

# Haunted by Systems, Haunted by Loss

GHOSTS & MEMORIES & NATURE

*'The future belong to the ghosts'*

– Jaque Derida

*“The past cannot be forgotten,  
the present cannot be remembered”*

— Mark Fisher

*I love folding laundry.*

– Timothy Morton

The first thoughts preceding these sentences started arising on a bumpy sun-soaked runway at Athens Airport — October 2024. I'm thinking about memories. How stable — how rigid — how trustworthy — how in past are they.

The moment of liftoff — both weightless and pressing — has surpassed me for two minutes, it still lingers diluted by island shapes, slow swaying changes of direction, patterns of human ant-colonies and dancing roads trying to orient through the mountie countryside.

How much of my environment do I have to describe to you, for you to understand the actual meaning of the words that I'm writing? How can my thoughts be transported to you — without becoming your own thought? How unchanged can Latour's *Immutable Mobiles* stay when their truth is interpreted under different circumstances? Is immutability the goal of a thought — a truth — a memory?

Should it adapt itself — become reactive to its environment — become *almost alive*?

When memories are *almost alive* they change their relation to the world around them — to the physical actors interacting with them — and to the other truths relating to them. In these relations memories build up an aura of agency. An aura that is neither limited in locality, nor the presence. This *body* of a memory is other-worldly — rooted and reaching into the human dimension.

*Memories are ghosts* — they are actors, almost alive, with metaphysical bodies.

When flying over endless waves of clouds, the memory of microscopic ground stays present. It mixes wit the imagined reality of what the ground might look like in this moment.

In imagination memories blossom into a immersive, controlling and allacomposing state. They overwrite, at least influence new experiences (new memories). I can imagine flying over an ocean covered by clouds, but actually fly

over a desert. I can imagine flying over Italy, but actually fly above France. When correcting my imagined reality with the facts of the collective one – what is changed?

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A book itself is not a ghost. But all that lives in it – thoughts, ideas, beliefs, truths, lies, words and memories. A book is their host. A book is like a haunted house creating a space of freedom for the *almost living* .

You step in through a squeaky door. You are confronted with a new reality. New rules. New physics. New Pasts. New Futures. Nothing is like the environment your body is positioned in.

And there you hover between different worlds. Your body held together by ghosts. Your mind influenced by ghosts. You are haunted.

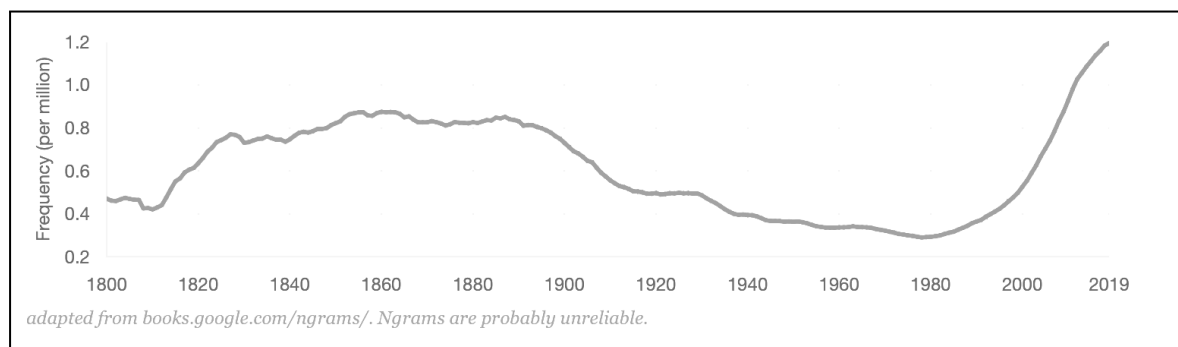


Figure 1: Frequency of the term *haunted* being used between 1800 and 2019  
<https://www.etymonline.com/word/haunted> visited 14.10.2024

Why the term *haunted* started to be related to ghosts and spirits is uncertain. What we know is that the term originally appeared in 1325 describing something that is practised. As this meaning of the word slowly faded over time – being now completely foreign to modern english – the term reappeared as the verb *haunt* describing both habitually practising and frequenting (visiting) something.

Also this use has not survived the times and we end up with *haunted* being used for places frequented by many people, or much resorted to (first used 1576); and those frequented or visited by spirits, or by imaginary beings, apparitions, spectres, etc. (1711).

When we look at the graph in figure 1 we see a sudden rise (500 per cent) in how frequently the term is being used, after it calmly disappearing between 1890 and 1980. Why is that? What is haunting the english language since 1980? And if language is a manifestation of the society speaking it – what is haunting us?

If ghosts are those that dwell in the in-between – of time and space – in the uncertain, the uncanny – the almost real – the almost alive; then ghosts are all around the urban anthropocene. We work for fabricated currencies, in labour with hidden outcomes, for ubiquitous non-nutritional food from uncertain origins. Nothing we do binds us in our immediate environment, but lets us dissolve into endless virtual gateways.

Timothy Morton writes in the *The Ecological Thought* on thinking about our environment while realising that nature as we imagine it has disappeared – developing his name-giving statement of his book *Ecology without Nature*. Contradictory, in our everyday language it is *nature* which is overtaking us in the Climate Catastrophe of the 21st century.

The idea of nature has become the major ghost that is haunting us. The once life-giving, nurturing, controlling and pace-dictating force of earth has become a subversive guerilla warfare like agent, acting in unpredictable ways.

It used to be humans haunting – submitting habitats to their own belief, seemingly taking their power from over-natural sources – now it is humans being haunted by events that break the *normal* rhythm of life.

*Lefebvre's Rhythmanalysis* makes us understand that rhythm is the underlining principle how the human mind organises time. Through it follow habits, traditions and cultural systems. Even ecological systems are strongly structured in time-based rhythms. When *nature* no longer supplements our natural and cultural rhythms, what will happen to the human orientation? We are left confused, uncertain and unprotected. Is this what being haunted feels like?

In 2021 I met a self-proclaimed shaman on Crete, Greece who said that he conducted metaphysical research in the 1980's (right before the rise of the term *haunted*). Let's take out of account if the stories he told are true.

He told me about visiting a young girl who was possessed by a Poltergeist. When he entered her room, out of excitement and anxiety she made plates and cups fly through the air – to be haunted makes actions out of the ordinary possible. In watching the haunted we can get a glimpse into other (seemingly fictional) realities.

One year later I was stuck next to 500 hectares of Island being burned by a wildfire. I watched ashes fall from the sky – hovering like German Christmas snow – in 40 degree red sun under black smoke clouds. No words can describe this feeling, except of *un-normal and haunted*.

In the climate collapse and in the cultural collapse of post-capitalism, *ghosts are all around us*.