*. [Online]. [Accessed 12th January 2018].

<sup>31</sup> This is a recurrent convention: Camilo José Vergara (example *Fern St 1979-2014*), Mark Klett (example *Panorama from Point Sublime after William Holmes (1882-2007)*) and Sergey Larenkov (example *Екатерининский дворец 1944/2016*)



Details from photographs by Godfrey Bingley (left) and the Quarry Hill archive (right)

#### “AURAS”

Cropping these very close details of the scans of Bingley’s glass slides we can see how their visible materiality and objecthood affects the trace they carry, not just in terms of reducing the clarity/veracity of the scenes depicted, but also in terms of how the image is interrupted (an archaic form of glitch), rendered ‘distant’ (or possibly auratic) and also how the patina/damage/texture of the plates comes to signify an authentic ‘past-ness’, or even an ‘otherworldliness’, which is not present in modern digital images. This could be connoted because we associate this type of texture/surface/patina with historical artefacts and objects which are subject to visible decay – rust, erosion, chemical breakdown and scratches and marks through use over many decades – hence we can *see* the elapsed time in this auratic surface, the temporal distance in the faded subjects, the foggy scenes. While this lends these glass plates an aura which is not present in pin-sharp digital photographs, or even later analogue examples, there is a degree of qualitative variance to explore here. The same process is applied to the scanned paper prints which make up the Quarry Hill archive. These are much less degraded as photographic objects, they are prints (copies) rather than negatives (originals), a very different surface (or subjectile) is involved (paper rather than glass), but they contain other haunting signifiers – comparing these cropped details from the two archives will hopefully allow us to examine the extent to which these material aberrations are signifying the spectrality of the photographic trace.





Details from various photographs by Godfrey Bingley – before and after “projection”

These captured details then form a new set of works which constitute a creative exploration of ‘auratic texture’ in isolation. We can see the role these surface aberrations might play in the hauntology of archive images – the features are *hauntological* in that they signify the temporal disjuncture taking place in the recording medium (a la Mark Fisher), forming what Adam Harper has called a “hauntological layer” (2009)<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> According to Adam Harper (a music journalist and one of few writers to examine visual “hauntological art” alongside music, film and television), such work usually consists of two layers, “the second, ‘hauntological’ layer problematises, compromises and obfuscates the first layer” Harper, A. 2009. *Hauntology: The Past Inside The Present*. *Rouge’s Foam: Excessive Aesthetics*. [Online]. [Accessed 23rd April 2016]. Available from: <http://rougesfoam.blogspot.co.uk/2009/10/hauntology-past-inside-present.html>

## “PROJECTIONS”



Figure 43 - Quarry Valley (Projection) 1905-2017

At some point in rephotography the old and new photographic artefacts must be brought together to form a new montage image. As we have already discussed these two images are either assembled into a diptych so that the two photographs can be compared (as we often see in ‘professional’ rephotography), or they are composited together, one inside the other (as we see in more vernacular iterations of the practice). In both of these rephotographic forms the images are composed and montaged to reproduce exactly the same framing, or at least to reproduce a singular ‘sense of place’ across the final composited work. This was not possible in most of the locations I was shooting for this project. The crucial ‘reference points’ (Munteán, 2017: 136) were missing and could no longer be used to anchor the two photographs together. The composition for the montages I created had to be arrived at some other way. Rather than synthesising a continued sense of space here, by virtue of the spatial representations in question, one space would be interrupting, obfuscating or problematizing the other. In a way then, it did not matter exactly how the two images were combined, except that it had to be clear that these two spaces, despite being from the same location, could no longer be reconciled.

In keeping with the transparent material quality of Bingley's lantern slides and glass negatives, I decided to 'project' the archive image over the same scene as it now stands, (this effect was achieved digitally, as the artefacts were too delicate to be taken back physically), preserving that transparent materiality and allowing us to view the present through the past – a deconstructive inversion of time's flow. The composition of these 'projections' was arrived at entirely formally, with the same method and composition used across all the montages (you can see an example of this form above, in *Fig. 43*). A very simple montaging arrangement was chosen and applied to all the 'projections' made, in the hope that this might allow the contending photographs themselves, rather than any formal consideration, to be the primary focus.

What becomes most striking about this 'inset' montage form, however, is the door or window-like character the archive image begins to embody. Although it is not a portal we can pass through, or a 'transparent envelope' we can even peer through with much ease, the distinct *framing* becomes one of the first things we notice when looking at these new montages. Concerned that this focus on the frame might come to dominate these compositions, I also experimented with versions where this frame could not be seen. However, this brought to my attention the role the frame plays in foregrounding the temporal disjuncture taking place, and, perhaps surprisingly, the deconstructive role that the frame can play too.

Deconstruction must neither reframe nor dream of the pure and simple absence of the frame.

These two apparently contradictory gestures are systematically indissociable (Derrida, 1987b)

As a term originally applied to describe the elaborate border work surrounding printed text and images, vignette functions like a frame, forming a perspectival cut between the work's 'interior' and 'exterior'. As Derrida (1991) suggests, 'If we are to approach a text, it must have an edge' (Wallin, 2006: 350)

For Derrida the 'frame' is a crucial element of all texts, and any attempt to deconstruct a text through its removal is an act of destruction rather than deconstruction. The frame here gives us a sense of the truth that both of these distinct texts are under some form of erasure, both inside and outside of this process of their combination. Removing the frame here, creating a synthesis of the two texts and the two times, would also efface the very temporal signifiers that have the potential to make this disjuncture haunting.

We see this in Sergey Larenkov's *Link to the Past* (Fig.44 below) – a body of work also referenced in *Double Exposure* (Munteán, 2017). In these rephotographic montages the frames are deliberately and meticulously removed to synthesise a continuous scene with multiple temporalities, destroying any distinct objecthood for the artefacts used. The temporal disjunctures are certainly “glossed-over” (Fisher, 2013: 46) by these processes, in the way Mark Fisher characterised as being conspicuously postmodern, and that hauntology seeks to refute.



Figure 44 - image by Sergey Larenkov - source: <https://sergey-larenkov.livejournal.com/>

Much has been written regarding the significance of the frame in painting, and this has been related to deconstruction<sup>33</sup>, but in digital photographic practices the frame is rarely discussed in these terms, perhaps because it is increasingly redundant, as technologies and practices change (360 degree photography, for example), or simply because it is no longer intrinsic to the image, nor a material structure in its own right. The straight edges of the digital image are completely transmutable, and thus completely dependent on the image's use in different digital display contexts.

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<sup>33</sup> Lebensztein, J.-C. 1994. Starting Out From The Frame (Vignettes). In: Brunette, P. and Wills, D. eds. *Deconstruction and the visual arts: art, media, architecture*. Cambridge;New York, NY, USA;: Cambridge University Press.

Previously it was assumed that the edges, the framing and the cropping of the photographic image were necessary. However, at the level of code, these visible edges are actually continuous with everything else on-and-off-screen (Rubinstein et al., 2013: 12)

This is characteristic of many digital technologies and practices, as the ontological montages that we see gloss over all such ‘cracks’, airbrushed and assimilated into new digital structures – photography very much entering the domain of pure simulacra (Baudrillard, 1983).

Elements are now blended together, and boundaries erased rather than emphasized (Manovich, 2001a: 142)

However, we still frame images for a very important reason:

Though borders have a tendency toward invisibility, they concomitantly have the effect of drawing attention and organizing the gaze (Wallin, 2006: 351)

And a frame not only organizes the gaze, but sets up a defining context for what goes within it. We might even see the frame as lending what it contains a certain aura, such as an ornamental border or gilt frame around a precious renaissance painting, or the social ritual of framing photographs of grandchildren and graduations. While the frame may be auratic there is nothing inherent in ontological montage that dictates the erasure of frames – digital montaging could actually emphasise them, play with them, even subvert them, “organising the gaze” in new ways. In Mark Fisher’s use of the term ontological montage a sense of rupture between worlds implies a reliance on some form of portal: “an Ontological montage in which a world – usually ‘our’ world, the world captured by naturalistic description and governed by commonsense – is ruptured or interrupted by what does not belong to it: that which is ‘out of space’, and/ or ‘out of time’.” (Fisher, 2007) In rephotography, the visibility of the frame forms such an interruption: a visible portal between times.



Figure 45 - Elevator Point by Jackson Patterson

Jackson Patterson's surreal photographic montages seem to operate in this way. While they are certainly influenced by rephotography, they seem to depict portals to imaginary worlds or impossible spaces as much as they investigate our changing surroundings, or the passage of time. These image juxtapositions ask questions, pose problems and resist simple interpretation, in a similar vein to my own photographic interventions. They also use digital editing without erasing the frame, or feeling the need to airbrush the photograph-as-object out of existence. The photograph's objecthood is celebrated at the same time as the frame is emphasised, toyed-with and destabilised.

Through the use of my own 'projection' montages (*Fig 43.*), and the 'auras' and 'traces' I have outlined above, I hope to define the role the frame plays in signifying the temporal disjunction taking place in rephotography (and in all photographic practices to some degree), and to explore whether other signifiers may take up that role if the frame is absent or obscured – for example, the materiality of the photographic artefact itself, the 'auratic texture' we discussed earlier. Can this still potentially signify a temporal shift without the frame helping delimit *then* from *now*?

So the frame becomes the critical fulcrum upon which rephotography is deconstructed. Keeping this intact seems congruent with Derrida's views on deconstruction, the frame, and on how we should view visual art as a text: the spacing of elements implying a textualisation of the visual.

there is text as soon as deconstruction is engaged in fields said to be artistic, visual or spatial. There is text because there is always a little discourse somewhere in the visual arts, and also because even if there is no discourse, the effect of spacing already implies a textualization. . . . Deconstruction starts with the deconstruction of logocentrism, and thus to want to confine it to linguistic phenomena is the most suspect of operations (Derrida et al., 1994: 14)

This methodology is not a pure act of Derridean deconstruction, however, even if such a thing were possible. As Christopher Norris said, deconstruction is "an activity of thought which cannot be consistently acted on – that way madness lies" (Norris, 1991: xi). It can also be challenging to reconcile deconstruction with *creative* practice, which is always to some degree an act of construction rather than its inverse: building something new, even if that new thing utilises and breaks apart appropriated texts.

deconstructive art practice may use a deconstructive method, but this method cannot be used to identify the artistic practice at hand (Schwab, 2009)

So while deconstruction is certainly part of this creative process, it cannot define it. It sets the wheels of creative investigation in motion and it mobilises to challenge the received wisdom. It makes the same "gesture of turning reason against itself" (Norris, 1991: 64) "devoted to the task of dismantling a concept of 'structure' that serves to immobilise the play of meaning" (Norris, 1991: 2) – but ultimately the process must produce something new, a body of work which stands up in its own right, communicating a new viewpoint. It must become something greater than the sum of its parts. Here I am referring to the creative process in practice research, something which is even harder to pin down and explicate than deconstruction. To an extent this is something which the artist must allow to happen naturally, yet in no way is this a mystification of artistic practice: one can always analyse exactly what has taken place afterwards.

### 3.3 Rephotography as a haunting

Rephotography is best understood as *hauntography* to emphasise how any perspective upon the present is haunted by its own past. Hauntography – *hauntological* montage – retemporalizes memory by inventing memory images and places that mobilize perspectives and bodies to perform acts of personal and public remembering (Kalin, 2013: 176)

A haunting is an intervention, an encounter (Heholt, 2016: 6)

When conducting what Jason Kalin has coined ‘hauntography’, one becomes very aware of one’s own role in perpetuating this haunting – the rephotographer is the unnatural presence felt, as the only active agent involved. If the image is the ghost, the rephotographer is still the one that awoke the spectre, allowing it to return at all. In practicing rephotography one is performing an act which results in some orphaned trace of the past being taken home, usually for the first time since its creation – reforming lost connections, remembering the forgotten, or perhaps creating entirely new ‘memories’ that would not have otherwise existed. Here we can see how the performance or act of rephotography can be conceived of as both a haunting and as an act of intervention – perhaps they are the same thing, to ‘wake the dead’ can certainly be seen as a political gesture or act. We shall return to this theme later.

Part of the method for creating these images involved practicing orienteering of a sort, using old OS maps, looking at dates and names in the captions and notes, attempting to trace Godfrey Bingley’s routes across Leeds, to find the missing locations. In doing so I began to get the feeling, while wandering the city, that these were not my own movements – I was walking in the footsteps of someone else, the footsteps of a wandering ghost. As an urban photographer I am familiar with the method of *flâneurism*, meandering through the city without a fixed plan or route as a method for discovery. This was quite different. It was very directed and procedural for the most part, as I was looking for specific locations, making my travels targeted and destination-based. And yet, I still felt like I was ambling, wandering the streets. If there was a *flâneur* involved it was not me but Bingley – the ghost flâneur I was hunting, reconnoitring his old haunts.



The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitring, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. Adept of the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy, the flâneur finds the world "picturesque." (Sontag, 2002: 55)

Whether or not Bingley could be considered a real photographic *flâneur*, I am not sure. He certainly finds the world 'picturesque' but shies away from Sontag's 'urban inferno', from depicting the modern, the industrial or the deprived, in his photographic representations of his home city. Despite his many jaunts across the country to photograph key landmarks and sites of historical interest, his explorations of Leeds never seem to venture too far from the comforts of home or his keen personal interest in geology. He is certainly preoccupied with the documentation of the pastoral and the picturesque, the bucolic scenes around his home in Headingley, but he never roams into pictorialism here – there is something simple and matter-of-fact about all these images.

Perhaps the picture is so empty that one invests it with pleasant memories of a country childhood. There is a lot of room in Bingley's pictures to be filled with the spectator's private thoughts. Or could it be that an image which is not trying to sell anything, nor convert, nor elicit applause or sympathy - not soliciting anything at all, but which delicately calls attention to the still beauty of a scene which is otherwise not particularly remarkable, is irresistibly disarming? It must be art. It's too artless to be anything else. (Jones, 1987: 130-135)



Figure 46 - Cardigan Road from field, near Kirkstall Lane (1887) by Godfrey Bingley

Whether Bingley could be considered an artist or not is a major theme of John E Jones' article on the photographer. He was certainly a renowned figure in photographic circles by the turn of the century. What Bingley's 'empty' style seems to suggest is the beginning of a more modernistic attitude to the medium that we can trace from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from Alfred Stieglitz through Eugene Atget, Walker Evans to the New Topographics photographers (the latter of which have been a big influence on my own practice as a landscape photographer over the years). In this modern mode the photographer supposedly becomes the detached or disinterested observer of their surroundings, the camera becoming a mere recorder. For Jones Bingley's photographs are "photographs which are unpretentious almost to the point of invisibility" and "are typical of hundreds which show Bingley's magical restraint" (Jones, 1987: 130).

Alongside the damage to the glass slides, and Bingley's scant notes, his photographic minimalism has caused some difficulties in my research, hampering the process of tracing his paths and rephotographing his images accurately. This certainly adds to the sensation of ghost hunting, these mysterious lacks and absences activating the imaginary. Initially I was completely lost, but gradually scraps of evidence accumulated to the point at which I could trace routes to follow. While some were so fragmented this was just not possible, I was able to follow one of Bingley's walks fairly accurately – on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1888, he set out from his house called "Ash Lea", and went for a walk with his camera around Headingley – a walk in deep snow.



These three images, and the one below, roughly sketch out a route down Cardigan Road and towards where Headingley House once stood.



Figure 47 - Various photographs<sup>34</sup> by Godfrey Bingley taken on the 20th Feb 1888

It was not until I had studied the maps in great detail that I discovered the vague caption “Headingley, house” was actually referring to the very specific “Headingley House”, a mansion demolished to make way for new terraced housing around 1900 (one of many errors that led me astray) – and it was not until I visited Cardigan Road looking for this route that I discovered the remains of the equally cryptic “Ash Lea”. While the house itself is long gone, the gate posts of Bingley’s old home remain.



It seems fitting that the house that Godfrey Bingley took so many of these photographs from has also disappeared, leaving these stones as the only trace.

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<sup>34</sup> “Cardigan Road, looking north, snow”, “Headingley, house, carriage drive”, “Headingley, house, drive, donkey and sleigh”, “Headingley, house, entrance” by Godfrey Bingley, 1888

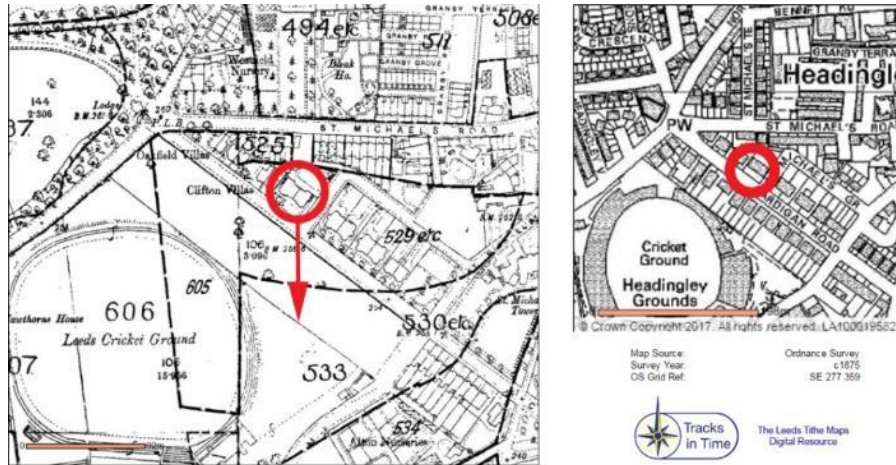


Figure 48 – Map: this is where *Asb Lea* once stood

The rural scenes of Headingley which Bingley captured from this address have also disappeared, yet the idea (or idealisation, or idyll) that Headingley is a *village*, rather than a busy suburb of an industrial city, has persisted until this day: the vision of the village of Headingley as a desirable and picturesque domicile for the aspirational classes, “the home of the Leeds elite” (Tagg, 1988: 126), despite the back-to-back housing, commuter traffic and pollution, blocks of flats and student ghettos, can be traced back to the time of Bingley, when those that could afford to, “escaped ‘above the smoke’, to the northern suburbs” (Tagg, 1988: 131). In this respect, the area still seems haunted by its rural past, its history as a refuge from the ‘urban inferno’ for bourgeois Loiners<sup>35</sup>.



Figure 49 - To Fields II (Projection II), 1889-2017

<sup>35</sup> Residents of Leeds

As an artist it is very difficult to resist the temptation to fill in these many gaps oneself. One could easily speculate that Godfrey Bingley's poor eyesight may have contributed to some of the many errors and inconsistencies in the archive – he gave up photography and donated his entire collection of slides to the University of Leeds Geology department in 1913, because of this condition (*Godfrey Bingley*, 2013). Although some of the errata may be due to transcription errors, such as the aforementioned 'Headingley, house', and an image captioned 'Tunnel How Mill' instead of 'Tunnel How *Hill*', others seem likely to be mistakes by Bingley himself. A panorama of Meanwood valley is mislabelled as Cardigan Road, leading me to believe that Headingley was even more pastoral at the time than I had at first thought. There are others too, which I shall not detail here. At one point I was chasing a house: from the photographs and map it looked mysteriously as if it had moved and I seriously thought it must have been dismantled and relocated a hundred yards up the road. One certainly gets the sense that the images and their archival context are under erasure, along with any sense of narrative or meaning. Suffice it to say, the traces and clues I had to base my work on were sparse, inconsistent and often incorrect, and this added another level of complexity to a project that was already impossible – namely, the rephotography of landscapes which no longer exist. This leads the photographer to a situation in which the imaginary is always having to work to form a complete picture, to make sense of the fragments, fill in the yawning gaps as they're encountered – and then one really does get the feeling of chasing spectres.

If you let it, the ghost can lead you toward what has been missing, which is sometimes *everything*.

(Gordon, 2008: 58)

The act of searching for the lost, of never quite managing to find what one is looking for, characterised this performance of deconstructed rephotography more than anything else. This is something I explored further in the final exhibition, *The Remote Viewer* – projecting my 'projections', the archive images moved around to evoke this failed act of searching. The image floats and wanders across the scene like a seeking view-finder, a wandering soul never quite finding its way home, despite being in exactly the right place – but exactly the wrong time. As the image shifts, we track in, the frame disappears and we become lost in this hinterland between times, and a frustrating lack of orientation results. The disjuncture of the frame was all that was stopping this haunted space from becoming a total fiction (see *Figs. 50 and 51* below.). The dead-end of photographic time travel is laid bare.



Figure 50 - Cornhill no longer exists 1908-2017b by Michael C Coldwell

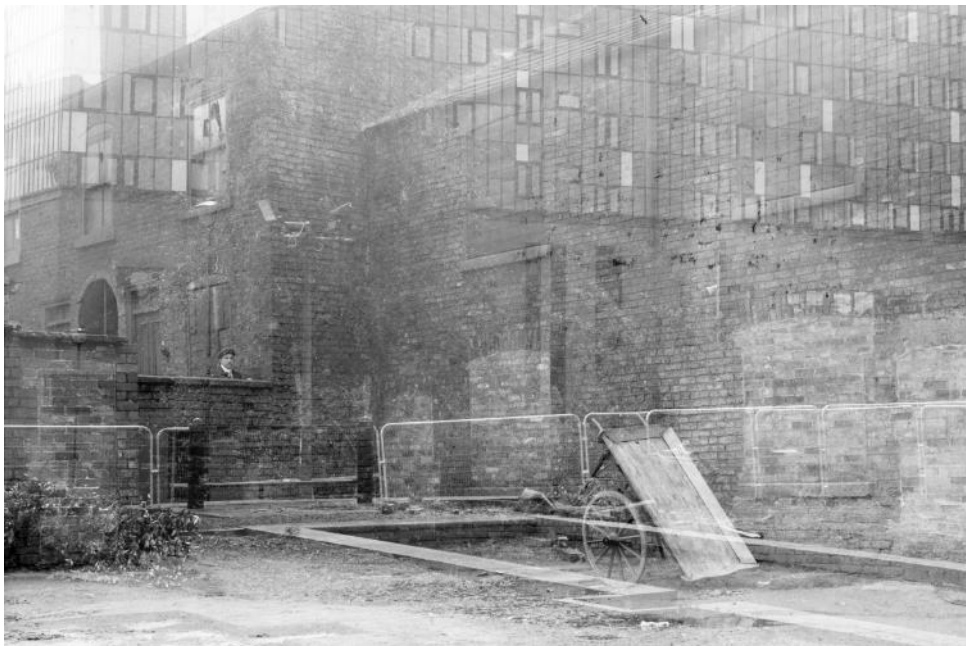


Figure 51 - Cornhill no longer exists 1908-2017b (detail) by Michael C Coldwell

The performance of searching is something which is not often mentioned in theories of photography. For Mark Klett, the performative aspect of rephotography must be seriously considered to take the genre further, and to develop landscape photography in general, the assumption of the invisibility of the photographer needs to be challenged. William L. Fox accompanied Klett on several rephotographic expeditions to the Nevada desert for his book *View Finder*, and was surprised when the photographer decided to leave all of his equipment in shot. Klett explained “No, that’s the view. We’re in the picture” (Fox, 2001: 15). This reflects a shift in how we might see objectivity in photography. To deliberately leave out the photographer’s presence does not negate their subjectivity, it merely masks it behind an illusion of their non-existence. Mark Klett makes the point even clearer: “landscape photography’s gone as far as it can go until we begin to integrate it with other things [...] We’ve seen the photographer as an observer, as a witness, but not as a participant” (Fox, 2001: 237-238). This is an aspect of photography I have investigated previously in a body of work entitled *Self-Landscapes* (Coldwell, 2014). With this work I sought to pick apart this illusion by taking pictures of the urban landscape reflected in windows. Through this technique the hidden photographer and camera are revealed in the image – the performance of photography is exposed, the absent rendered present, and the landscape photograph is no longer an illusion in this sense.

Landscape photographs are really “inner landscapes” (Sontag, 2002: 122)

The rephotograph is always haunted by a performance we do not see, of the body moving through the landscape searching for a certain shot, the act that actually results in an image being created at all. Occasionally something happens, akin to the reflections in my earlier project, something which reveals this spectral presence in the photograph. In *Shire Oak (Projection) 1888-2017* (Fig. 52, below) the presence of my shadow has the same effect. My act as a photographer, and my rephotographic intervention in that scene, now visibly haunts the final image.

The moving body, then, might be considered as another outside intervention in the archival urban record (Hetherington, 2012: 22)



Figure 52 - Shire Oak (Projection) 1888-2017

If rephotography then, is both a haunting and an intervention, what does this actually mean? What are the political ramifications of intervening, of returning to the scene? Can we even make generalities about this? For Derrida, following Marx, haunting is often a political metaphor<sup>36</sup> – “a way of presenting (in temporal terms too) and bringing to the fore, the violences of the past” (Heholt, 2016: 10). The ‘spectropolitics’ we see in the work of Derrida, Gordon and others demonstrates the political potency of the ghost; haunted as we are by forgotten injustices. Waking these ghosts can be transgressive, revolutionary, or at the very least, in tackling these revenants, we might better “understand the modern forms of dispossession, exploitation, repression” (Blanco and Peeren, 2013b: 94), that otherwise go unseen.

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<sup>36</sup> “If I am getting ready to speak at length about ghosts, inheritance, and generations, generations of ghosts, which is to say about certain others who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us, it is in the name of justice” Derrida, J. 2006. *Specters of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new international*. New York; London;: Routledge. p. xviii



Sociology needs a way of grappling with what it represses, haunting[...] haunting as a prerequisite for sensuous knowledge and to ponder the paradox of providing a hospitable memory for ghosts *out of a concern for justice* (Gordon, 2008: 60)

The hidden and forgotten injustice of repression and dispossession is certainly latent in the images of Quarry Hill that I have been using for this project. The upheaval and destruction of this impoverished area, and the mass relocation and dispersal of its inhabitants without their consultation, can easily be seen as a ‘violence of the past’ that we might re-awaken and re-remember through the process of rephotography.



Figure 53 - Allison's Buildings, 1901. Photographer Unknown. From *Unhealthy Areas*, Volume 4

With only a few notable exceptions (such as *Fig.53*), however, the dispossessed of Quarry Hill are missing from these archive images. If anything, the original photographs are haunted as much by their absence as presence.

It is a remarkable picture [...] which is offered as evidence but conjures the inhabitants of the gangland and insanitary area away. It is a remarkable strategy [...], resting its case for clearance on the technical claims of a pseudo-medical discourse itself underpinned by the technicism of photography” (Tagg, 1988: 135).

I mentioned earlier that the photographer is often magically effaced in a supposed quest for objectivity: here the subjects of the photographs have endured the same fate. This was a very convenient fate for those in power<sup>37</sup> – those with power over their representation not only had the power to have them erased from the photograph that stood to represent them, but eventually from the landscape itself.

So what we are presented with, in trying to make meaningful rephotographs using these archives, is really a series of problematic voids. Firstly there is the void left when the original photographers neglected to represent the inhabitants of this area. Then there is the physical void left in the city to this day, by a century of slum clearance and mismanagement of both the land and the people on it. We also find a critical void between these two markedly different representations of the same city. And these holes are then filled in by the imaginary, and by mythology – by the contrasting notions of Headingley as some rural idyll, and Quarry Hill as a living urban nightmare, a “nether world lost in satanic fumes, the breeding place of infernal beings. (Tagg, 1988: 131)”. This idealisation and demonization of these respective neighbourhoods is almost certainly a politically-motivated exaggeration, but a contrast which is also materially grounded in real issues of social class and the gross inequality which existed at the time. This geographic polarisation may no longer be applicable to these specific areas today, but despite recent attempts to regenerate (or gentrify) Quarry Hill into a new cultural sector of Leeds, it still shows signs of neglect and poverty, and there is evidence to suggest this space is still socially dysfunctional, despite now being totally expunged of its ‘problematic’ residents. The strangely empty zones of endless car parks and promenades can feel like a ghost town (*Fig. 54*), a city centre area where real life has been eradicated. However, at night and at the weekends this urban void is repopulated by homeless people and others who seek a quiet place to take drugs. There is still plenty of wasteland here, away from the range of surveillance cameras, to facilitate such pastimes – land that has lain fallow since the demolition of Quarry Hill flats in 1978 (*Fig. 55*).

Leeds’ East End still feels haunted by its long and troubled past, despite every attempt to erase this history from the land.

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<sup>37</sup> “Power, then, is what is centrally at issue here: the forms and relations of power which are brought to bear on practices of representation or constitute their conditions of existence” Tagg, J. 1988. *The burden of representation: essays on photographs and histories*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education. P. 21



Figure 54 - Searching for Cornhill (Trace I), 2017



Figure 55 - Searching for Allison's Buildings (Trace II), 2017



Figure 56 - Cornhill East End (Projection), 1901-2017

While the resulting images are completely devoid of people, they are not just abstract representations of urban space, but are politically haunting because of this very emptiness. The absences presage the lost stories of all those displaced by this upheaval, all those who were never given a voice as their homes were destroyed. Even ‘impossible rephotographs’ of empty landscapes can have the ability to emote, to tell simple stories about specific places, and to be counter-monuments for this hidden loss – even if that which has been lost has long since left living memory. Rephotography has these strengths, as well as the aforementioned weaknesses.

Klett found the journey to be a spiritual one as well as a physical one, arguing that ‘so much of what we know, and we think we know, about the land has first passed through someone’s lens. The interesting thing is to make use of this history, not merely be absorbed into it’” (Lowe and Norfolk, 2016: 48)

Rephotography in the normal mode can provide the illusion of an easy answer, a historical ‘trick picture’, a temporal and mnemonic problem solved. Through deconstructing this process I have tried to question that common-sense assumption – by staging rephotography as a shadowy intervention, a ‘screen memory’ which

haunts the modern city with disembodied views of its own past, views which can never be fully reconciled. Susan Sontag characterised photographs as giving people “imaginary possession of a past that is unreal” (Sontag, 2002: 9), and this seems even more true of *rephotography*, a medium which promises the fantasy of time travel, but delivers only a spatial magic trick. What thing do we imagine we now possess through this trace? (Benjamin, 1999: 447). Can we show that it is not the past represented which is unreal, but the illusion that we could ever possess it in the first place? Could the visible materiality of the photographic artefact itself assist us by signifying the auratic distance of a past that *did* once exist, but that we can no longer know - ultimately disallowing us possession of the trace we can see, but that we can no longer touch?

Deconstruction is always already in ruins. There are only ever the ruins of deconstruction, and the deconstruction of ruins (Royle, 1995)

Through textual analysis of the results of these processes we might begin see to what degree photographs do act as ghosts. Why do some possess this quality more than others, and how we might define this ontologically, materially, technologically, and even what it might mean politically, in the post-digital cultures of late capitalism. To this end, I hope this deconstruction will help establish a ‘hauntology’ of the medium – the spectral logic of ruins, traces, loss and aftermath, which haunts the ontic state of the photograph as both disembodied trace of the past and impenetrable spatial artefact.

## 4. Aura and Affect

### Findings and Outcomes

In this chapter we will examine the original archival images very closely, the digital scans, the new montages and look at different ways of exhibiting them (print and projection), to explore how these artefacts continue to haunt through different media supports.

Time in its passing casts off particles of itself in the form of images, documents, relics, junk. Nobody can seize time once it is gone, so we must make do with such husks, the ones that have not yet succeeded in disintegrating (Sante, 1992)

#### 4.1 Searching for aura

Luc Sante's description of archive photographs as disintegrating 'husks' certainly captures something of the materiality of the artefacts I have been examining for this project. But how does this visible decay change how we read the image? What role does it play in how photographs might appear or act as ghosts? The photographic 'husk', or its material support or subjectile, is not the same thing as the trace it carries, the referent we see - yet they are both inextricably and indexically linked in the photographic object - we therefore see and read them as one thing. One of the first things we notice when examining the Godfrey Bingley scans is the auratic colour and form precipitated by damage to the original artefacts. It is hard to imagine the photographs without these dominant features, yet they have all appeared since Bingley's death. They were never intentional qualities of the image as made, or even aspects the original photographer was ever aware of - they are the marks of subsequent decay.

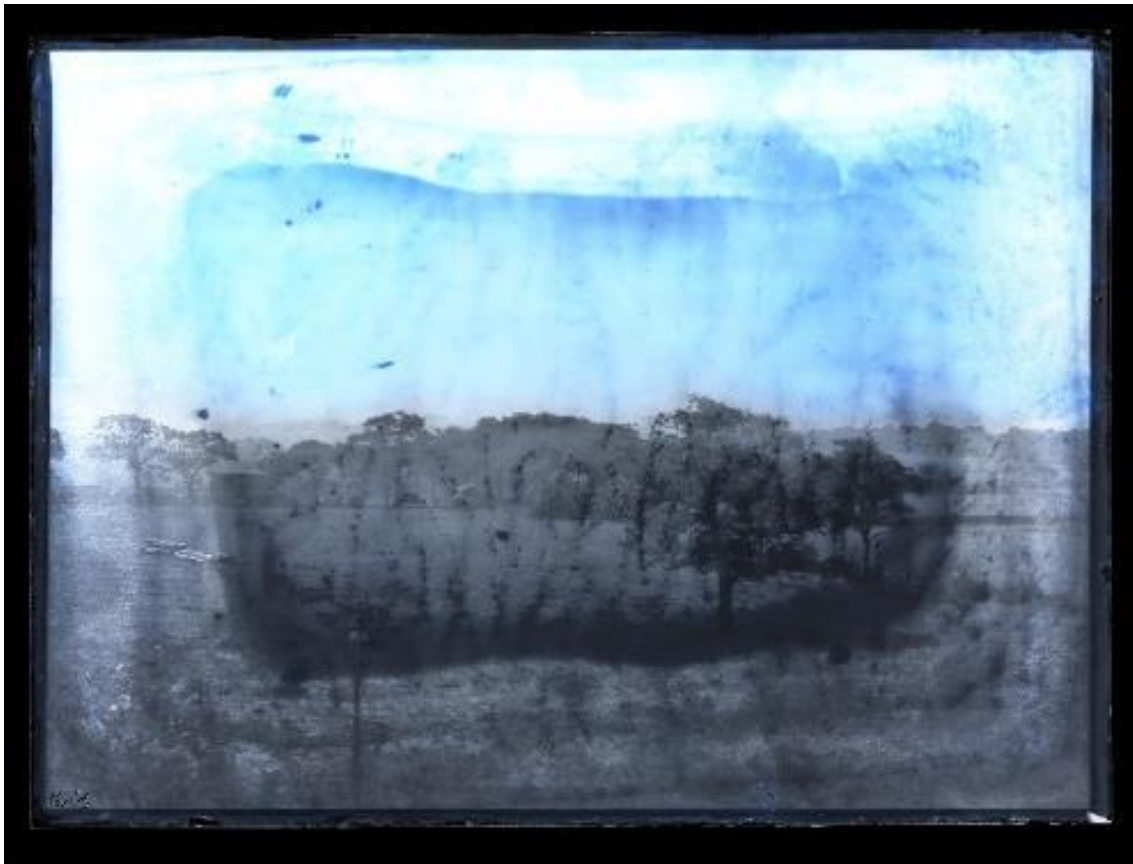


Figure 57 - Headingley, from Ash Lea over fields, 1889, by Godfrey Bingley

The digitisation team at Leeds University Library are currently conducting a race against time. Much of this photographic archive is degrading and disintegrating rapidly, so they are trying to scan and preserve many of these artefacts while it is still possible to do so. This is particularly true of the “cellulose nitrate negatives” (Sayers, 2016) they hold of Bingley’s work, as this medium is particularly volatile and presents a difficult and hazardous challenge for conservation. The majority of the images I have been using from this archive are in a different photographic format, however – they are glass negatives made using the gelatin dry plate process. While these are not as unstable as old film, they still show clear signs of damage and decay (*Fig 57.*) So what is causing this particular deterioration? It seems likely that the plates have been improperly stored at some stage, as the gelatin binder can easily dissolve as a result of exposure to water (Patkus, 2006).

Gelatin plates are also susceptible to oxidative deterioration, which appears as fading, yellowing, and silver mirroring. This is often caused by poor storage enclosures like old cardboard boxes” (Hain Teper)

Among the strangest aberrations in Bingley's images, though, are the bizarre and beautiful discolourations – not just yellowing, but neon-blues and spectral-rainbows. What causes these strange chromatic glitches in the medium? According to photograph conservator Luisa Casella it could be mould on the emulsion, or the gelatin binder itself may present discolouration due to “defective processing, inherent problems of residual chemistry, environmental pollutants, contact with poor quality materials, relative humidity and temperature variations” (Casella, 2014). Whatever the cause, all of these aberrations affect how we experience and read the image. They obscure the trace – the referent seems further away – and the damage itself seems to signify the passage of time. It is for this reason that I conceive of these glitches in the subjectile as an ‘auratic texture’. They break the illusion of the trace as something we can possess. They provide the “unique apparition of a distance” of which Walter Benjamin spoke, while also evidencing that uniqueness in time and space (Benjamin, 1935) – an original fingerprint, an authentic materiality – that we might associate more with painting than the optical perfection sought by the technologies and practices of mechanical reproduction. Rather ironically, in order to closely examine these ‘auratic’ forms of decay, we must mechanically reproduce them, scanning the glass negative at very high resolution and then inverting the digital image. We do all this on a colour-calibrated computer monitor, and this is where these forms are eventually revealed and studied.



Handling the original artefacts is quite a different experience altogether as we cannot see these colours or the degree to which the images are damaged. Examining the pieces of glass ‘in the flesh’, one really gets a sense of the photographic trace as a form of residue, or more accurately, a pattern in that residual surface. The glass sometimes seems in surprisingly good condition, but sometimes we can hardly see the image itself. Look closely and we begin to see a faint dusting of chemical information, a crust that is barely visible on an otherwise transparent object – the image is almost latent (see the top slide in *Fig. 59*). Paradoxically, these photographs seem more immaterial and wraithlike when encountered as physical objects, but by scanning them into a digital file (which can certainly be conceptualised as some sort of immaterial object – transmutable code), one can reveal the complexity and depth of that physical form, a materiality largely invisible to the naked eye (*compare Fig. 60 with 61, below*). Through the process of scanning the glass slide and producing a digital image, we begin to see how the photograph is akin to haunted matter. The material substrate allows the trace of a past reality to live on, the referent to have an afterlife as a new material - and because we can see this substrate clearly on Bingley’s slides, because of their ‘auratic texture’, we are made acutely aware of the temporal disjuncture taking place, of the trace as an absence rather than a presence. In direct contrast, the material substrate of modern digital photography is completely invisible in the image, but this is not a new phenomenon – indeed, the technical progression of photography through history has been an ongoing effort to efface the visibility of its carrier, to render the medium invisible leaving only the pure trace of the referent. We thus forget what the photographic trace is in material terms – an optical trick, and a pattern left in matter.



Figure 58 - Examining the Godfrey Bingley artefacts at Special Collections

The mouldering photographs, palpable testimony to time's passing, are refrigerated and remote. The original photograph, its presence in time and space, yellowing and with all the markings on the back, is disallowed. The mechanically reproduced photograph attains a new status as a scarce and at times unique object, with a preciousness more like a painting (Ritchin, 2009: 50)



Figure 59 - Godfrey Bingley glass plates on the lightbox

But does this “preciousness” equate to aura?

what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura [...]

the aura beckons from early photographs for the last time (Benjamin, 1935)

For Walter Benjamin, 'early photographs' still possessed some aura, a feature of images that 'withered' as the technologies of reproduction became more advanced. As photographic technologies became more advanced, the medium (the substrate or the subjectile) became less and less visible as part of the image – *aura* withered away, and *trace* took over completely. When an analogue image decays, however, the trace fades and the subjectile reappears. Maybe it is not 'early photography' so much as 'older photography' which retains or reveals its aura as time elapses. Certainly, for Benjamin to consider a photograph truly auratic, there must be something about it we cannot possess, something inaccessible or impenetrable, much like the past itself – and these beautifully damaged slides certainly seem to fit that bill. The scenes depicted feel completely out of reach, they are echoes of another world.



Figure 60 – Godfrey Bingley glass plates on the lightbox

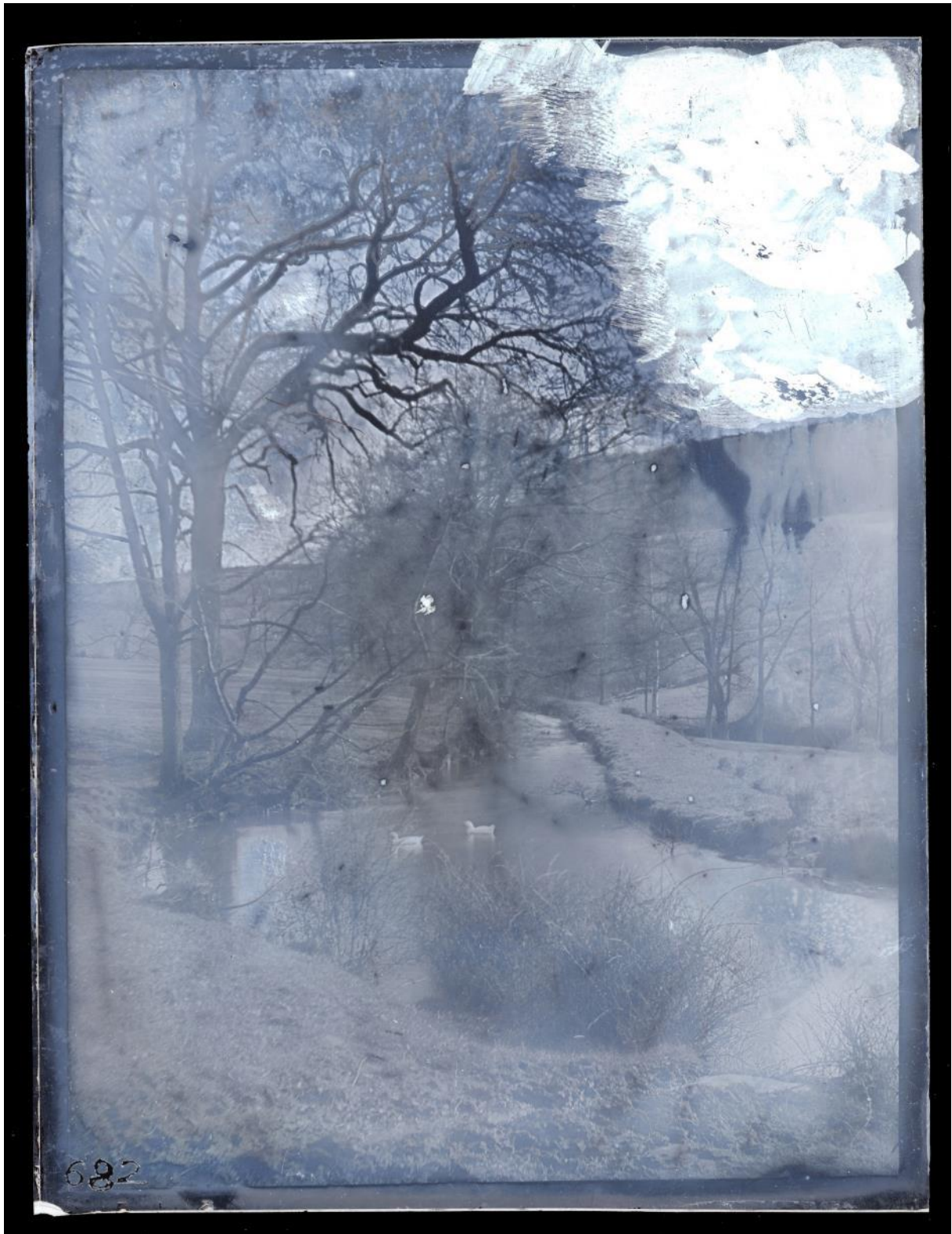


Figure 61 - Adel Beck, near Scotland Mills, 1889, by Godfrey Bingley

Here the glass plate negative you can see at the top of the previous figure (60) has been scanned into a digital file and the colours inverted.

the particular ways in which aura's defining elements of disjunctive temporality – its sudden and fleeting disruption of linear time, its uncanny linkage of past and future – and the concomitant dislocation of the subject are articulated through, rather than in mere opposition to, the technological media (Hansen, 2008: 346-347)

What can we really deduce from studying and appropriating these images in new works, in terms of their aura, their “disjunctive temporality” and the technological media it is “articulated through”? While appreciating these stunningly disfigured photographs as part of that process, we must be wary of the possibility of reducing Benjamin's complex ideas to an “aesthetic category” (Hansen, 2008: 336). By conceptualising aura as an identifiable material property of an image, we risk losing the nuanced political context and intention of Benjamin's original treatise on it. For Miriam Bratu Hansen, this simplified concept is actually the “common understanding” of aura (2008: 337) that we see used today. So while this may indeed be a reductive or selective reading of Benjamin, is it still useful to our ontological understanding of images?

This aesthetic characterisation of aura is often centred around what Benjamin referred to as “beautiful semblance” in art (2008: 48). At its most basic, visual art re-presents something from nature – “this lies in mimesis as the primal phenomenon of all artistic activity” (Benjamin, 2008: 48). This notion certainly makes sense when considering traditional oil painting or a similar medium as representative art, but when applied to ‘early photography’ as Benjamin does by stating that these nascent works possess aura too, the intimation is that early photographs only *resemble* what they depict, while newer methods of photographic reproduction actually *capture* reality somehow (they are indexes as well as icons). Early photography can possess a dreamlike quality which we may struggle to perceive as reality's direct trace (this can certainly be said of some of Bingley's more damaged plates), but the fact of the matter is that they are just that. However, that trace can be obscured, it is rendered auratically distant by the visibility of the underlying medium (akin to a landscape painting when we notice the brushstrokes and we can no longer peer through it like a window to another world).

It used to be said that photography was tormented by the ghost of painting. For now photography is the one that is doing the haunting [...] What was once thought to be a window onto the world is transformed into an opaque, resistant surface volumetrically unfolding in space. In each of these cases, we are forced to look *at* photography rather than *through it*. (Batchen, 2002: 109-110)

The Godfrey Bingley images seem to lie at the tail end of what Benjamin referred to as ‘early photography’, the dry plate processes signalling the beginning of a more modern approach (Coe, 1976: 38), and mass produced cameras and media gradually taking over photography as it became both a common pastime and a technology of evidence, even as it continued to be a skilled craft of image-making. Bingley’s approach to photography seems almost scientific in tone, and most concerned with ‘accurate’ representation of the scene. Despite the arguably ‘romantic’ rural settings, Bingley is certainly no pictorialist – the images seemed striking at the time precisely because of “their apparent lack of ‘expressive’ intent” (Jones, 1987: 130).

When we look at these plates and discuss their aura, we are not really looking at Bingley’s work at all. These pictures have acquired aura in the many decades since they were taken. Bingley’s cool and calculated shots, which Benjamin may well have grouped with Atget as part of a new anti-auratic photographic movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>38</sup>, have since ‘warmed’ with age. Their visible decay lends them their auratic and haunting ‘affects’ as much as anything actually depicted, the auratic distance merely reflecting the growing temporal one. While these photographs are certainly part of those technologies of reproduction under which aura was to wither, the glass negatives are still unique artefacts, “strange tissues of space and time” (Benjamin, 1935), and their gradual degradation signifies their authentic materiality and the temporal journey they have been on. If aura were more than just those physical marks, more than an aesthetic or a beautiful semblance, then this aura could not survive the process of digital scanning, the process of “assimilating it as a reproduction” (Benjamin, 1935), and under any further copying this aura should certainly wither. And yet, we are still left with the paradox that without this technical reproductive process, that unique ‘auratic texture’ could never have been revealed in the first place.

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<sup>38</sup> Walter Benjamin mentions Eugène Atget as an example of how photography has moved away from the auratic portraits of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “as man withdraws from the photographic image, the exhibition value for the first time shows its superiority to the ritual value. To have pinpointed this new stage constitutes the incomparable significance of Atget, who, around 1900, took photographs of deserted Paris streets. It has quite justly been said of him that he photographed them like scenes of crime. The scene of a crime, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence. With Atget, photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance. They demand a specific kind of approach; free-floating contemplation is not appropriate to them. They stir the viewer; he feels challenged by them in a new way”. Benjamin, W. 1935. *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. Jahsonic.com.



Figure 62 – Aura of tree (Scan), 1889-2017

Benjamin underestimated the capacity for aura to establish itself around reproduction (Walton, 2015: 18)

For Jeremy Walton, who writes about aura and its relationship to the subjectile, Benjamin did not foresee the many new practices and uses of photographic objects, reproductions and copies, which “*re-aurify*” those facsimiles. By taking details of these scans I have drawn attention to the surface of the original subjectile, and I have created new works where the focus of the image is not on Bingley’s original trace but on the signs of decay, the ‘auratic texture’ of the unique object and the patina of the photograph as artefact (*Fig. 62*). Here we see the haunting presence of medium in a post-medium age (Manovich, 2001b), and the seemingly impossible, the aura of the object is now in the digital realm for our consideration. The digital image above might not have a subjectile of its own, but at such high resolution it captures and reveals in exquisite detail the decaying subjectile of another, transforming our notion of the original, and reawakening its hidden ghosts.

Perhaps this 'auratic texture' is so strikingly obvious in Bingley's photographs because of their original minimalism. The aura of the slide as object easily comes to the fore because the trace it carries is almost inconsequential: the picture that is "so empty that one invests it with pleasant memories" (Jones, 1987: 130), is also so empty that we can focus on its objecthood without too much distraction, and we can project onto it almost anything we like. I doubt this was Bingley's original aesthetic intention, although we cannot know for sure. I am not sure what Bingley would have made of my usage of his slides generally, my main interest in them being little to do with his original compositions. He would certainly have balked at my cropping them in post-production, we know this was against his views on both photographic authenticity, and his aesthetic consideration of the medium.

In [one of Bingley's talks] he deplores the practice of composing when printing, ie after the photograph has been taken, to choose an area of picture which is well arranged and then crop off the unwanted remainder in the enlarger (Jones, 1987: 125)

All of this talk of medium and aesthetics might seem a little antiquated in any case. Postmodernism and the digital turn have supposedly put paid to such prescriptive considerations. In the post-medium digital world these terms are no longer meant to be viable, as all possible forms are copied, pasted, cropped and re-contextualised with untold irreverence, fully-integrated into the great network of transmutable simulacra through which all visual culture is not only disseminated, but from which it now originates too. Lev Manovich outlines this post-digital position clearly in his essay entitled *Post-media Aesthetics* (2001).

[the] traditional concept of medium does not work in relation to post-digital, post-net culture. And yet, despite the obvious inadequacy of the concept of medium to describe contemporary cultural and artistic reality, it persists. (Manovich, 2001b: 36)

One might almost say that the post-digital world is haunted by it. And this new fascination for obsolete recording media that we see in cultural hauntology certainly returns aesthetic considerations of medium to the discussion, fetishizing, if not "*re-aurifying*" (Walton, 2015: 18) out-dated methods of mechanical reproduction, within those very digital cultures to which Manovich refers.



If we are to consider the aura of Bingley's scanned plates in aesthetic terms, we must do so within this new context. The aesthetic of old recording media within digital culture is already addressed within musicology's contemporary study of sonic hauntology, as outlined in Elodie Roy's monograph *Media, Materiality and Memory* (2015).

The obsolete or semi-obsolete delivery technology, such as the vinyl record, has now acquired an auratic dimension (Roy, 2015: 159)

An already owned object, for example, a vintage vinyl record, would bear the physical traces of the passing of time. Eisenberg said of records that they contain musical as well as historical time (2005: 37); the patina, aging and *aura of decay* of the recorded object can be seen as evidence of its life. (Roy, 2015: 166)

Here we see the importance of the "aura of decay" in signifying a temporal authenticity missing from our experience of the digital – the data file "does not age progressively" (Roy, 2015: 166), for it has no material subjectile of its own. "No layers of dust or patina are added to the digital object, no cracks alter its invisible surface" (Roy, 2015: 165), and so it lacks those marks which might make up a visible aura of authenticity. Despite the distorting noise and surface aberrations we experience with old analogue media, personified perhaps in Bingley's beautifully damaged plates, we still see them as ontologically authentic, as having 'soul', even as their representations of the past are thus compromised. Hauntology is preoccupied with obsolete media not merely because of nostalgia, but due to a temporal disjuncture between analogue and digital media, between older and newer methods of recording and representing reality – the latter being haunted in some way by the former, or haunted by our mis-memory of it, perhaps. The sonic and visual style of these relatively new cultural concerns can be seen to gravitate towards the "aura of decay", or what we might see as an aestheticization of media entropy.



Figure 63 - Aura out of context, 1889-2017 by Michael C Coldwell

In *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the Absence of Reason* (2006), Dylan Trigg talks about the aesthetic pleasure we take from experiencing modern ruins, “a post-industrial form of the sublime” (Trigg, 2006: xxvi), and much of his description seems to fit these decaying photographs too – perhaps we could even think of them as ‘media ruins’.

As this balance between ontology and aesthetics is understood, so the aesthetic quality of the ruin emerges. Instead of being marginalized as pernicious or otherwise antithetical to productive space, the ruin creates a centre of its own. Celebrating ruins does not entail domesticating and nullifying them. (Trigg, 2006: xxvi)

Trigg makes one exception to this latter point which seems pertinent to the sampling of decaying media. Through the preservation or the abstraction of ruins from their original context, we can render them a novelty, because we remove these forms from an understanding of their ongoing physical dissolution. It is real dissolution that we see in the “aura of decay”, and which is missing in its digital preservation. The image above is now completely re-contextualised within a state of suspended de-animation (*Fig. 63*) – but is it nullified?

For Benjamin the marks accrued on an object over its life are part of its aura, and all attempts at preservation or restoration are a “process of de-auraticization” (Gilloch, 2007: 6). If the aura we are looking for is that of material dissolution and our digital preservation has captured those marks but also stopped this process, then maybe the aura we see *is* still lost in reproduction, as Benjamin predicted. What was once aura has been aestheticized, but is this something we actually visually perceive? Theoretically the scanned artefact may have lost this aura, but what if the viewer cannot tell the difference, or if that aura was completely hidden before it was copied, as with our scanned plates? Arguably these digital copies merely simulate any “auratic effects” of the originals, something which for Hansen can take on “an acutely negative valence” (Hansen, 2008: 336), but in a post-digital age in which our participatory experience of the world is largely mediated through the advanced technologies of reproduction, perhaps this gloomy view of aura “appearing on the side of the technological media” (Hansen, 2008: 336) is somewhat outmoded.

while true aura dissipates under modernity, Benjamin does note that it resurfaces in mass culture as a kind of dream image: it is refigured, as pastiche, in the production of mass culture. (Yong)

The interesting thing about the hauntological foregrounding of medium is that it seems to counter this pastiche by foregrounding that auratic and temporal *distance* in the process, and the haunting sense of loss that goes with it. In pastiche the past blends seamlessly with the present as it does in the vernacular rephotography we looked at in the previous chapter: there is no sense of loss. In hauntology we see the ‘dream image’ for what it is – a jarring apparition. This is something Mark Fisher wrote about with regard to the digital sampling of analogue noise in sonic hauntology<sup>39</sup>. Hansen herself seems to allude to this sense of loss and the temporal nature of aura.

In this regard, Benjamin writes, they share the primary aspect of aura as “the unique appearance of a distance, however near it may be,” that is, an essential inapproachability and unavailability, related to an irrecoverable absence or loss...The linkage of aura with *memoire involontaire* not only suggests that the “unique distance” that appears to the beholder is of a temporal dimension; it also inscribes the entwinement of distance and closeness with the register of the unconscious. (Hansen, 2008: 344)

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<sup>39</sup> For Mark Fisher “postmodernism *glosses over* the temporal disjunctures” made possible by recording technologies, while “the hauntological artists foreground them” Fisher, M. 2013. The Metaphysics of Crackle: Afrofuturism and Hauntology. *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture*. 5(2). p.46

The dissolution of the artefact may be deferred and de-auraticized by our sampling of it, but we do not know this simply by looking – we only see those signs of dissolution amplified in this new ‘frozen’ context. The “aura of decay” constitutes that “unique distance” here, it is a visible presence in these digital images even if only to signify the irrecuperable loss of aura itself. What might we perceive when we look at these ghostly marks then? What do we see this ‘auratic texture’ as, in relation to the referent? We might be spatially close to what we see, but the distance here is certainly temporal. We register this disjunction unconsciously – we do not know what has been lost, we only *feel* loss. A thick atmosphere enshrouds the image, evoking the hazy memory of something lost to time.



Figure 64 - Aura of time, 1889-2017 by Michael C Coldwell

Trace and the aura have never looked more distinct here (*Fig. 64*): the trace forms the original referent, the leaves and branches of the tree, while the aura actually looks like a halo, the tonal distortions and metallic discolourations of the underlying plate, form an 'atmosphere' around the tree. This is both literally an aura, and aura in the Benjaminian sense – and it is certainly this auratic atmosphere which creates the temporal distance which renders the image haunting. It can be nothing else in the image, for there is nothing else.

Conceiving of aura as an atmosphere is not a new idea – indeed the two words are semantically very closely related. Looking at the importance of aura, distance and affect, to the atmosphere of museums, Mark Dorrian invokes the work of a contemporary German phenomenologist and aesthetician: "Benjamin's concept is also taken up by the philosopher Gernot Böhme in his influential theorisation of atmospheres as aesthetic phenomena. Böhme clearly understands Benjamin's 'aura' as atmosphere" (Dorrian, 2014).

"Atmosphere" is an expression which occurs frequently in aesthetic discourse but is not up to now a concept of aesthetic theory. Nevertheless there is a concept which is, so to speak, its substitute representative in theory – the concept of aura, introduced by Benjamin in his essay "The Work of Art..." Benjamin sought through the concept of aura to determine that atmosphere of distance and respect surrounding original works of art. (Böhme, 1993: 116)

[Adorno] claims that what Benjamin calls aura is something familiar to artistic experience. And he identifies it with 'atmosphere' (Knizek, 1993: 358)

This reconceptualization of Benjamin's aura as atmosphere renders it less to do with abstract theories of authenticity and presence and places aura closer to the realm of affect – atmospheres are *felt*, first and foremost they are sensed by eyes and by the body – any judgement of authenticity must come after the fact<sup>40</sup>. For Alfred Stieglitz, pioneering art photographer and a contemporary of Bingley, atmosphere was everything in the medium:

Atmosphere is the medium through which we see all things. Atmosphere softens all lines; it graduates the transition from light to shade; it is essential to the reproduction of the sense of distance. That dimness of outline which is characteristic for distant objects is due to atmosphere. Now, what atmosphere is to Nature, tone is to a picture. (Stieglitz, 1892)

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<sup>40</sup> "affects must be viewed as independent of, and in an important sense prior to, ideology—that is, prior to intentions, meanings, reasons, and beliefs— because they are nonsignifying, autonomic processes that take place below the threshold of conscious awareness and meaning" Leys, R. 2011. The turn to affect: A critique. *Critical Inquiry*. 37(3), pp.434-472.

The fact the Stieglitz mentions a “sense of distance” here too is very interesting. Does this tonal atmosphere actually create a sense of *spatial* distance in the photograph, or are we always really talking about the auratic ‘mists of time’?



Figure 65 - Aura of Monument 1888-2017  
Digital copy of Bingley's plate, photographed from the screen

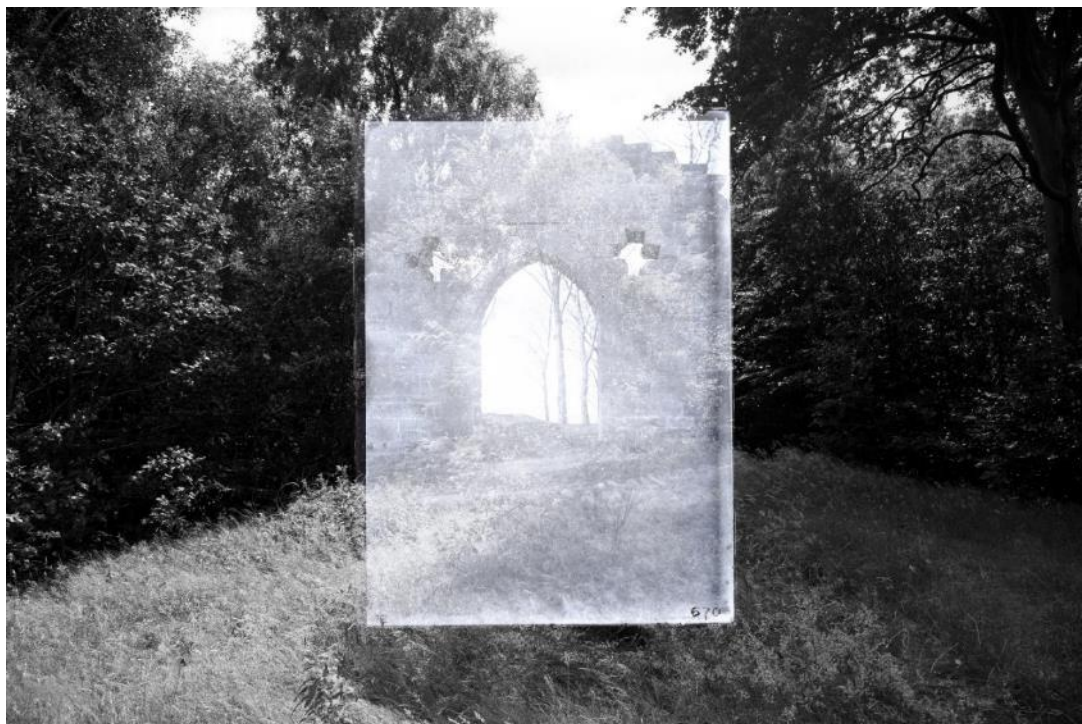


Figure 65 - Monument Hill II (Projection) 1888-2017 by Michael C Coldwell  
Scan of Bingley's plate digitally composited into the scene as it stands today

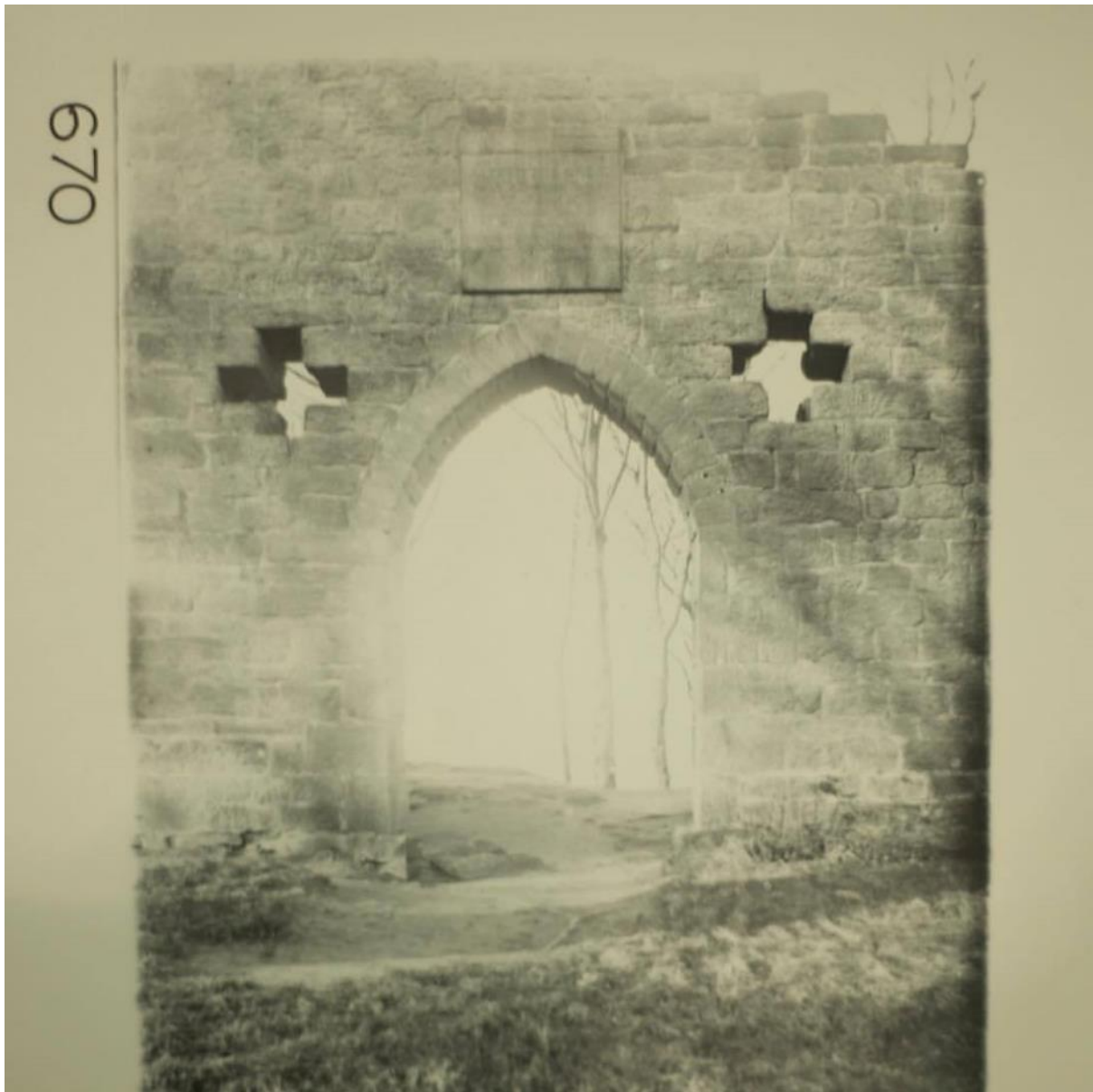


Figure 66 - Print from Godfrey Bingley handbook - 670 "Tunnel How Mill near Meanwood" 1888

Re-photographed from the paper page using rostrum camera

The original record is mislabelled and is actually a photograph of a monument which no longer exists, called King Alfred's Castle.

These three figures are all of the same photographic trace (*Figs. 65-67*), but the atmosphere of each is altered by the differing technological media involved in delivering them. The 'projection' above (*Fig. 66*) is an entirely digital composition: Bingley's original glass plate negative has been scanned at high resolution and digitally 'projected' over the scene as it stands today. The 'auratic texture' of the unique artefact is captured in this scan in great detail, despite being an 'atmospheric' image there is a clarity to this composition. It is actually that plate's murky derivatives which seem to contain more of Stieglitz's crucial atmosphere – his softness/dimness of line, his sense of atmospheric distance.

These various versions of the same image constitute an apt reminder that the trace is transmutable in analogue media too – but unlike the digital copy, each new incarnation has a new physical presence, a unique new subjectile which reasserts itself on the transplanted trace. So atmosphere gathers around the analogue copy, and subsequent generations of copies seem to have more background atmosphere – noise and artefacts of the transition between media build up and the trace begins to soften and fade away. The sense of distance increases despite being further deferred from the original auratic source. This seems to suggest that while atmosphere and aura both have a role to play in rendering the photographic trace temporally distant and haunting, they are certainly not the same thing at all, and in fact may run counter to each other when it comes to photography.

The blurred paper print (*Fig. 67*) is a *copy* of the unique artefact but it has that "unique phenomenon of a distance" (Benjamin, 1935) we might associate with the auratic. And the photograph I took of the scanned plate from the screen (*Fig. 65*) is even more obscured by a new dense atmospheric layer – the texture/structure of the computer screen itself becomes a visible part of the photograph, a faux-subjectile further obscuring the original trace. In neither of these examples does it seem that we gain possession of the trace through its copy, for it actually feels further away from our grasp, as it fades in the process, seemingly opposing Benjamin's characterisation of auratic distance and its relation to the uniqueness of the original material artefact. This particular 'aura of decay', if we can even still call it that, is a product of the loss that takes place when we make a copy. This is the 'withering away' itself – the very opposite of Benjaminian aura – but, like the latter, it reveals the temporal disjuncture taking place, the temporal distance felt, and reaffirms the trace we see as decidedly spectral.



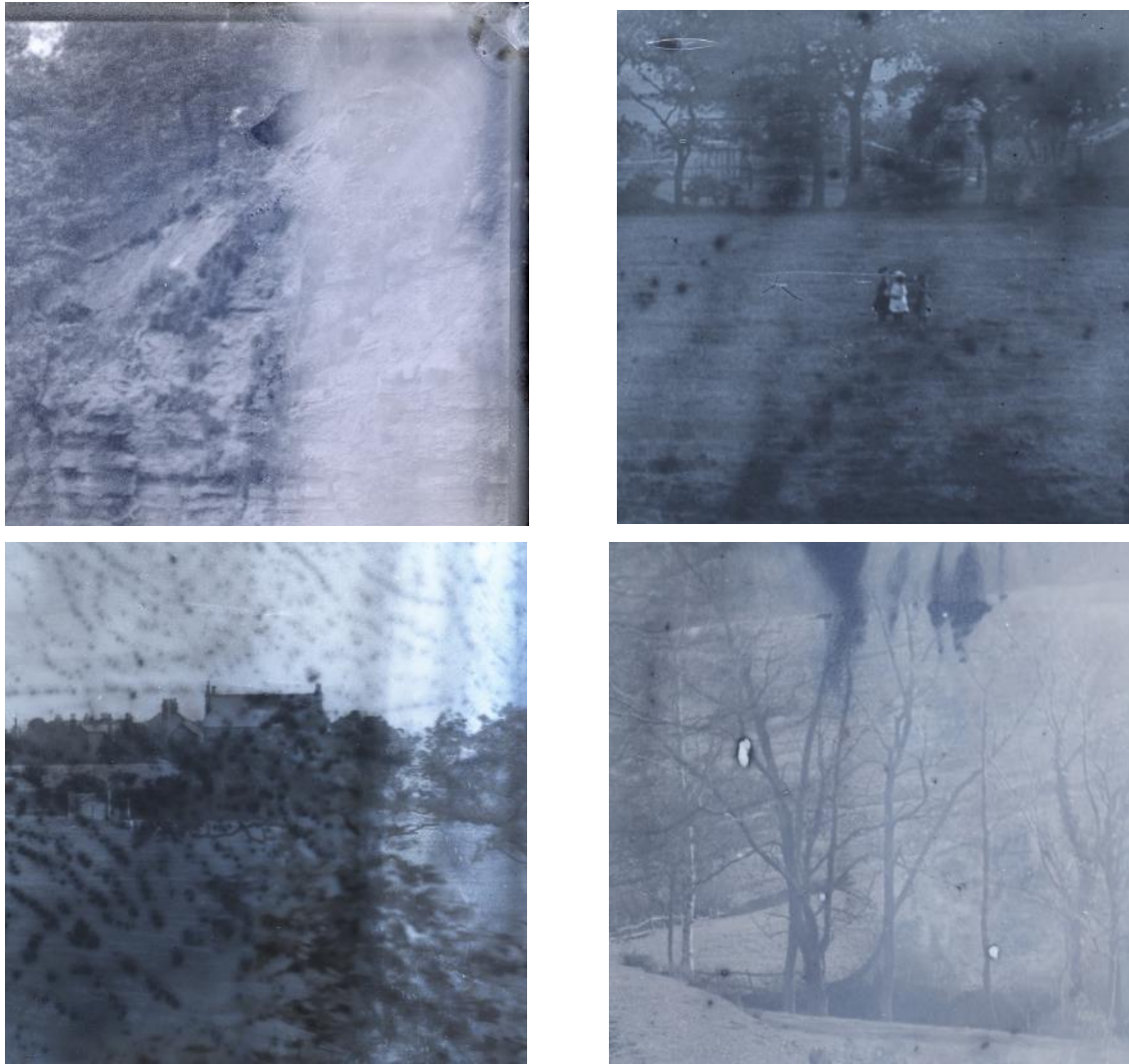


Figure 67 - Auras of Fields, 1889-2017

The material aberrations we see in the ‘auras’ above start to have a similar effect on the trace to that of random noise or interference. Noise is a key component in a visual phenomenon called pareidolia. This psychological tendency to see patterns (especially faces) where there are none, is a common scientific explanation for ghost sightings and other paranormal phenomena<sup>41</sup> – the fainter (or more distant) the trace appears, the harder the eye-brain has to work to interpret what it is seeing, increasing the role the imaginary plays in reading the image, and the chance of phantasmatic pareidolia occurring. This ghostly noise, like a form of techno-ectoplasm, does

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<sup>41</sup> Scientific explanations for ghost sightings include: “...misinterpretation of natural phenomena, hallucinatory experiences and pareidolia (seeing things that are not there), inattentional blindness (not seeing things that are there), the fallibility of eyewitness testimony, false memories, the possible role of complex electromagnetic fields and infrasound, photographic evidence, EVP, and the role of the media.” French, C.C. 2013. The Psychology of Ghosts and Hauntings. *The Skeptic [UK]*. 24(2), pp.31-34.

seem ontologically unique to analogue technologies of recording, whether in the copy or the auratic original: although it can be sampled or simulated in the digital realm with ease, as we can see, it cannot originate there.

As well as increasing the chances of a 'ghostly' reading of the image, the atmosphere of the analogue copy has an authenticity of its own which problematizes a strictly Benjaminian understanding of aura – but if we're reconceptualising aura and atmosphere in terms of affect, is there really any discernible difference? Whether we are looking at a copy or the original artefact, it is the visible signs of decay which reveal the image as both a temporal object and temporal disjuncture. How then might the "aura of decay" affect the viewer of such ruined images? How does it make us *feel*?

There is the surface. Now think – or rather feel, intuit – what is beyond it (Sontag, 2002: 23)

For both Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes, affect was crucial to understanding the way photographs communicate, why they are important to us and how we project ourselves onto them. What is Barthes' 'punctum' if not visceral affect – the universal affect of time:

This *punctum*, more or less blurred beneath the abundance and the disparity of contemporary photographs, is vividly legible in historical photographs: there is always a defeat of Time in them: *that* is dead and *that* is going to die. (Barthes, 1993: 96)

Here Barthes echoes Benjamin – the former's punctum of historical photographs, and the latter's aura of early photographs, are clearly related in their power to affectively evoke time's relentless passage, but this has little to do with inauthenticity or mechanical reproduction. The atmosphere of death, the "aura of decay" and the power that can bring to the photograph, can be just as present and 'affective' in the copy as the original – as we saw above, the analogue copy can even increase this atmospheric signification of temporal distance.

Haunting itself is merely or *only* affect (Heholt, 2016: 5)

Despite affect often being a primary consideration of the artist – attempting to conjure certain emotive atmospheres in their work and ‘affect’ or ‘haunt’ the viewer – it is impossible to get a firm handle on this aspect of visual communication, as it is to clearly separate the objective from subjective considerations. Notwithstanding the difficulties this presents to the media researcher, it seems disingenuous not to acknowledge the importance of affect to the issues being considered, indeed, ‘affective atmospheres’ are increasingly considered legitimate targets for scholarly study in fields such as cultural geography despite their intractable ambiguity:

Atmospheres do not fit neatly into either an analytical or pragmatic distinction between affect and emotion. They are indeterminate with regard to the distinction between the subjective and objective [...] As such, to attend to affective atmospheres is to learn to be affected by the ambiguities of affect/emotion, by that which is determinate and indeterminate, present and absent, singular and vague.

(Anderson, 2009: 80)

For László Munteán the affective qualities of photography are paramount, and constitute a possible answer to the ontological crisis surrounding photography’s indexicality in the post-digital age – whether or not the trace is real is not the question anymore, rather, it is whether the trace is *felt* to be real.

If indexicality is an affective rather than ontological property of photography, the spectre’s absent presence is rooted more in the viewer’s unwitting acceptance of the photographic document as a trace of the real. (Munteán, 2017: 136)

Does this mirror the notion that our understanding of aura has shifted post-digitally from the domain of authenticity to the domain of affect? And where does this leave Barthes’ significance of authentication?

From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation (Barthes, 1993: 89)

Maybe we are still talking about the power of authentication here – except in relative rather than absolute terms. As long as the photograph *feels* authentic, it possesses the same emotive power regardless of whether it is or not.

The power of certain iconic photographs can have little to do with what they actually index or evidence, and is more the ‘affect’ of authenticity inscribed by their iconicity, familiarity of form, cultural context and use. Whether or not Robert Capa’s *The Falling Soldier* (1936) is ever definitively proven to be a fake, for example, it has possessed the power of authentication for over seventy years because people have believed or felt it to be true. It *looked* true – people were told it was true – and they had no reason to suspect otherwise, thanks to their faith in the “photographic document as a trace of the real” (Munteán, 2017: 136).

This is a remarkable consideration when looking at the photograph’s role as evidence, and its role in telling history – how photographs are used in the archive to create meaning, to authenticate certain narratives of the past, and the hidden role of affect therein. This is another area of increasing scholarly interest:

[we can] locate affect as a phenomenological and social endeavour... Scholars in history, anthropology and gender and sexuality studies have begun to examine the affective power of archival records (Cifor, 2016: 11)

Even though they recognize that signs carry meaning, [archivists] work often neglects the ways in which these signs are imbued with affective intensities... Postmodern and deconstructionist scholars assert that archivists are mediators or constructors of the knowledge that is available within archives. The archival appraiser is not “identifying records with archival value,” rather they are “*creating* archival value” (Cifor, 2016: 12-13)

I have unearthed images from the archive here searching for signs of aura, largely via their ‘affective’ qualities as photographic artefacts, rather than their evidential value to historians, or even particularly their content. By making this selection and creating new public work to what degree am I also creating new truths, “creating [new] archival value” in the sense mentioned above – and is this the same as “*re-aurifying*” (Walton, 2015: 18) those hidden bodies – paradoxically through their digital trace?

## 4.2 Comparing the archives

### Glass and paper

The two photographic archives used in creating these new works date from approximately the same time period, but there are many differences. One set of images represents the rural; the other the urban. One is fractional, damaged and comes without much context; the other has known historical significance and comes with a haunting narrative of disappearance – slum clearance, forgotten people and the destruction of community and place. One is a set of discoloured glass negatives; the other is a set of scanned paper prints. In comparing the Godfrey Bingley photographs with those of Quarry Hill, through this process of deconstructed rephotography, we can begin to see how these various aspects affect the images' ability to haunt us, through that interplay between the artefact and the immaterial trace it transports across time.

The following examples are particularly interesting, in that despite both the glass plate and paper print used effectively exerting their separate objecthood in the compositions (via the disjunctive frame too), we *still* see a synthesis of views across time. The eye-brain almost cannot help but try and fill the gaps, reconcile the irreconcilable, creating a fictional third space in both images, despite my best efforts to emphasise the disjunction taking place. One crucial difference between the examples regards atmosphere and auratic distance – something about *Beck Near Mills (Fig 70.)* seems impenetrable and transparent at the same time, which only augments its spectral quality. The damage to the original plate and the contrast between the crepuscular present and the eerily incandescent past certainly adds to this impression. The 'auratic texture' of the paper print used (*Fig 69.*) is not as evident a presence at all – here the haunted quality comes much more strikingly from the content of the trace, as we might expect, with the punctum brought by the children in the scene depicted. It is hard to tell exactly what role the underlying medium is playing here, because in a sense we are trying to compare chalk with cheese. In one image the focus is the ghostly figures on the street (*Fig. 69*), in the other we feel ourselves first, ascending the stairs to the beyond (*Fig. 70*). In one we primarily feel an eerie presence; in the other an absence. Both are actually features of a void: what we can see is no longer with us.

The eerie concerns the most fundamental metaphysical questions one could pose, questions to do with existence and non-existence: Why is there something here when there should be nothing? Why is there nothing here when there should be something? (Fisher, 2016: 12)



Figure 69 - Cross Templar Street (Projection) 1901-2017 by Michael C Coldwell  
Original from the Quarry Hill archive



Figure 70 - Beck Near Mills (Projection) 1889-2017  
Original from the Godfrey Bingley archive



To determine the role of the subjectile in this spectrality, however, we need to take a different approach. By looking at examples of the *same* trace appearing on glass and paper we might get closer to an answer – here I have chosen Bingley slide 228.



Figure 68 - Meanwood Wood and park, 1887 by Godfrey Bingley  
Digital scan of original glass plate negative (228)





Figure 73 – Meanwood Wood and park, 1887 by Godfrey Bingley  
Print on paper – from accomp. handbook (228)

In this example (*Fig.73*) it is evident that the copy to paper takes some of the “aura of decay” present on the original plate (*Fig.72*) with it – the jagged hole to the left of the image being the most obvious material signifier. The softness/distance added in printmaking sees a reduction in detail and the auratic texture that comes with it, but also a greater synthesis of figure and background, the layers are rendered on the same plane because the “aura of decay” we see on the glass slide has now become part of its trace on paper.

Both materialisations of this trace are haunting, but in different ways. Again, rather puzzlingly, the auratic distance is more prominent in the paper print (a copy), because of the increase in background atmosphere afforded by the effect of *two* subjectiles on the trace (the original glass negative and now the sheet of paper). These are just two different ways in which the spectrality of the trace can be revealed through the underlying material's visible qualities – a form of glitch. In the 'projection' of slide 228 we see below (*Fig. 74*), the spectrality of Bingley's trace is underscored by our ability to see straight through the photographic plate – the transparency of the subjectile on which the trace resides literally renders the referent spectral.



Figure 74 - Wood and Park (Projection) 1887-2017

The conviction that the photographic plate, as a truly unique artefact, possesses an aura that cannot be copied, can be extended into metaphysical and unapologetically supernatural territory with ease. Indeed in spirit photography “it was the photographic plate (rather than the photographic print) that constituted the paranormal object” (Harvey, 2007: 42). This conception of aura as inimitable seems to be challenged by these interventions in the way that digitisation has revealed many of these haunting features for the first time, allowed the images to haunt their locations for the first time too, and in the way that analogue prints (which are always copies of something) can seem even *more* atmospheric/affecting than their supposedly ‘auratic’ originals.

However, there is some hope for aura. The argument that none of these copies, analogue or digital, could exist without the unique and lasting power of the original negative, provides some assurance, as does the examination of these objects in terms of their weird and wonderful colouration – part of their visible “aura of decay”. The black and white prints in the Bingley handbooks cannot copy the colour aberrations on the original negatives – and the digital scans we made, while revealing a wealth of hidden colour, do not reflect the effective invisibility of those discolorations on the actual plate – something that you only get to appreciate when handling the material artefacts after seeing the copies.

Here the elusive ‘spectral’ quality of colour has two meanings, as does the term ‘aura’ – something which is echoed in John Harvey’s examination of ‘paranormal’ Kirlian<sup>42</sup> and Aura Photography:

Photographs of auras are conspicuously colourful. Here, colour serves as the medium of spirit: the spectrum is the spectre. (In one sense this is entirely apposite, completing a circle of connections that had begun before the invention of photography: in the seventeenth century, the colour terms ‘spectrum’ [Latin: appearance] and ‘hue’ also referred to an apparition, ghost or phantom (Harvey, 2007: 78)

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<sup>42</sup> “In 1939, Kirlian made a “discovery” ... Being scientifically illiterate, Kirlian decided he was photographing something supernatural... To Kirlian, the fuzzy field surrounding any object in the photographs was a photograph of the “aura”, a pseudoscience concept inherited from Madame Blavatsky, who in turn drew it loosely from Eastern mysticism.” Coker, R. 2014. *Kirlian Photography and the "Aura"*. [Online]. [Accessed 28th February 2018]. Available from: <https://web2.ph.utexas.edu/~coker2/index.files/kirlian.shtml>



Figure 75 - To Fields I (Projection I) 1889-2017

This colourful “aura of decay” might survive digitisation and make it into the digital copy (Fig. 75), but it loses that sense of inaccessibility and latency, when compared to the original photographic plate. And this exploration of auratic colour is also something that you do not get at all in the Quarry Hill images used in this project, a body of work created solely using monochromatic *paper* copies – the original negatives appear to be long gone. This does seem to suggest there is something auratic missing from the high-resolution copy, even if its capacity to haunt is undiminished by reproduction and can even be amplified by it, the copy is haunted by this other loss too.



Figure 76 - Cornhill II (Projection I) 1908-2017

While the Quarry Hill images might not seem haunted by colour or such an obvious “aura of decay”, the haunting loss they do convey is certainly the affect of “time as punctum” (Barthes, 1993: 94) embodied in the represented landscape itself. Any perceived signification of decay here seems most likely to be on the side of the referent – the crumbling condemned buildings which are no longer present, projected into an equally disrupted and damaged contemporary space. These ‘projections’ (example *Fig. 76*), which juxtapose then and now as very distinct yet part of a whole, seem to successfully communicate the fact that the city has changed beyond all recognition, with a palpable sense of the time that has elapsed too. The absence, the destruction and our inability to return, are *felt* here as much as understood.



Figure 77 - Aura of Quarry Hill, 1901-2017

The materiality of the paper prints of Quarry Hill might still have some role to play in this feeling of spectrality, though it is certainly more subtle. The prints often show some signs of decay, marks of use, some of them could easily be auratic ghosts of some damage to the original negatives. But unlike some of Bingley's decaying plates these surface features never feel like the focus – or that the image is under life-threatening erasure. Other signifiers of spectrality come from features of exposure time, such as the motion glitch above (*Fig. 77*). As well as helping to highlight the immateriality of the trace, there is evidence to suggest these types of temporal artefact were integral to Benjamin's original conception of aura in 'early photography'.

In *A Short History of Photography* he presages his later discussion in *The Work of Art* essay with a characterisation of early photography focussing on time. Juxtaposed with later "snapshots", Benjamin thought that long exposure gave photographs "a more penetrating and lasting effect on the spectator... during the long duration of these shots they grew as it were into the picture" (Benjamin, 1972: 17). The atmosphere created by such distortions, is affective then, as well as creating the sort of ghostly ambiguity we talked about earlier with regard to pareidolia. Could the auratic difference between 'early photography' and later forms of the medium actually be explained in terms of exposure time, rather than the visible materiality of the medium we have been examining so far?

'The synthesis of expression brought about by the length of time that a model has to stand still', says Orlik of the early photography, 'is the main reason why these pictures, apart from their simplicity, resemble well-drawn or painted portraits and have a more penetrating and lasting effect on the spectator than more recent photography' (Benjamin, 1972: 17)

Both photographic archives used in this project stand at the end of Benjamin's auratic photography, at the technological cusp of the now ubiquitous "snapshot" – before these developments, longer shutter times were required to get any image at all.

The early photographic processes were all relatively insensitive. Although with each improved process exposure times had been reduced, until the dry plate arrived they were still in seconds or minutes (Coe, 1976: 44)

While the dry plate process, that we know Godfrey Bingley used, significantly brought down exposure times in photography, this was not always the case – and many of the archive photographs used in this project have the visual hallmarks of the longer exposures required in much earlier photography.

In his *EPS T* Mackintosh gave an insight into the early days of the dry plate. He said dry plates were introduced in the late 1860s, but at first were so slow that many photographers preferred to continue using wet plates. (Stubbs, 2001)

Whether or not this is the reason we see these particular temporal artefacts happening later than expected, is impossible to say. Despite the more advanced technology used, many of these shots were certainly longer exposures, significantly blurring movement, and perhaps creating the same auratic atmosphere Benjamin might have recognised – the haunting aura he ascribed only to early photographs.

This view of photographic aura as a feature of exposure-time does not necessarily negate my main hypothesis regarding the auratic visibility of the underlying medium, the 'auratic texture' of the artefact – long exposure actually increases visibility of the subject too, but in a way more closely associated with the temporal illusion taking place in all photography – the freezing of time itself. As the shutter is left open atmospheric noise builds-up, movement blurs, visual artefacts accrue – this all adds to the visibility of the background medium too, serving as a further reminder of the temporal disjuncture taking place, the distance between the material artefact you are co-present with, and the immaterial trace that you can see, but with which you are not.

So in comparing the two archives for differences in materiality and process, we can see that we are presented with different types of material haunting, depending on the medium and depending on the condition of the artefacts – but also with a striking similarity in terms of their overall ability to haunt, the spectrality conveyed in all of them and its survival in the digital copy, as those crucial signifiers of time and decay are captured and preserved as data. The digital image might not have a subjectile of its own, but this ‘immateriality’ actually allows it to better represent the original subjectile that it copies – its very invisibility makes this possible. Some auratic quality is certainly lost in the trace, à la Benjamin, but the digital image is still haunted by subtle auratic signifiers: a texture of decay which still has the power to ‘affect’ us, even as a ghost of itself in the digital realm.



Figure 78 - Looking North, Snow (Projection), 1888-2017  
Original image of Headingley by Godfrey Bingley



## Heaven and hell

A more obvious but no less crucial comparison to make, when examining both archives and the new derived works, concerns their differing representations of landscape. Despite both depicting the city of Leeds during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the types of environment covered in these photographs could not be more dissimilar – and this can be seen as a difference of social class, reflected in the built environment – one area is a slum (Quarry Hill), the other very affluent (Headingley). But does this obvious difference warrant the kind of polarisation we see in how these two neighbourhoods are characterised through their representation? The comparison suggested is literally that between heaven and hell, as we see in Tagg’s account of these photographs and how they were used.

“Leeds was becoming much more rigidly segregated... The East End had always been viewed from the outside and understood through the representations of distanced reporting, but it now became something radically other... What could not be known had to be imagined, and the imagination was inflamed by official inquiries, pamphlets, and sensational reports in the press. From the heights of Headingley, Quarry Hill seemed a nether world lost in satanic fumes, the breeding place of infernal beings.” (Tagg, 1988: 131)



Figure 79 - Unhealthy Areas, Quarry Hill (Projection I), 1905-2017

For Tagg, this geographic demonization and the images produced to evidence it were politically motivated, skewing the representation we have of this lost landscape in the archive.

What characterised the East End to outside middle-class commentators was its utter otherness, its intransigence and its unruliness (Tagg, 1988: 132)

This vilification was motivated at the time by issues of both class and race – Irish and Jewish immigrants settled in this area throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its population of approximately 20,000 were “almost entirely destitute” according to reports at the time (Tagg, 1988: 132). While Quarry Hill is no longer a residential area, neighbouring Burmantofts arguably still fulfils this same social role, housing many of the city’s asylum seekers in cheap accommodation. This particular realisation made me increasingly mindful of whether my own photographs, and use of these archive images, might unwittingly continue a damaging narrative about this area and its inhabitants – a narrative that started nearly 150 years ago, and continues to this day. Looking across the footbridge from Quarry Hill towards Burmantofts (*Fig. 80*) there lies a possible answer to the question which closes Tagg’s seminal essay: “We might look at the photographs and ask again, where have the working-class slum dwellers gone?” (Tagg, 1988: 152)



Figure 80 - Searching for Allison's Buildings (*Trace III*), 2017 and Burmantofts, 2014 by Michael C Coldwell

This type of slum clearance is rarely what it purports to be: the removal of old housing stock in the interests of those displaced residents. As Frederick Engels warned in 1872:

The breeding places of disease, the infamous holes and cellars in which the capitalist mode of production confines our workers night after night, are not abolished; they are merely *shifted elsewhere!* (Engels, 1935)



Figure 81 - Cornhill I (Projection I), 1908-2017

The new images are certainly haunted by this history of demonization. How could they fail to be, with these very representations used in the rephotographic process? However, in comparing the archives through this work, we can see this simple binary – heaven versus hell – challenged as an obvious over-simplification, if not a politically-motivated falsehood. While it is harder to refute the damning narrative regarding precise conditions in historic Quarry Hill (rephotography is not time travel, after all), the inverse account of Headingley as some perfect rural refuge is much easier to dispute. While Godfrey Bingley seems to shy away from representing it in his photographs, there was a rapid urbanisation of Headingley happening, that we can clearly see in Ordnance Survey maps made at the time. There are some clues in his photographs that the “heights of Headingley” were not as idyllic as they sounded. There was actually a fair amount of heavy industry there at the time – made visible here, somewhat ironically, by Bingley’s proclivity for photographing quarries. The quarry in question is

not on Quarry Hill, but Rowley's Quarry in the Meanwood Valley area of Headingley – substantial excavation works existed here next to a large mill for the extraction and processing of ganister. In a marked inversion of the traditional view of progress regarding urbanisation and industrialisation, these large works have long since disappeared and become a neglected but peaceful area of urban woodland (*Figs. 82 and 83*). So in a way, this area is now more 'rural' than it was in Bingley's day.

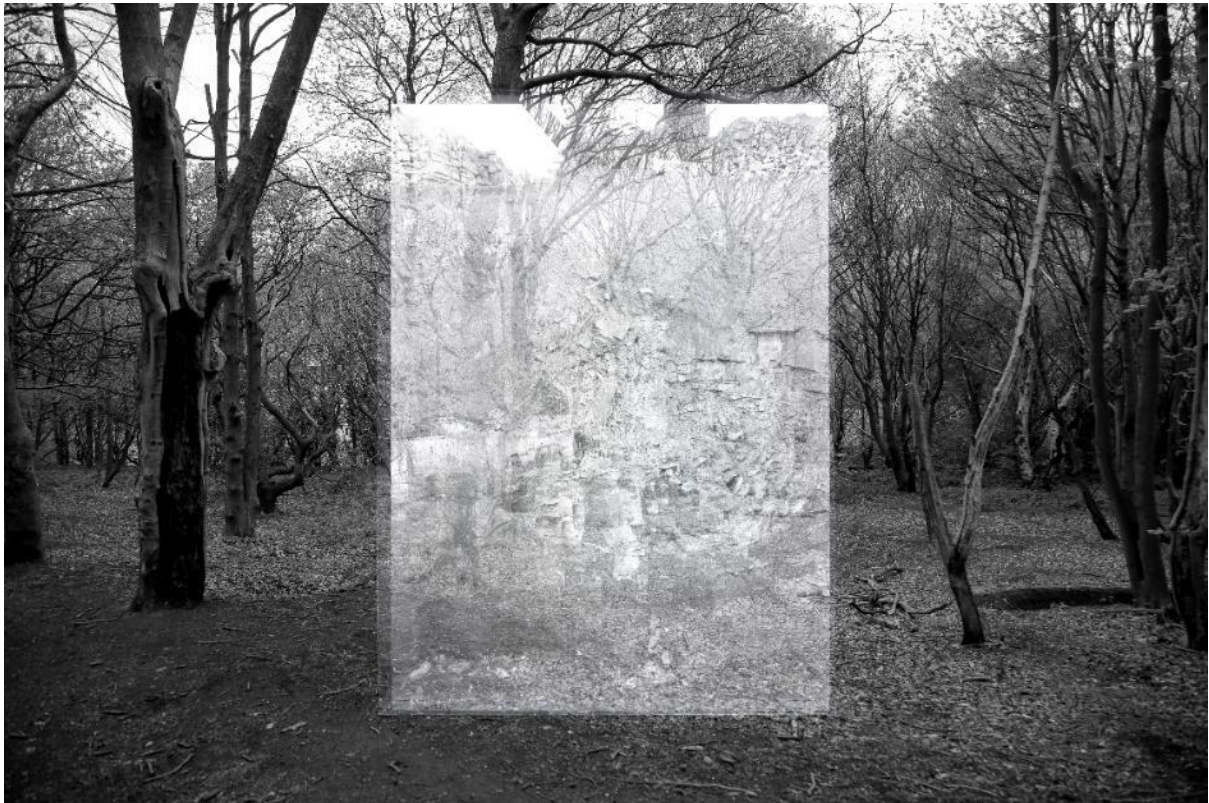


Figure 82 - Quarry Valley I (Projection I), 1905-2017



Figure 83 - Quarry Valley III (Projection II), 1905-2017



Figure 84 - Boynton Street no longer exists II (Projection II), 1906-2017

A similar thing has happened in Quarry Hill. In *Fig. 84* we can see a space that was once a densely populated urban street reduced to rubble, and we can see the fact that it too now exists as a small pocket of urban woodland. Areas that were once seen as being as far apart as heaven and hell, are seen here as party to the same forces, not just of urbanisation, but also its inverse, the decay of the built environment, and its potential to return to a natural state. Rephotography's ability to represent the same location at two different times, problematizes these simplistic characterisations of the landscape as being one thing: either urban or rural, rich or poor, heaven or hell.

So how does the materiality of these photographic artefacts actually effect their representation of these lost landscapes and the related issues we have discussed? The decay of the referent is mirrored by the decay of the photograph itself, to greater or lesser degrees, in both archives used in this work. In Bingley's damaged plates this decay is more evident in the subjectile, in the Quarry Hill photographs the deterioration is more apparent in the crumbling scenes depicted – but in both there is an interplay between artefact and trace which creates the overall “aura of decay”, which we then read and experience as loss – that we feel as Barthes' “time as punctum”.

The atmospheric sense of time and absence that this creates around the image, regardless of whether we encounter the actual artefact, or its digital trace on screen, encourages a certain mood of reflection and contemplation that these archive images would not have engendered at the time they were originally made. Assumptions are questioned as we gaze across time: the assumption of permanence; the assumption of progress. There is something universalising about this. While the original intention may have been to lionise or demonise the landscape for whatever political purpose, this context gets lost as time passes, and a more general sense of change, upheaval, transience and mortality is communicated, that only accrues as the images themselves gradually become victims of an inevitable disintegration.

Whether or not the resulting digital images possess aura, there is still an “auratic distance” to them which is distinctly temporal, and this changes how we read the landscapes we see in a way that runs counter to landscape photography in the usual mode.

Landscape photography tends to aspire to detail and accuracy; large-format cameras or very high pixel counts capture the landscape in all its glory - “this is not meant to imply that landscape photographs should necessarily be free of film grain (or noise, which is the digital equivalent); however, it is reasonable to generalize that landscape photographers tend to prefer continuous tone and fine detail over grainy images.” (Alexander, 2015: 30)

In other words, as with most photography, the medium seeks to efface itself and become invisible in the name of greater objectivity – the progression of these technologies and practices has always sought a perfect illusion: asserting the *presence* of the referent, and in doing so, “its realist mode hides its ghostly and phantomatic aspects” (Wolfreys, 2015: 641-642). In these archive images, and in my treatments of them, the opposite is true. They are pictures primarily about absence – we *feel* that what we see is long gone, that the trace is just a spectre, as we see the photo object for what it is. The strong frame is a clear reminder of the temporal disjuncture taking place – almost to the point of becoming monumental<sup>43</sup>. The materiality of the analogue medium is foregrounded as it decays and slowly vanishes, revealing this ghost, and a greater truth about photography and the landscape we usually overlook, or even seek to avoid: the fact that nothing is permanent, and these things too, will die.

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<sup>43</sup> The idea of a photograph being a monument is something of a contradiction, as Barthes observes: “by making the (mortal) Photograph” the “natural witness of ‘what has been’, modern society has renounced the Monument”, which was always before the immortal, eternal repository for memory. Barthes, R. 1993. *Camera lucida: reflections on photography*. London: Vintage. P. 93



Figure 85 - Lost Quarry I (Projection II), 1905-2017

### 4.3 Projecting time

Following the ghosts is about making a contact... putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look (Gordon, 2008: 22)

How and where these archival ghosts are re-presented will certainly affect what they communicate, and what becomes the focus for the viewer will be different depending on the medium of delivery. As images in a book, the details in the photographs may be studied more closely. The reading of each montage will be informed by the surrounding textual elements, and the sequence of images will form a narrative of sorts, inevitably affecting the meaning. As a picture on paper we might expect a greater awareness of the photograph as physical object too, its own material qualities, its 'auratic texture', but perhaps not – the image that ends up on the glossy printed page may seem too removed from the original crumbling auratic artefact – in which case its aura will have withered, à la Benjamin. But what about when these images are physically projected as light into an empty space – akin to projections of Bingley's original magic lantern slides? Surely it is here that we will really begin to see both the materiality of the glass subjectile, and the immateriality of the spectral trace?



Alongside a comprehensive photo book documenting this project called *A Window on Time*, my primary outcome for this practical research is a multi-screen video installation entitled *The Remote Viewer*. In this work the final montages are unmoored and the elements literally projected over one another in a slow-moving sequence, mirroring the failed act of searching that lay behind my deconstructed rephotography, and evoking the palpable sense of loss (and being lost) one experiences when exploring these landscapes of disappearance. The archive photographs are unambiguously presented as ghosts, floating slowly in space like lost souls.

The two archives, with their two contrasting views of the city, are juxtaposed on opposing screens in *The Remote Viewer*, while the simple inset montages break down through protracted rostrum zooming and tracking across the superimposed photographs, showing the instability of these constructed views, and the palimpsestic layering of past, present and future which necessarily takes place. We also see the imaginary third spaces that emerge between them, once the frame disappears, and the disorientation and ambiguity that results when we can no longer separate the texts/times. While this research has been primarily about the still photographic image, in *The Remote Viewer*, those research outputs are transformed into new media art by means of this deconstructive motion – yet this is media art which is focussed upon the exploration of *still* photography as a changing medium, continually haunted by past versions of itself.

In comparing the same images presented in *A Window in Time* with *The Remote Viewer*, we can see how medium and context still affect our reading and emotional responses to the images, even as they are completely transmutable, immaterial traces in a fully post-medium environment. The glowing translucent traces of *The Remote Viewer* seem far more spectral than the static versions of the same montages in the book. Photography's innate transparency and latency is brought to the fore, via a format which is as old as photography itself, echoing the ghostly apparitions of the magic lantern. And paradoxically, in shifting its opacity, its materiality is also more visible, its haunting auratic texture is foregrounded alongside this intrinsic spectrality.

The installation work is also an opportunity to explore further the ontological frontiers of the photographic image within the digital, to find where it begins to break down and become something else, and also to investigate the photograph within a completely multimedial environment (where we increasingly encounter it anyway), to see how the surrounding media inform and change the meaning of the images presented, and how one form can potentially haunt another.

The use of sound was initially a source of consternation for me, while developing this primary outcome, as I was well aware of audio's capacity to completely overwhelm an image, rather than merely haunt it – potentially distracting the viewer from the subtle visual phenomena that I wanted to foreground. I received conflicting advice on this issue too, with some thinking that any music or sound design in the installation would dominate the work, while others suggested that such a piece without any sound element would seem incomplete, and a missed opportunity to explore the interaction between audio and photograph. Considering the strong links between my research and music, via Mark Fisher and cultural hauntology, eventually I decided that audio should play a part in the final presentation, but that it needed to be equally subtle, and that silence should also feature too. The stillness of the photograph has always felt like a haunting 'visual silence' to me, the total lack of movement and sound being a fundamental part of the photograph's spectral quality, its uncanny stasis and its "flat death", to invoke Barthes again (1993: 92) – indeed, this was the key reason why he could never see *moving* images as spectral, while Derrida could.

So, other than silence, what else should I include in this soundtrack? The audio equivalent of the landscape photograph is surely the field recording – a technological encounter with the environment which, like the photograph, at least purports to document what it finds objectively, even if it rarely does. I retraced my footsteps and attempted to take the same rephotographs again – *re-rephotographs* if you like – but this time I took an audio recorder and also documented the process sonically. As I walked around with my audio recorder and camera, one passer-by joked that I looked like a ghost hunter – how little did they know! But these recordings mainly consisted of the background sounds of my trips. My footsteps feature heavily as I walked miles looking for the shots, we hear birdsong and cars, planes flying overhead, the new construction work on Quarry Hill, the sounds of new building effacing and reworking the land once again. A dominant and recurring sound was that of my own camera shutter – which I was delighted about as this became another way I could haunt the images with the hidden processes and practices of their making. With this in mind, I also recorded the sound of the scanner that was originally used to digitise Godfrey Bingley's slides. This was a very incongruous sound, despite being integral to these images appearing here at all, as it sounded very robotic and jarring when layered with the other more environmental sounds taken. But this was a good thing – these inharmonious and disrupting noises of the technology working hard to create the illusion of presence we take for granted, are exactly the type of

glitch-phenomena Mark Fisher was referring to in *The Metaphysics of Crackle* (2013), when he talked about such distortions becoming haunting signifiers for the underlying temporal disjuncture of recording itself (Fisher, 2013: 47). Here we can hear the unearthly sound of the time machine itself in operation.

the foregrounding of recording noises can sometimes be seen as a hauntological strategy, in that it signals decay and deterioration and can lend sounds a rather uncanny air; likewise, the use of sampling can be used to evoke “dead” presences and can be transformed into more eerie sonic markers when treated with effects such as *reverberation*. (Sexton, 2012)

I took my clean digital field recordings and recorded them through reverb effects to old analogue tape, in order to further this sense of spatiotemporal dislocation. Reverb is a fascinating effect when talking about both changing space and mediated time. The common-sense view is that reverb is just a feature of space – a given space responds to sound in a certain way, and we get a sonic sense of that space from the reverb signature that we hear. But as Professor Kevin Donnelly points out, in film and television, reverb does not have to “signify diegetic space”: we often hear reverb and echo used “as a manifestation of a state of mind” (Donnelly, 2013: 141-142). The use of extreme reverb in the horror genre to suggest “shadowy presences” (Doyle, 2004: 39), and reverb and delay used to signify memory and the passage of time, have both become something of a cliché (Palmer, 2012) in film. But why should reverb, an effect of space on sound, become a *temporal* signifier?

The semiotics of reverb are under-explored. David Machin describes the way that sonic vastness suggests a sense of “the extraordinary or sacredness” (Machin, 2011), the sublime in effect, and in the *The Routledge Companion to Screen Music and Sound* we read that reverb is used as a “para-spatial” device, metaphorically connoting “mystical, unstable or uncanny spaces” (Mera et al., 2017) – and indeed haunted spaces.

...grainy sepia and misty trails of reverb, falling into a dyschronic contemporaneity with the crackly samples... drenched in so much reverb that they have dissolved into a suggestive audio-fog, the songs all the more evocative now that they have been reduced to hints of themselves (Fisher, 2006a)

Mark Fisher certainly saw the importance of reverb to hauntological music, and it was a temporal rather than spatial distance that was being evoked by the effect. And this should not be surprising, as reverberation is temporally affecting the sound – many delayed copies of the same source sound can reach the ear at *different*

*times*, and this is the underlying physical reason for this sonic phenomenon. As in the words *re*-member or *re*-photography, a key temporal element is built into the word from the prefix “re” – *re*-verb means to strike *again*, or in physics, “the persistence of a sound after its source has stopped” (dictionary.com). It is literally a ghost sound. Or as Tim Edensor stated when he was talking about industrial ruins, “ghosts are *echoes*” (Edensor, 2001: 48)

How is this related to rephotography? Here we are really investigating sound’s ability to bring to our attention the pre-existing haunted qualities of those photographs – to haunt them again, sonically and even reanimate them in the imaginary. While the use of a static and a time-based medium together can seem unsettling or confusing, it is this clear temporal disjuncture between what we’re seeing and what we’re hearing, that reveals the haunted quality of *both* recording media involved, emphasising the disembodied voice of the tape recording, and the dead stillness of the photographic image, even as that stillness is set into uncanny motion. The fact that sound and image seem obviously related to one another, yet cannot be temporally reconciled (much like the montages themselves), creates another auratic sense of distance. And it is the temporal nature of this distance that haunts. The use of reverb, even as a digital effect, is somehow aurifying, emphasising this distance further – placing this space outside of our grasp, outside of lived time – something that we feel as much as we try and understand. So this is aura as affective atmosphere, the sound re-aurifying the digital image in this new context, granting a sense of distance and absence to a medium which is usually preoccupied with trying to provide a strong illusion of presence, in all its ever-advancing technological reproductions.

Through this use of sound, the photographs are haunted by a hidden part of themselves – by the footsteps of the hidden cameraman retracing Bingley’s equally hidden footsteps – by the sounds of the recording technologies that made their uncanny appearance possible (the camera shutter, the digital scanner, the hum of a hard drive) – by the sounds of the changing urban landscape they attempt and fail to represent in motion: this utter transformation of space over time, where rural becomes urban, urban becomes rural again, heaven and hell overlap and the reality is a dense palimpsest of temporary states and the fragmentary traces that they leave behind. As with Fisher’s ruminations on the tenses of hauntology, a sense of haunting can come as much from a projected future (or our sense of a lack of one) as it comes from traces of the past. The sound of new construction work on Quarry Hill haunts a rephotography that is already out of date.

There is no present which is not haunted by a past *and a future* (Deleuze, 1989: 36)



Figure 69 – Planning The Remote Viewer installation, 2018 – Godfrey Bingley's heaven (left) and Quarry Hill's hell (right)

The rephotography that makes up this work is certainly transformed by this new context alongside other media, which seem to bring out yet further, the spectral qualities latent within the photography. Slow movement and the accompanying soundscape add to a sense of haunting entrancement impossible to summon with the printed image alone. This is a limitation in the ontology of photography we have seen historically, which focuses chiefly on the photographic print in splendid isolation, even though slide projection and phantasmagoria are also 19<sup>th</sup> century inventions, just as 'photographic' as any other delivery mechanism we might ontologise.

But this entrancing affect is perhaps more a recurring feature of video and multimedial art than it is an ontological property of the photographic image. Maria Walsh investigates this in her essay on “the entranced spectator” of projected-image art.

Key to the trance state is a sense of depersonalisation, whereby the subject is possessed by a strangeness that neither comes from within nor from without (Walsh, 2011: 120)

In this piece Walsh examines such entrancing affect as being “at the borders of psychoanalysis”, but qualifies this with an admission that one cannot predict what might entrance certain viewers of screen-based art, without prior knowledge of an individual's unconscious affective ties.

So while the entrancing qualities of *The Remote Viewer* may well add to the haunting affect we experience viewing the rephotography, we cannot firmly pin one to the other.

Any increased spectrality we can see in these projections should be expected – we are literally watching ghosts of ghosts. Just as all photographs present an absent referent, the *re*-presentation of digital scans in *The Remote Viewer* presents us with absent *photographs*, all the more obviously absent as objects, when we can see their auratic texture *re*-presented as light hitting a screen. This is just what photography has always done, here made visible – as with projecting light through a transparent negative onto photo-sensitive paper – mechanical reproduction ad infinitum – photography has always been about copies of ghosts, ghosts of copies – light becomes matter, matter becomes light – a photo-mechanical game of smoke and mirrors.

Just as the damaged analogue photograph reveals this spectrality through imperfections in the subjectile, so can the digital – but we must get much closer to the image to see it.

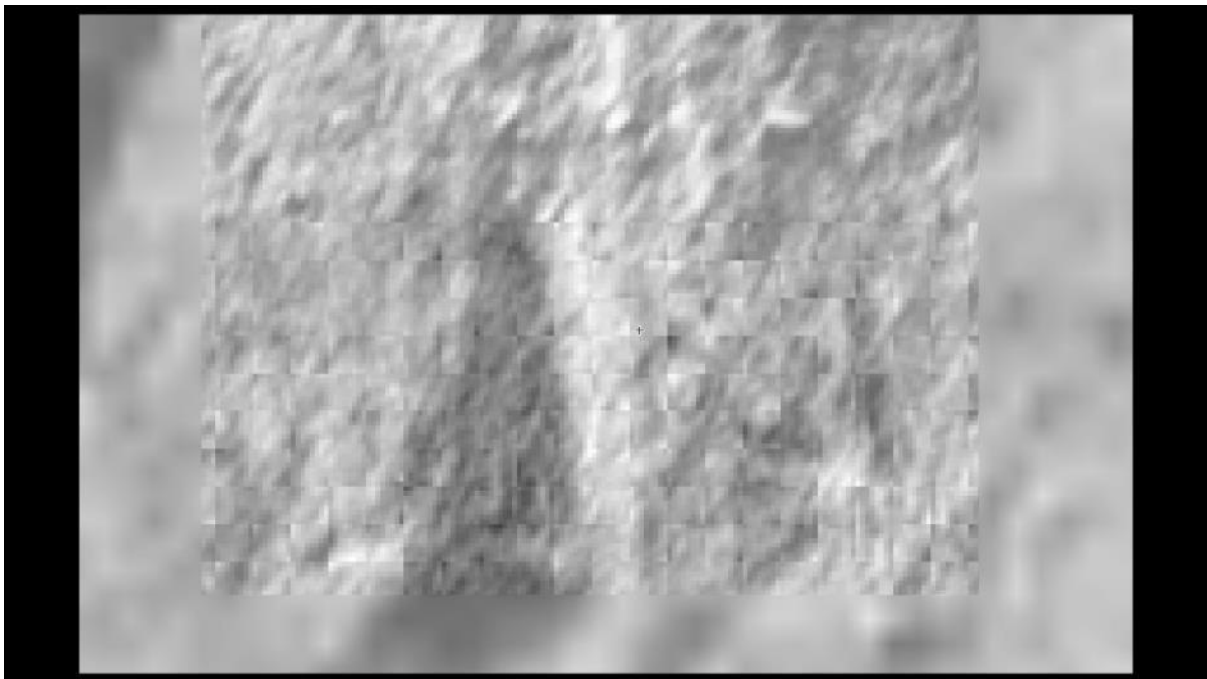


Figure 87 - Still from *The Remote Viewer*, 2018

I attempt to show this in *The Remote Viewer* in a brief interlude on each screen, in which the digital illusion of presence breaks down, the image breaks up into blocky artefacts, and we see the raw pixels which really underlie the apparition (*Fig. 87*). This is weird and jarring, rather than eerie and haunting in the way we observed when analogue photographs revealed their material substrates. It feels like an intrusion rather than a gradual disappearance or profound sense of absence. This echoes Mark Fisher's redefinitions of the words weird and

erie<sup>44</sup>: where the digital seems like a weird intrusion on our reality, the analogue seems an eerie absence of reality, when its subjectile is revealed and the trace it carries fades. If there *is* a digital subjectile to work with here (contradicting Derrida’s claim), it is surprisingly difficult to manipulate. I attempted to modify the underlying code of the rephotographic images using a HEX editor for this piece (*Fig. 88*). The image quickly breaks and becomes unusable. If we regard the underlying code as the digital image’s subjectile, it is both immaterial and incredibly fragile. Paradoxically its invisibility makes it resist too much<sup>45</sup> for us to work with it intuitively – adjust the code by more than a few percent and the image vanishes or simply will not load at all.



Figure 88 - Still from *The Remote Viewer*, 2018

For some “the error is the aura”<sup>46</sup> – but not so much here. If the glitch reveals a distance it is a disconnecting and alienating one, a removal of something organic and relatable that was still present in decaying analogue media, to greater or lesser degrees, a physical and temporal connectivity which has died with the arrival of digital technology. Hauntology is a form of cultural mourning for this intangible, and largely unacknowledged, death.

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<sup>44</sup> Fisher, M. 2016. *The Weird and the Eerie*. Duncan Baird Publishers.

<sup>45</sup> “The subjectile resists. It has to resist. Sometimes it resists too much, sometimes not enough.” Derrida, J. and Caws, M.A. 1994. *Maddening the Subjectile*. *Yale French Studies*. (84), pp.154-171.

<sup>46</sup> Krapp, P. 2011. *Noise Channels: Glitch and Error in Digital Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p.68

Despite being a screen-based presentation of digital scans, there is still aura in experiencing *The Remote Viewer* in situ – it is always a unique moment in time and space due to the randomisation of the three elements of the installation. Each screen and the soundtrack are always at a different point in relation to one another, hence a unique combination is experienced each and every time it is viewed, even as those elements repeat – its auratic uniqueness is also increased by it being a one-off, site-specific event. The idea that aura in a post-digital world is less about any qualities of a given object and more to do with the uniqueness of the moment in which that object is experienced, is not a new one.

Douglas Davis, in a digital-era response six decades [after Benjamin], asserted: “Here is where the aura resides – not in the thing itself but in the originality of the moment when we see, hear, read, repeat, revise.” Now the icon is transmogrified and, in a sense, resurrected. (Ritchin, 2009: 58)

The fascinating thing about cultural hauntology is that it seems to largely reject this postmodern, disembodied view of aura, but from deep within that milieu. Within this very digital backdrop, the unique material object and its aura of decay are fetishized again in their absence. The digital traces of auratic objects that both exist and do not exist, are then shared losslessly online. What is the digital archive then, if not spectrality ad absurdum?



## 5. Even Ghosts Must Die

### Conclusion

What wider conclusions can we draw from this research into materiality, medium and hauntedness? What do hauntology and the deconstructed rephotograph have to offer contemporary ontological debates in media theory?

In the beginning there is ruin. Ruin is that which happens to the image from the moment of the first gaze. (Derrida and du Louvre, 1993)

Where Derrida's words are compelling is in coming to an often near-impossible realization that home is a process of ruin from the outset, and permanence is only and always an ideal state of that architectural form. It is always dissolving before our eyes, transforming, altering into something else, something new (Hornstein, 2013: 83)

#### 5.1 Aura, noise and 'the Real'

Rephotography is a strange sort of afterlife. Life after death is usually conceived of as being infinite – but any second-life for the photographic referent must have its own expiry date. For Derrida, all media is a sort of techno-afterlife, a vast collection of spectral traces of the past reanimated by the technologies and materials of reproduction. But despite this outwardly spiritual metaphor, he was also very aware that the trace was “always the finite trace of a finite being” (Derrida, 2005: 159). These afterimages too will fade, disappear, change state, transform in meaning, or become unreadable as time passes, as they are always dependent on some material support, however invisible it may seem. So while Derrida suggested that “haunting can be amplified and accelerated by material supports and modern means of reproduction which store and replicate time” (Roy, 2015: 78), there is also the suggestion that this too will end, that these same supports will at some point decay, producing ghosts of their own. The aura of the decaying archive images used in this research – and that of their digital ‘ghosts’ in reproduction – is concerned with the visual effects and affects of the analogue subjectile's own deterioration and eventual death. It is also concerned with the strange lack of such a phenomenon in its digital equivalent – the digital image that does not visibly decay.

While the “aura of decay” of these artefacts *can* be captured digitally and preserved like some well-maintained ruin on screen – any decay then frozen at the moment of apprehension – the original digital photographs taken for this project have no tangible subjectile of their own, no auratic surface that will gradually fade with time as human memory fades. And yet these digital objects are not immune to time’s passage, or the reality of their eventual destruction – they are visibly disconnected from the underlying temporal and material conditions of their existence.

It is difficult to believe that a digital file, which is a fluid and elusive object, enters history and temporality. No layers of dust or patina are added to the digital object, no cracks alter its invisible surface. (Roy, 2015: 165)

This is something which is noted in music studies (as above) more often than in media research, where medium and materiality are often seen as anachronistic concerns, but as Tom McCourt rightly claims of digital files in *Collecting music in the digital realm* (2005): “No history is encoded on their surfaces, since *they have no surfaces*” (Mccourt, 2005: 250). This is a real material change in the technologies of media that we are only just beginning to address theoretically. So we find a genuine loss/withering in this technological shift, and a crucial difference between images made using analogue and digital cameras – but at the same time the digital realm is haunted by countless “scanned ghosts” (Gunning, 2007) of these anachronistic analogue surfaces, their decay apparently frozen in some sort of suspended animation.

However, as with Benjamin and the aura, for Derrida something was *always* destroyed by the trace, regardless of technical means, the usual indexical metaphors of tracks and footprints leaving out this crucial second death. Derrida saw the trace as “something which erases itself totally, radically, while presenting itself” (Derrida, 1987a: 177) – as that which only *barely* remains, the original conditions of its creation impossible to recreate, like the cinders of something immolated.

I have the impression now that the best paradigm of the trace is not, as certain people have believed... the hunter’s tracks, the furrow, the line in the sand, the wake in the sea, the love of the footstep for the footprint, but *ash* (that which remains without remaining from the holocaust, from the burned offering, the incense of the incendiary) (Derrida, 1991: 43)

And there is certainly something empty and ashen about the Quarry Hill rephotography (*Fig. 89*) which seems to echo this idea, perhaps because of the monochromatic paperiness of the source artefacts, the genuine loss and destruction that happens when the two traces are montaged in this way, the erasure of the palimpsest invoking the prior total loss it seeks and fails to represent.



Figure 89 - Unhealthy Areas, Quarry Hill (Projection II), 1905-2017

‘Trace as ash’ is also an interesting metaphor in that it seems to capture the strange materiality of the immaterial, something which we encounter in these disintegrating photographic artefacts. What this does not deconstruct, which is surprising for Derrida, as he certainly does this elsewhere, is that this strange materiality is a feature of the support, the paper subjectile, rather than the trace it carries, which is transmutable. Its very transmutability is evidence of its immateriality – it shape-shifts from material surface to material surface, and is often damaged in the process, but this does not mean it is itself a material form – quite the opposite. As Derrida says:

The trace is not a substance, a present existing thing, but a *process* that is changing all the time.  
(Derrida, 2005: 159)

The “aura of decay” is the atmospheric background noise of the subjectile invading the image, or more correctly, of a material surface gradually exorcising itself of a ghost – an immaterial trace that never really belonged to it. The damage and lurch towards death of the trace is then made materially visible. This noise creates a void, a glitch, which creates an ambiguity that we then read with our imaginations as much as our eyes, as the referent fades before them.

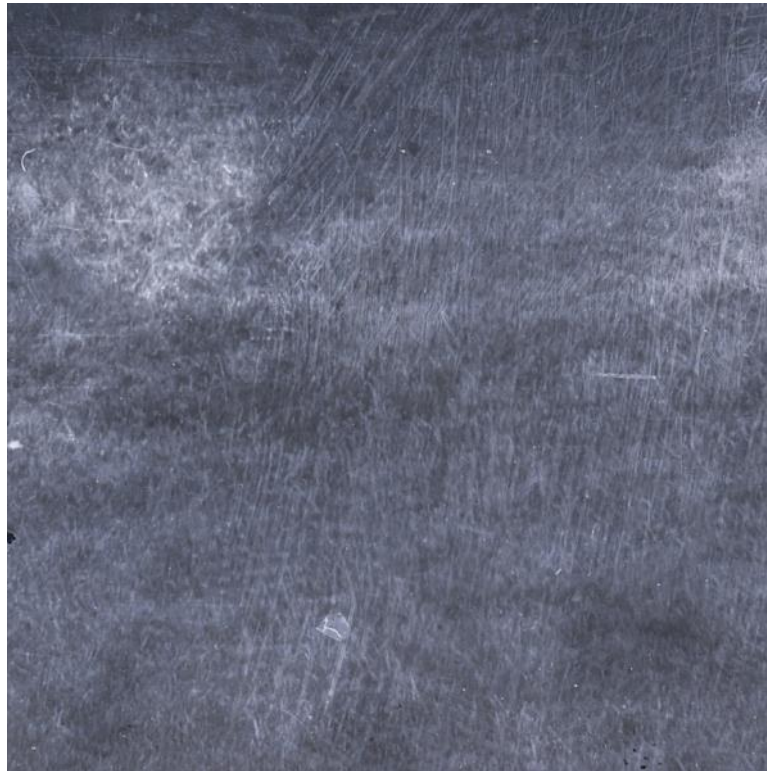


Figure 90 - Unknowable Aura, 1889-2017

This background noise is entropic. It is the absence of information, the destructive force of nature that blights all communication. That is not to say all noise is meaningless, formless and communicates nothing, but that it constitutes “patterns of organisation alien to the norms of a specific system” (Goddard et al., 2012) – an interruption from outside the intended message, outside the referent. In glitch art “the error is the aura” (Krapp, 2011: 68) – to make machines fail and reveal their workings is to expose a hidden truth – the opposite of communication technology’s default mode, which always works hard to convince us that the medium doesn’t exist at all. Background processes buckle down to disappear, to airbrush out and smooth over the artefacts, effacing the existence of medium entirely. These processes are required for us to suspend our disbelief in a digital world we routinely treat as reality itself. Glitch art exists to disturb this misplaced faith.

This reminder of the imperfect, noisy, lossy nature of the machine counters our contemporary digital culture's positivistic faith in technology as providing order (Krapp, 2011: 74)

when [pictures] prove friable and fall apart, what we glimpse is precisely that underlying technology: we actually see the ulterior realm of the digital (Self, 2016)

As Will Self observes in *Our digital lives and the chaos beneath* (2016), when the digital image falls apart it fails catastrophically and we briefly see its algorithmic make up laid bare – jarring blocks obliterate any message and it becomes completely nonsensical to our eyes. There is no grey area between presence and absence here, as we saw in the glitch deaths employed in *The Remote Viewer*.

Analogue errors are very different. Noise and grain have that ontological connection to the real world and to the forces harnessed by the original physical technology. With such ethereal noise the image breaks down gradually rather than abruptly, it fades and we see it as *atmosphere* – our eyes can see through it, *with it* even. Despite a bad signal you can still watch analogue television, and even the grainiest photograph is still an index, even if it is no longer a functioning icon. Analogue noise becomes part of how we interpret the image.

But how this noise is then interpreted by the viewer is fairly idiosyncratic. As a general rule, however, as the noise increases, the subject is rendered progressively spectral (or more accurately, we begin to notice its immateriality), before it eventually disappears completely. This vagueness and randomness, this continuum between the presence and absence of information, between transparency and opaqueness, between medium and message, not only leaves room for extended polysemy, but also for illusion and even hallucination in the form of pareidolia: the ghost is conjured from almost-absence:

The brain baulks at non-meaning; meaninglessness, like formlessness, becomes the dominant scandal against reason, and reason, seeking to abolish it, *generates fantasies* (Warner, 2006: 17)

All that is needed is that they constitute faint forms, which disintegrate when under observation (Sartre, 1972: 57)

Another view of noise and aura might not see the noise involved as symbolising anything in particular (such as absence or death), or as activating the imaginary (such as in hallucinatory ghost sightings), but instead sees it as occupying the Lacanian order of 'the Real' – that which exists outside of our systems of understanding.

the real 'forms the waste or residue that neither the mirror of the imaginary nor the grid of the symbolic can catch: the physiological accidents and stochastic disorder of bodies' (Kittler). These accidents are the very components that the logical ordering of the digital tries to avoid (Castanheira, 2012: 91)

For José Castanheira, writing in *Reverberations: The Philosophy, Aesthetics and Politics of Noise* (2012), analogue noise embodies a Lacanian Real<sup>47</sup> that the order of digital media cannot touch – perhaps the aura of the obsolete medium lies somewhere in this ghostly background noise.



Figure 91 - Detail taken from: Unhealthy Areas, Quarry Hill (Projection I), 1905-2017

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<sup>47</sup> "The Real: very unlike our conventional conception of objective/collective experience, in Lacanian theory the real becomes that which resists representation, what is pre-mirror, pre-imaginary, pre-symbolic – what cannot be symbolized – what loses its "reality" once it is symbolized (made conscious) through language. It is "the aspect where words fail" (Vogler, 2), what Miller describes as, "the ineliminable residue of all articulation, the foreclosed element, which may be approached, but never grasped: the umbilical cord of the symbolic" (280). This is perhaps the source of the most contention within theories of media in that media itself can only point at the real but never embody it, never be it. For Peirce, this can be described as the "index" – the "real" traces left behind" Loos, A. 2002. *symbolic, real, imaginary*. [Online]. Available from: <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/symbolicrealimaginary.htm>

Randomness and unexpectedness jolt us out of the other orders and into the Real. They are part of an aura of the texture of reality that the digital cannot possess as it is a closed deterministic system. So we try and re-introduce, sample or simulate these 'organic' features in digital art, in computer music, and even in popular digital media (Instagram, Hipstamatic filters, for example), as this 'Real' aura appears absent from all our digital representations, and it is something we do seem to miss – even mourn – within the digital.

The solution to this is to digitally simulate the effects of analogue distortion... Effects that simulate the wear of old films, the hisses and clicks from vinyl records, the yellowing of old photos, the narrow frequency band of the first recordings or of telephone lines, have become part of a gallery of antique references in state-of-the-art equipment. They are analogue digital presets, a kind of high-tech nostalgia... In this way, noise becomes no longer the questioner of an old order, but is instead inserted into media as a component of a new order (Castanheira, 2012: 91-92)

So this auratic noise, once it is on the side of the digital, cannot really be of 'the Real', even if it points towards something outside of itself. These strange and outmoded artefacts of material representation have become assimilated within digital practices – they reference a past that we have now moved beyond but are still saturated by. If, as Derrida asserted, the digital object has no subjectile of its own, what do these ghosts of a prior subjectile have to say about that fact – about its apparent immateriality and atemporality? Hauntology's foregrounding of background noise may lend a new aura to obsolete technologies from within digital culture, but what does that really mean for a culture that exists primarily online, outside of this visibility of time, and outside of a realm of such 'historical surfaces' (McCourt, 2005: 250) – a virtual realm where things do not visibly decay? What does it mean to fetishize the material from within the immaterial, the historical from within the ahistorical, and what really happens when the digital trace finally dies? Will we mourn it in quite the same way if it just vanishes without a trace?

The warmth and human associations that various analogue media have accrued may also relate to their ghostly nature: if digital media are marked by absence of humanity, for example, then they are perhaps capable not so much of producing ghosts as they are of producing a form of "soulless" interference. (Sexton, 2012: 18)

the switch from the fragility of analogue to the infinite replicability of digital. What we have lost, it can often seem, is the very possibility of loss (Fisher, 2014: 144)



Figure 92 - CC-AM (cover art), 2017, by Michael C Coldwell

My photograph was treated using filters from Hipstamatic and Instagram to create a faux-vintage effect.

In my work *CC-AM* I also explore the haunted qualities of obsolete media (*Fig. 92*) – the spectral noise of shortwave radio, and VHS and polaroid in the visual artwork. Here I use digital faux-vintage filters to simulate these media aesthetics as part of an ongoing examination of the ways in which the digital is haunted by the analogue, not only via countless scans and copies, but also as pure simulacra. In this work the analogue noise is completely virtual. Such filters have become ubiquitous on digital platforms – a largely misunderstood popular hauntology - and it seems pertinent to ask why people are drawn to these features. Why do we yearn for the analogue, en masse? Is it really about nostalgia? If we realise we have lost something, culturally, we are obviously happy to make do with its simulation, affect supplanting aura yet again. A future study might examine the affect of such attempts to simulate aura. Can we really tell the difference? Is this a ‘knowing’ postmodern reference, merely style over content, or can we really be *affected* by these syntheses? Can an Instagram filter really haunt us?



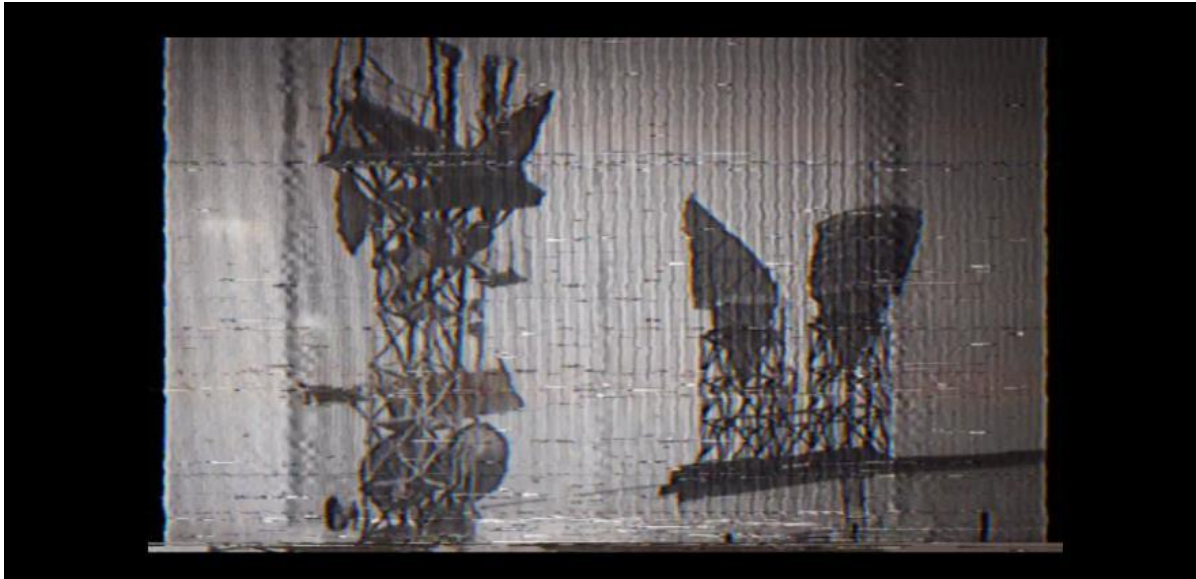


Figure 93 - CC-AM video, 2017, by Michael C Coldwell – the VHS distortion was digitally modelled.

## 5.2 Post-digital aura

Since the telegraph, electrical media has raised the fantasy of immateriality. Its promise is metaphysical (Casemajor, 2015)

The digital seems to promise nothing less than an escape from materiality itself. (Fisher, 2014)

There is a growing school of thought that the “trope of immateriality” we find in the discussion of digital media “obscures the labour, materials and natural resources of digital culture” and hides the very real “material substrate” without which the digital world could not exist (Casemajor, 2015). This is a staunchly materialist view of these technologies and social practices which we see reflected in the Berlin school of media<sup>48</sup>, media archaeology, in cybernetic theory and others, which must see any immateriality of the digital trace as a metaphysical illusion.

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<sup>48</sup> “Talk of a Berlin school is something that has similarly been used to refer to the hardware materialist, technodeterminist, or even a technofetishist emphasis on the primacy of the machine” and “Hence, it is more about *how* stories are recorded, in what kind of physical media, what kind of processes and durations—and as such, its focus is on the archaeology of the apparatus that conveys the past as fact not just as a story” Ernst, W. 2013. *Digital Memory and the Archive*. University of Minnesota Press. (p.7)

Digital stuff is composed of *material entities*... Noise, errors, signal distortion and entropy result from material phenomena... Feedback routines maintain an *illusion of immateriality* (Casemajor, 2015)

This position resonates with my own materialist stance. A technological understanding of the underlying processes involved, and the role of noise and entropy in signifying that material basis, are integral to my own approach to these questions. Of course the digital trace is constituted from the material, just as the analogue photographic trace could not exist without the pattern of silver halide crystals – but it is the *disembodied* pattern of the *referent*, caused originally by light and lens, rather than the crystals themselves, which constitutes the time-travelling trace of a past reality that we eventually read. And it is always this spectral trace that we see first – the material support, particularly in digital media, is often practically invisible to the reader of the image. This is the “transparent envelope” (Barthes, 1993: 5) illusion *in excelsis* as we now only see the referent. The illusion of immateriality, created by what Nathalie Casemajor refers to as “feedback routines”, is the digital world as it is constantly presented to us, as countless apparitions on ubiquitous screens. The material supports of digital communication are largely hidden, inaccessible or hard to understand, and they are not part of the fabric of the image as seen, as the digital object has now become fully transmutable from one surface to the next.

The transmutability of the digital trace is what allowed me to make these rephotographic montages using Adobe Photoshop, without any loss to the original forms. The scans actually revealed *more* detail of the artefacts used than a physical encounter with them. But I cannot tell you much about the real, physical, material processes that underlie my copying of one digital trace into another – there are patterns of invisible data somewhere skipping between different areas on a solid state hard drive and the computer’s memory, but these processes are totally obscured: they occur in a black box, and more importantly, they do not affect the meaning of the image as seen. The support is *effectively* transparent or immaterial in this sense, and while the solid material supports are indeed primary and unquestionable, they are *unseen* in the digital image, and unaccounted for in the visual communications they support. As we experience these communications, the substrate is not present, it is not available to the senses in the same way that it was with analogue media. From this perspective, digital communication is phantasmatic phenomenologically, even if we acknowledge its fully material basis. The material basis of older technologies, the decaying subjectile of analogue communications, was in fact just a visible reminder of the electronic trace’s “fantastical phantomaticity” (Derrida et al., 2010: 39).

We can observe a certain historical correspondence between the structure of cultural ‘content’ and the structure of the media that carries it. Tight packaging of the cultural products of mass media era corresponds to the non-discrete materiality of the dominant recording media – photographic paper, film and magnetic tape used for audio and later video recording. In contrast, the growing modularity of cultural content in the software age perfectly corresponds the systematic modularity of modern software which manifest itself on all levels (Manovich, 2013: 215)

For Marshall McLuhan the ‘medium was the message’, but for Lev Manovich this is no longer a possibility, if it ever was. The “structure of the media”, with which we might substitute the material limitations of a given medium (or Artaud / Derrida’s conception of the subjectile), is predicated on a materiality which is at the *level of the content* - a materiality which visibly effects the trace. This has been superseded by a largely hidden materiality, a crucial discontinuity, and the mutable modularity of digital platforms: the invisible ground which is forever shifting beneath our feet. Illusory as the idea of digital immateriality actually is, we inhabit that illusion completely when we consume or even create digital images – we have to, as it is deep within this illusion that an understandable experience of digital media resides.

While the analog photochemical process is based on a principal of continuity between input and output, the information processing of the digital image is, ontologically speaking, based on a separation or *discontinuity* between input and output (Røssaak, 2011: 190)

While Eivind Røssaak also claims that “algorithmic culture is not an *immaterial* culture” (Røssaak, 2011: 194), it is this crucial discontinuity which distances us from any material basis that it has. The trace is no longer wedded to its support, or to any one physical surface we can access directly.

Eivind Røssaak mentions some very interesting digital structural films in his chapter on algorithmic culture – particularly *Labyrinthine* (2010) by Greg Biermann. These films play with the ‘materiality’ of the digital medium, revealing its potential for appropriation, mutability and discontinuity, by sampling and processing older works originally shot on film, such as Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*. It should be noted the materiality of the original analogue film is still visible here, if not actually present. As with my own appropriations in this project, the signifiers of an old analogue subjectile have become ‘immaterial’ digital ghosts.

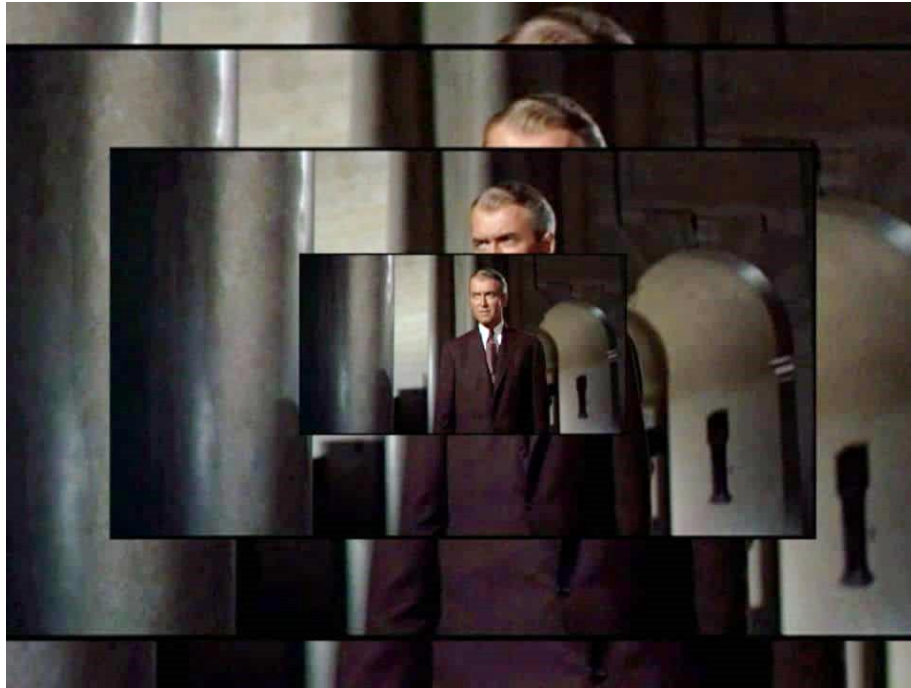


Figure 94 - Still from *Labyrinthine*, 2010, by Gregg Biermann

Clever and interesting as these examples of digital materiality are (*Fig. 94*), I can see why people may yearn for some auratic materiality of a technical medium characterised by continuity rather than its opposite. Algorithmic patterns are extremely abstract, and in a very real sense they are immaterial, despite relying on material structures to operate: the codes are disembodied forms untied from any specific matter, that crucial discontinuity renders them opaque in many cases. The ‘uncanny valley’ of generative movement does seem to appear from another realm, from a mechanistic ideality that is not the material world we experience outside of the digital – it is one which can be alienating. As we have seen, when the material supports of digital media are rendered visible, it can feel invasive or unpleasant. In many different fields (computer music production and game design, to name just two) coders work hard to try and ‘naturalise’ these strange motions and gestures, so that we might suspend our disbelief and immerse ourselves in the virtual space as if it were real/material. The hauntological trope of the ‘virtual analogue’ effect often attempts to synthesise the signifiers of a lost continuity, an accessible yet noisy and imperfect materiality, and its connotations of authenticity – a need or desire that seems to go beyond mere nostalgia for, or the fetishisation of, obsolete media.

Perhaps then, it is not a question of whether the digital realm is ontologically immaterial, but of how our relationship with the materiality of what we consume digitally has become severed. Even the most ardent

computer programmer is not visualising the code when they watch a movie on Netflix. This disjuncture creates the illusion of immateriality that the digital engenders, a world where pictures miraculously appear in front of us at the swipe of a touchscreen. While there was always a kind of phenomenological magic to photography and film, as we experienced them historically, the signifiers of their materiality were still there for us to see, in the flickering grain of cinema or the feel and smell of photographic paper. The visual signifiers can still be seen in the digital image even as that materiality is lost, as with our scanned glass negatives, or as with certain simulations, like the Hipstamatic photo filter. But they no longer signify what they once did. Now they connote the ghost of a lost aura, the vague memory of another time, a spectre rather than any real material authenticity.



Figure 95 - Headingley, Beck Street, 1888, by Godfrey Bingley

A digital scan of the original glass plate negative  
Have these auratic signifiers of materiality lost their authenticity?

Michael Betancourt deals with these issues head on in an essay entitled *The Aura of the Digital* (2006).

Because the material aspects of digital works are ephemeral, lasting no longer than the phenomenological encounter with the presentation of the digital object, the “aura of information” suggests that the digital itself transcends physical form (Betancourt, 2006)

This illusion defines the “aura of information” ... As digital objects do not degrade with time; they will not disappear over time. The limit for a digital work is not based on its physical demise, but rather on its availability within contemporary technology. Older digital works are only “lost” because the technological support for them vanishes (Betancourt, 2006)

So here we see how the digital ghost really dies. It does not fade away like the analogue one, signifying its own auratic mortality, its decay, its strange existence as a material spectre, as a fading afterimage. Instead it persists under an illusion of real presence, right up until the point when that illusion breaks down forever, and then the trace really is dead – it is gone without warning, vanished without ‘a trace’. An odd fragility hides here in the hyperreal perpetuity of digital media, the ontology of digital archives.

For both Michael Betancourt and Jay David Bolter, the aura can and does exist in digital works, but for different reasons. For Betancourt the “aura of a work of art can be regarded as the tertiary interpretative effect” – a relativistic view that sees an object as authentic as long as we interpret it that way. For Bolter, aura in the digital has more to do with cultural memory than authenticity.

Even today a viewer is likely to feel the aura of such a photograph not in spite of, *but because of its poorer quality*, which suggests the technology of that time and emphasizes the historical distance between the original object and the contemporary viewer. Benjamin argued that a daguerreotype, each of which was unique, maintained the aura that belonged to portrait painting. We would argue that a photographic print can share in the aura of the original by awakening the *memory of aura*. (Bolter et al., 2006: 30)

This quotation reflects my own findings: the fact that copies of poorer quality can paradoxically seem more auratic than their original, and that the passage of time is signified by an “aura of decay”, or auratic texture of the material photographic subjectile, something which is missing from the digital. But also that digital

reproductions still have the power of affect, the power to activate that “memory of aura”, even as they are totally disjunctive and far removed ontologically, from the original objects that they copy and simulate. And as addressed before, these new ideas have the capacity to reorient aura, post-digitally, as part of the *affect* of an image, rather than its authenticity or indexicality, or an artefact’s material existence at a unique point in space and time. This only has to be invoked / evoked by the image for it to *feel* auratic – for us to feel time as punctum. This also supports the idea that what we consider to be the aura changes fundamentally over time, as technologies of media change, and as social and cultural practices change too. Jacques Derrida suggested that aura was mutable and dependent on its cultural and historical context. In the manner that analogue photographs have been supplanted by the digital, the printed image by the screen image, the still image by the moving image, those superseded media objects become artefacts, and this produces “a relative rarity and therefore an auratic surplus value of photography” (Derrida et al., 2010: 52). The products of superseded technologies acquire this aura by virtue of their obsolescence and subsequent scarcity, and also by how we remember them, personally and then culturally, and how we continue to use them *for* memory.

Ever since Benjamin coined the term, aura has been wrapped up in the phantasm of memory, in nostalgia for past technologies of representation, and in an unease at the past’s new simulation in the present – “a concept coined with hindsight, describing an elusive phenomenon from the perspective of its disappearance” (Duttlinger, 2008: 80). The auratic crisis of Benjamin can be seen as a nostalgic reaction to the transition from the plastic arts to mechanical reproduction, and this is replicated again today, in what we might conceive of as a new auratic crisis, a nostalgic reaction to the transition between the analogue and the digital, where the earlier mode is trusted, human, authentic and affective, while the newer technology is always perceived as a threat to those things.

Analogue media has, you might say, “acquired an aura, only now it is a function not of presence but of absence, severed from an origin, from an originator, from authenticity. In our time, the aura has become *only* a presence, which is to say, a ghost. (Crimp, 1980: 100)



The post-digital era<sup>49</sup> (which we can synonymise with a post-medium one too) is haunted by an absence of recognisable and understandable medium(s), physical agents for messages, distinct technologies and practices. These withered away to be replaced by a cloud of homogenised digital communications, which are difficult to understand phenomenologically.

the medium and the real are now in a single *nebula whose truth is indecipherable*

(Baudrillard, 1994: 83)

the culture industry is defined by the fact that it does not strictly counterpose another principle to that of aura, but rather by the fact that it conserves the decaying aura as a *foggy mist* (Adorno and Rabinbach, 1975)

Such a blending, such a viral, endemic, chronic, alarming presence of the medium, without the possibility of isolating the effects – *spectralized*, like these adverting laser sculptures in the empty space of the event filtered by the medium (Baudrillard, 1994: 30)

Finally, the medium is the message not only signifies the end of the message, but also the end of the medium... the *erasure of distinct terms* and oppositions, including that of the medium and of the real – thus the impossibility of any mediation, of any dialectical intervention between the two or from one to the other (Baudrillard, 1994: 82-83)

*A blurred contour*, a stain, becomes a clear entity if we look at it from a certain *'biased' standpoint* – and is this not one of the succinct formulas of ideology? (Žižek, 2002)

The “foggy mist”, “spectralised”, “erasure of distinct terms”, the “nebula whose truth is indecipherable” – these are the “blurred contours” of digital media which are made sense of by the “‘biased’ standpoint” of technological progress, and the ideology of consumer capitalism and a data-driven socioeconomic landscape. Outside of this

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<sup>49</sup> “the term post-digital can be used to describe either a contemporary disenchantment with digital information systems and media gadgets, or a period in which our fascination with these systems and gadgets has become historical” – we also see a cultural “revival of ‘old’ media” and a focus on analogue/digital hybridity in art. Berry, D. and Dieter, M. 2015. *Postdigital aesthetics: art, computation and design*. Springer. “Vinyl and cassettes have thus become post-digital media. They exist today only because they compensate for deficiencies of digital files – deficiencies that are both aesthetic and social... In the post-digital condition, “old” and “new” media no longer exist as meaningful terms, but only as technologies of mutual stabilization and destabilization.” Cramer, F. 2013. Post-digital Aesthetics. *Le Magazine*. (Publié le 1.05.2013).

paradigm we might see that this separation of materiality and trace has led to an unsettling disconnect between reality and representation, to a new mediated 'reality' which is increasingly hard to make any sense of whatsoever.

Previous understandings of the photographic image as an indexical, discrete or enframed semantic unit appear increasingly inadequate when faced with the inter-network with its boundlessness, simultaneity and processuality... Because the image is continuous, frameless, multiple and processual, it cannot be unpacked with the tools of semiotics and structuralism that were developed to deal with finite, framed, singular and static images. (Sluis and Rubinstein, 2013: 30-31)

Is it any wonder that we see a post-digital desire for the solid objects of the material world, for texts with clear boundaries (frames are instrumental to the creation of meaning) and separate and comprehensible media? The haunting of contemporary media by the old, of the postmodern by the modern; the renewed interest in aura and authenticity – this could all be indicative of some perceived need to return to a territory which can be understood phenomenologically, by direct experience and haptic feedback, to a world where the connections between reality and its representation are real, visible and intelligible – where representations are analogues of nature, and where they are imperfect and they age and decay, like we do. As a post-digital phenomenon, cultural hauntology must be a result of this longing/mourning, as much as it is symptomatic of anything else, and as a reflex/reaction from within digital culture, it is also self-contradictory.

Nothing is as purely imaginary as the digital archive. Like a brilliant specter from the vast recesses of the cultural universe, the digital archive sweeps through the night skies of the mind, turning time's past into real-time, lighting up spatial horizons with light-space, folding the historical past into the projected future, breaking down fixed boundaries, always following the unpredictable pathways of the awaiting imagination (Kroker, 2011)



Figure 96 - Wood Road (Projection), 1887-2017

### 5.3 The spectral archive

The hauntological turn, if it can so be called, stimulated a renewed interest in the archive as a vehicle for creative inspiration, in the same way that it inspired my own practice. This is not postmodern appropriation for its own sake, however, but sampling with an *affective* intent – with a view towards exploring what has been lost in these seismic technological and cultural shifts, and what it even means to be haunted by these mediated traces of the past, from within the strange atemporality and immateriality of the post-digital world.

the structure of the archive is *spectral*. It is spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent “in the flesh”, neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met (Derrida, 1996: 84)

The archive, digital or otherwise, must necessarily concern loss and haunting first and foremost, rather than the intended preservation of memory, which it largely fails to accomplish, as Derrida explores in *Archive Fever*:

the archive, if this word or this figure can be stabilized so as to take on signification, will never be either memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience. On the contrary: the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory (Derrida, 1996: 11)

For Derrida the archive has acute hypomnesia – it recalls the past very poorly indeed – due to its need for expropriation, and then repetition, reproduction and reimpression – “the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive. And thus from destruction” (Derrida, 1996: 11-12). This notion has definite echoes of Benjamin’s loss of aura in the copying of original artworks. The very act of trying to preserve something by reproducing it elsewhere, places it under some transformative erasure. And that because “archives only contain [the] trace of what happened there, not the thing itself, we will always yearn to know what was lost, what burned and disappeared with the ashes” (Enszler, 2008), because the archive is by necessity always-already incomplete.

Hauntological work explores that yearning, those losses and absences, but what does this mean for the archive itself? This motive seems to run counter to the archive’s core objectives – to record the past, to be an effective repository for social memory and the preservation of our cultural heritage. But this is the paradox of preservation – particularly through digitisation – the artefacts are manifestly transformed. In scanning Godfrey Bingley’s glass negatives we changed how they were seen (or whether they were seen at all), we created a hyperreal copy, a simulation of an artefact in which the colours and details are actually *more* visible. We created a transmutable object that can be used anywhere and at any time – we severed the object from its original spatiotemporal context, but in doing so, allowed it to live on in some form. The digital archive is always engaged in this process of re-appropriation and re-contextualisation, to a greater or lesser degree, as its artefacts are no longer bound to any given physical context.



Figure 97 - Aura of tree, 2017

Detail from high resolution digital scan of 'Adel Beck, near Weetwood Lane', 1889, by Godfrey Bingley

My work hopefully highlights these transformative processes, but also shows that this need not be a negative deduction.

The analysis of the archive, then, involves a privileged region: at once close to us, and different from our present existence, it is the border of time that surrounds our presence, which overhangs it, and which indicates it in its otherness; it is that which, outside ourselves, delimits us. (Foucault, 2013: 147)

In this sense then the archive is as much about today as it is about the past, as much about our own identity as it is about the forgotten identities of others – how our identity is formed from a distortion of memory, its mediation through culture and its technologies – and hauntology recognises this aspect of cultural memory

where history has a serious blind spot. But what actually happens to the archive when it is appropriated hauntologically?

Appropriation may be seen pessimistically as merely looking backward. Alternatively, appropriation may be seen as renewal. It adds the context of history to current affairs. (Lovejoy, 2004: 78)

when it is fetishized, the archive is more than a repository of traces of the past which may be used in its inferential reconstruction. It is a stand-in for the past that brings the mystified experience of the thing itself (Spivak, 1985: 165)

This mystified experience of the thing itself, concerns a mystification or fetishisation of the present artefact as an icon. Hauntology gravitates towards a mystified experience of the *missing* thing – of the absence that the present trace of the past represents – the unknowable thing to which it refers and defers.

The re-use of artefacts in this way can certainly sentimentalize and monumentalize them, and this can lead to a “process of falsification and of mystification, whereby the past is reduced and abstracted” (Roy, 2015: 89). The difference between hauntological practice and archive work in the usual mode is that the former acknowledges and asserts that this re-imaginative relationship with the past is actually inevitable, and may even be a necessary engine for culture’s evolution, while the latter tries to pretend this inconvenient transfiguration does not exist.

As we saw with *The Remote Viewer*, taking digital objects out of the archive and placing them in a new context, such as a projection installation based on rephotography, places them in a new specific point in space and time where it is possible to re-aurify those digital copies, bringing them back to life, thus reanimating the past in the living present. But as we have seen this is always a profoundly transformative process, accelerating the processes of ‘archive fever’ as the past fades from memory. In making something new and original out of something old, we may bring those traces of the past briefly back to life, but we always lose something too – their nature changes, counter to the aims of preservation, and their original aura withers, just as Benjamin prophesied. This withering, though, is an inevitable symptom of time and entropy, that hauntology understands and incorporates, as it foregrounds the illusory and spectral nature of those fading traces, which are merely echoes of something always-already lost, and the aura of decay which surrounds their passing becomes something to consider in and of itself.



Figure 98 – Post Play, Modern Ground, 2016, by Michael C Coldwell

#### 5.4 The social hauntology of the photographic image

Despite a debatably 'outmoded' focus on materiality and medium in this practice-led research project, there is also a critical recognition of the fact that these technological shifts (both forwards and backwards) are symbiotically tied to changes in social practice and their underlying causes in culture. The post-digital shift back towards anachronistic notions of authenticity, media aesthetics, materialism, analogue technology, and the ghosts of modernism that we see resurrected in the cultural practices of hauntology, and other related contemporary movements and subcultures, must be indicative of some hidden cultural malaise, regarding both postmodernism and the digital. For Mark Fisher this retrograde condition was symptomatic of the cul-de-sac of late capitalism.

Jameson famously claimed that postmodernism is the 'cultural logic of late capitalism'. He argued that the failure of the future was constitutive of a postmodern cultural scene which, as he correctly prophesied, would become dominated by pastiche and revivalism. (Fisher, 2009: 7)

Fisher saw hauntology's relation to the past as vitally different to postmodernism in its usual retrospective mode, however. Hauntology's many manifestations seemed to be actively searching for failed futures in the past, exploring what was lost in the move to a fully digital, postmodern capitalism. The lost futures of modernism are a recurring theme in his writing and the cultural outputs he studied – yearning for a utopic future that we were promised, but which failed to materialize.

It is beyond the scope of this research to delve much further into this cultural theory and the social conditions potentially underlying the post-digital turn towards hauntology, but it seems pertinent to conclude this investigation by contextualising the work within contemporary social practices of both photography and hauntology, and the continuing re-use of old media.



Figure 99 - Westgate Car Park, Oxford, Lomography Sprocket Rocket, Kentmere 400, 2014, by Barnaby Nutt

In Peter Osborne's *Infinite Exchange: The Social Ontology of the Photographic Image* (2010), he plays down the differences between analogue and digital imagery and any crisis of indexicality we might perceive. "The anxiety about the real" has its origins elsewhere (Osborne, 2010: 59). *All* images are dematerializations of what they represent, and the important technological change which has taken place is that these disembodied representations are now infinitely socially exchangeable.



The practices of how photographs are now exchanged and repurposed have certainly changed fundamentally, and the cultural practices of hauntology are also largely dependent on the unbridled access to the historical archive that this ‘infinite exchange’ of data has facilitated. However, Osborne seems a little quick to dismiss the ontological changes photography has undergone: the key difference is not so much to do with indexicality as it is *time*. Digitisation and the subsequent “infinite exchange” that Osborne talks about helps create a pervasive illusion of permanence – permanent co-presence and permanent access to all media, where decaying analogue objects could signify the opposite: time passing, memory fading, loss and distance. Arguably we see a cultural response to this in an analogue revivalism that shows no sign of abating, both in its pure form in photographic practices such as the analogue camera movement of Lomography<sup>50</sup> (Fig. 99), and in its abundant simulation via the faux-vintage filters we now find on most digital image platforms (such as Instagram).

There are many contemporary subcultures, genres and technology fashions which show this analogue fetish becoming pervasive. If anything it seems that as Osborne’s infinite exchange grows, the focus on previous forms of media technology in digital culture only intensifies. Here are some key examples:

- Lomography
- The vinyl and cassette tape revivals
- The return of mass-produced analogue synthesizers
- Circuit bending and Zombie media<sup>51</sup>
- Virtual analogue plug-ins
- Vaporwave and Hypnagogic Pop<sup>52</sup>
- Skeuomorphism<sup>53</sup> - simulation of old media, including VHS camcorders.

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<sup>50</sup> Lomography is a commercial trademark of Lomographische AG, which their creators associate to a photographic image style and an analog camera movement and community facilitated by The Lomographic Society International. [www.lomography.com](http://www.lomography.com)

<sup>51</sup> Zombie Media is a theory and burgeoning art movement: “media archaeology becomes not only a method for excavation of repressed and forgotten media discourses, but extends itself into an artistic method close to Do-It-Yourself (DIY) culture, circuit bending, hardware hacking and other hacktivist exercises that are closely related to the political economy of information technology. The concept of dead media is discussed as “zombie media”—dead media revitalized, brought back to use, reworked.” Hertz, G. and Parikka, J. 2012. *Zombie media: Circuit bending media archaeology into an art method*. *Leonardo*. 45(5), pp.424-430.

<sup>52</sup> Hauntology as a music genre is well over a decade old, but has spawned new genres with similar aims, from a whole new generation of musicians. Interestingly Vaporwave often fetishizes early digital technologies.

<sup>53</sup> Skeuomorphism is where an object in software mimics its real world counterpart. The “trash can” icon is, perhaps, the most recognizable skeuomorphic object. Simulation of the analogue inside the digital, such as with Instagram filters, can be seen as being skeuomorphic.

In the first four examples we see a genuine search for authenticity in the return to analogue. The latter three examples seem to reinforce my counter-hypothesis that the hauntological aesthetic motive has as much to do with affect and some paramnesic fantasy as it does any real authenticity, as we are dealing with pure simulacra here – the affective “memory of aura” rather than a search for aura itself. The new “cult-value” ascribed to obsolete media and technologies in these practices re-aurifies them as much as their haunting material presence does, and in all these things the aura being searched for is largely imaginary, but no less affecting for it.

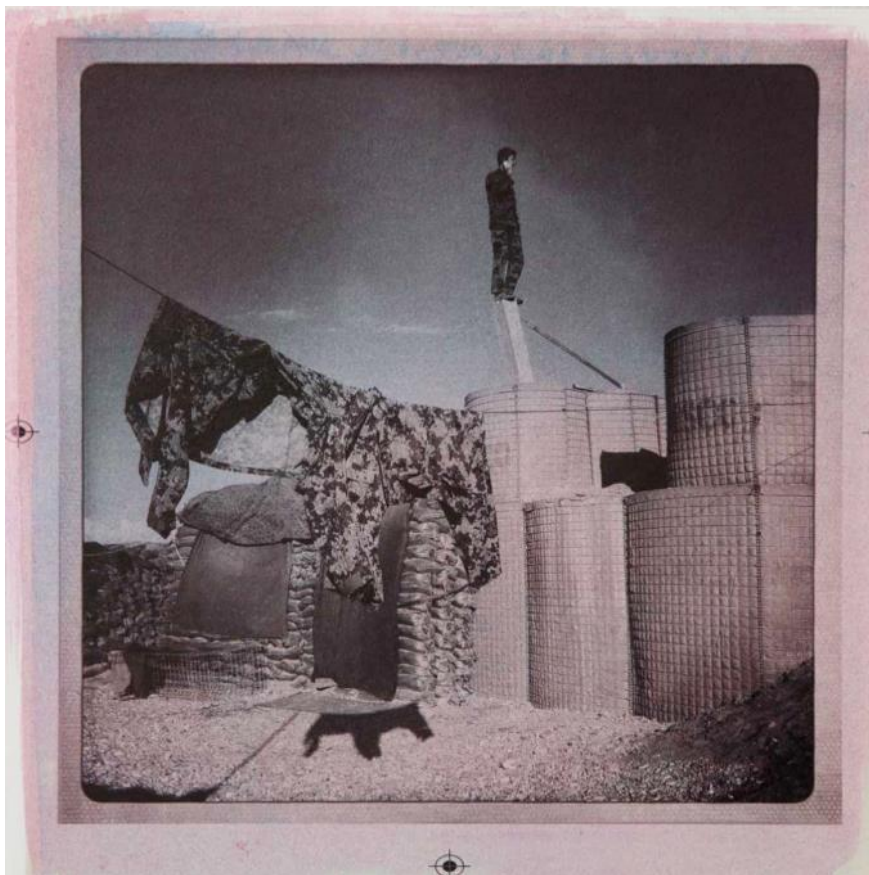


Figure 100 - Untitled (Afghan National Army soldier...), 2011 by Rita Leistner  
Hipstamatic iPhone photography of war-torn Afghanistan

The digital turn seems to have inverted Benjaminian temporality, redefining aura as a symptom of *transience* rather than “uniqueness and permanence”, and the trace as seemingly everlasting, rather than transitory – its apparent permanence a feature of the copy’s infinite repeatability.

Uniqueness and permanence are as closely entwined in the latter as are transitoriness and repeatability in the former. The stripping of the veil from the object, the destruction of the aura, is the signature of a

perception whose "sense for all that is the same in the world" so increased that, by means of reproduction, it extracts sameness even from what is unique. (Benjamin, 2008: 23)

Unlike atmosphere and those material signifiers of decay we captured and closely examined in this project, aura is not really an identifiable property of an image because it is largely a social significance that *we project* on to the image as valorised or fetishized object. This is why the aura changes as media changes, socially as culture changes. For those alive at the cusp of the digital age, this significance was then ascribed to anything that came before that turn. And in digital media there is no longer a physical object to project this significance onto, and this loss underlies the post-digital hauntological turn, and its obsession with obsolete physical media.

All new technologies bring on the cultural blues, just as the old ones evoke phantom pain after they have disappeared (McLuhan and Fiore, 1997: 16)

It is interesting to ruminate on whether the digital photograph will be aurified in the same way, so continuing this cycle. It seems doubtful, largely because of the lack of a material object for us to valorise, and the lack of a subjectile for time to work upon. For Benjamin there was "no facsimile of the aura" (Benjamin, 2008: 31) - but arguably now there is no aura, only its facsimile – its ghost image in our memories and in the digital media archive in which we now spend our lives. Aura, like meaning itself, is always endlessly deferred, never quite completely captured or definable, always subject to time and relentless change – very much spectral itself. The new authenticity of the hauntological lies in this realisation, that aura is a recurrent symptom of change and loss, a future-anxiety we project onto the photograph and other media objects. Now we are saturated in traces of the past, traces we see everywhere, but can never truly know – and that constitutes a constant auratic distance, regardless of medium.



## 5.5 Denouement

Some interesting and unexpected revelations have taken place in this broad examination of rephotography and hauntology. We have looked at some strange and troubling differences between analogue and digital photography, but found that the former still profoundly haunts and helps define the latter. We have seen how important the frame is in creating meaning – something increasingly missing from newer forms of media. We’ve seen how sound and movement can be used to bring to life, even “re-aurify”, static artefacts from the digital archive. Deconstructed rephotography presented a new way of using archival images to haunt and problematize urban space, reflecting rather than revealing some overwhelming and intractable changes to the urban landscape. There was a frustration of the usual reading of rephotography to spatially orientate ourselves, that I’m not sure we could call completely successful, at least in terms of its display as static images. These problems were transcended in *The Remote Viewer*, however, as rephotography was rendered an immersive and auratic experience via its reanimation as a drifting projected form, fading in and out of spatial existence.

But what of my original aims? Through rephotographic practice I hoped to learn something of the spectrality of photography. Is it the ontological essence of the photographic image as Derrida inferred, part of the fabric of *all* photography, or is the haunting photograph an anomaly, specific to a given image and its referent? The research seems to have largely confirmed Derrida's supposition. Even photographs without an obvious haunting referent, such as a ghostly figure or poignant relationship to personal memory, can be made to haunt us by virtue of their structural relationship to time, their unstable opacity, their decaying materiality as artefacts and the transmutable immateriality of the photographic trace. In deconstructing this materiality / immateriality, I was taken on a journey through some challenging territory, a spectral landscape that posed Gordian questions. Can digital images still haunt us – and if not, why not? Does the notion of aura mean anything anymore? How can we gauge a photograph's haunting affect? Despite this being crucial to any understanding of hauntedness, the subjectivity of affect is too much of an obstacle for us to approach it impartially. The decaying materiality of archive photographs certainly becomes part of how we read and respond to them – their atmosphere, their haunting punctum, their temporal significance – but this is not the only way an image can haunt us, and the degree to which that visible materiality is really signifying the immateriality of the trace, is hard to establish. My theory has not been disproved, but I could not separate this idea from the fact that those surface features, like erosion or rust on any artefact, could signify time passing, entropy and death, whether or not there was a photographic trace there to be read alongside them.

However, the relationships are certainly real and all there to be found through practice, for photographers and artists looking to explore and manipulate the spectral qualities of the photographic image, Derrida's notion of the subjectile is still highly relevant, and perhaps more useful than Benjamin's slippery conception of aura. Aura starts to have limited meaning if the copied trace can become more atmospheric and affecting than the original – as explored in Chapter 4 – and when the digital scan can contain more visible materiality. The subjectile and the possibility of its absence is the key to understanding the ontological difference between analogue and digital media, reality and simulation, and the reasons for a hauntological obsession with obsolete media technology, even as it stems from within digital culture itself. We seem to be mourning an absence of physical surfaces marked by time – analogue revivalism reflects a nostalgic desire to return to an accessible and authentic materiality, one with physical links to our past – but chiefly in those digital spaces which resolutely lack one.

The problem of this missing subjectile continues to haunt the digital – it is intrinsic and it exists semi-independently from those strong influences of cultural memory and nostalgia<sup>54</sup>. However, it is in the examination of these latter concerns that a deeper understanding of the cultural hauntology of photography shall come. While only touched upon here, a deeper engagement with memory studies and specific historical narratives could enrich these explorations greatly – and this points towards the next phase of these continuing investigations. How do we *re*-remember the forgotten through media, and how is memory and postmemory<sup>55</sup> mediated through the spectrality of photography?



We certainly see a strong connection to personal memory in much that could be considered hauntological in our culture – artists approaching their own nostalgia often reveal it as a spectre, a distortion of memory, almost an acknowledgement of intentional amnesia, or paramnesia. Hauntological work is usually aware of the semi-fictional nature of memory, and plays with this to create new memory worlds.

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<sup>54</sup> I am not sure how much of a role nostalgia plays in my research as the photographs are from a time before lived-memory, and there is no rose-tinted view of the past being presented through these works. However nostalgia plays a role in much hauntological art and music, but this is not a sentimental or uncritical gesture, as Elodie Roy explains: “Nostalgia for old media is not necessarily, or not simply, retrograde: it can also be understood as a form of critical nostalgia. It expresses the difficult tension between analogue and digital, past and present sites of representation, past and present representations” Roy, E.A. 2015. *Media, Materiality and Memory, Grounding the Groove*. Ashgate Publishing. p. 159

<sup>55</sup> Postmemory is Marianne Hirsch’s name for a sort of *re*-remembering of (the often traumatic) memories of others: “one person’s lived memories cannot be transformed into another’s. Postmemory is not identical to memory: it is ‘post’; but, at the same time, I argue, it approximates memory in its affective force and its psychic effects.” Hirsch, M. 2012. *The Generation of postmemory: writing and visual culture after the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press. p. 31

In future, I aim to further investigate the relationship between postmemory, photography and hauntology, an obvious extension of the work already undertaken here. Several journal articles on these themes are already in preparation, so this afterword has already become the foreword of something new.

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