

Keywords

Geologic time, Temporal sublime, Submerged territories, Hauntology, Anthropocene

Abstract

Geographies and the territories that opportunistically spring up to inhabit them, populate their landscapes and exploit their riches are merely superficial manifestations of more substratal tendencies of movement. What appears stable and static is, in fact, volatile, mutable, unstable. Coastal erosion, whether attributed to climate change or less anthropocene causes, can be read as a hyper-accelerated manifestation of geological time on a human scale. The processes of geological change, measured out in millennia and thus ordinarily imperceptible to the evanescent oscillations of human mortality, and the imaginations seated therein are dromologically condensed to a scale measurable in months or years. This sudden access or awareness, or maybe confluence between human and geological time, gives us a glimpse into the scales of the universe normally incomprehensible, and in doing so a glimpse too of our fragility and ephemerality. This article in itself ‘a quantity of faded images accompanied by only partial notations’ explores the way in which the tools and apparatuses we use to interrogate the detritus of both past and the present are unstable, mutable and often inadequate.

Above us the waves

'you wont never fynd no beginning its long gone and far pas' (Hoban 1980: 152).

If we look through the aperture which we have opened up onto the absolute, what we see there is a rather menacing power – something insensible, and capable of destroying both things and worlds, of bringing forth monstrous absurdities, yet also of never doing anything, of realizing every dream, but also every nightmare, of engendering random and frenetic transformations, or conversely, of producing a universe that remains motionless down to its ultimate recesses, like a cloud bearing the fiercest storms, then the eeriest bright spells, if only for an interval of disquieting calm. We see an omnipotence equal to that of the Cartesian God, and capable of anything, even the inconceivable; but an omnipotence that has become autonomous, without norms, blind, devoid of the other divine perfections, a power with neither goodness nor wisdom, ill-disposed to reassure thought about the veracity of its distinct ideas. We see something akin to Time, but a Time that is inconceivable for physics, since it is capable of destroying without cause or reason, every physical law, just as it is inconceivable for metaphysics, since it is capable of destroying every determinate entity, even a god, even God. This is not a Heraclitean time, since it is not the eternal law of becoming, but rather the eternal and lawless possible becoming of every law. It is a Time capable of destroying even becoming itself by bringing forth, perhaps forever, fixity, stasis, and death. (Meillassoux 2009: 64)

For millions of years what we currently understand as the coastal regions of Norfolk and Suffolk have seen the traces of human activity come and go.

Beneath the waves of the North Sea, now a destroyer of human shoreline endeavour, eroding land and on the eastern edge of what we call 'England', the seabed was itself once host to a fertile plain of settled land.

Traces of this were recently exposed by storm tides in the form of fossilized footprints, embedded into the shoreline were some of the oldest human remains found outside of continental Africa, then just as summarily erased. As this attests, the ever-shifting delineation of land and sea is perhaps much more fluid than we would like to believe, demonstrating the fragile, ephemeral nature of the human in respect of the sublime power of nature.

Figure 1: Sunken forests.



In early 2013 the lost forest of Borth was temporarily exposed by ferocious winter storms that tore across the country stripping thousands of tons of sand from beaches in Cardigan Bay on the South Welsh coast.

The remnants of this prehistoric forest are now an apocalyptic tidal landscape haunted by the stumps of oak trees that drowned more than 4500 years ago. It once stretched for miles on land that lay off Cardigan Bay before ancient geological change or rising sea levels buried it under layers of peat, sand and saltwater. Perhaps what was revealed were the remains of the 'Cantref y Gwaelod' or 'Maes Gwyddno', the legendary land told of in the *Black Book of Caermarthen* that stretched out to Bardsey Island off the Llyn Peninsula, said to have been consumed in a single night by storms. The ghostly chiming of the region's submerged bells, it has been claimed, still haunts the coast.

Out in the North Sea about 60 or 70 miles from the Kent coast on the South East of England, lies the Dogger Bank. Here the seabed is formed of an extensive shoal that forms a wide irregular plateau with an area comparable to that of Denmark. Over much of it the sea has a depth of only 50 or 60 feet. Its edges slope abruptly into deeper water, about 150 feet in the south, east and west, but much deeper to the north. Stories of the existence of a mythical submerged land have long been told in the fishing communities around the North Sea. The bones of large, often extinct, land mammals had often been brought up from the seabed, hidden in the peaty deposits known to the North Sea fishermen as 'moorlog'. In 1913, the British geologist and paleobotanist Clement Reid published a book entitled *Submerged Forests* in which he hypothesized a submerged land between mainland Europe and Britain.

Reid's ideas had been formulated through observation of ancient root structures visible only at exceptionally low tides. Although the possibility of a prehistoric human

presence in the Dogger area had been suggested by Reid and others previously, it was not until 1931 that any hard evidence was found. A trawler named Colinda, captained by one Pilgrim Lockwood, hauled up a lump of peat whilst fishing near the Ower Bank, 25 miles east of Norfolk. The peat was found to contain an elegant barbed antler point possibly used as a harpoon or fish spear and dated to a time when the area was tundra, about 4000 and 10,000 BCE. Archaeologists studying what became known as the Colinda Point began to realize that hunter-gatherers could once have roamed across a vast plain that connected Britain to the rest of Europe.

It has been suggested that this terrain of coastal lagoons, salt marshes and rivers may have been one of the richest geographical resources in Europe at the time.

Could this abundant environment have enabled the Mesolithic harpoon makers who carved the Colinda Point to begin to settle and form proto-agrarian communities?

If so, Doggerland, like 'Maes Gwyddno' could be seen as a form of prelapsarian paradise. A lost realm, a space both real and metaphoric between what was and is, perhaps even a trajectory of what is to come.

Les lacunes laissées en nous par l'absence d'autres.

The gaps left within us by the absence of others.

Figure 2: This lost region.



When the early trawl boats or ‘Doggers’ as they were known, first fished the Dogger Bank, it was common practice to break the large cakes of ‘moorlog’ found in the nets into pieces and discard the detritus in deeper water. Whilst a few of the blocks and some of the bones they contained were brought back to Yarmouth as curiosities, no reliable record seems to have been kept as to the exact details of the content or location of any of the finds.

They have been overwhelmed, and are now as hidden as the remains of King John’s baggage train, which has never been seen again since it wandered off a flooded causeway during the disastrous springtide of 1216. Despite advances in technology, our knowledge of the region remains largely obscured, inaccessible and hypothetical. Doggerland remains effectively terra incognita. In cartography uncharted or inaccessible areas are traditionally annotated with the phrase ‘hic svnt dracones’ and

populated with the mythic and the imagined. Gaps in the schema become sites of unknown horror, spoken of only by oracles.

Hic svnt dracones

Figure 3: Hic svnt dracones



According to the eighteenth-century writer Jacques Cazotte, located at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea, just off the Gulf of Tunis is a cavernous hall called Domdaniel. This submerged realm is said to be a meeting place for evil spirits, frequented by magicians, gnomes and other miscreant souls. For a fairly long time the dead limited themselves to uttering more or less confused oracles, but as education became obligatory and the number of illiterate people diminished they finally dictated their messages clearly to the very people who questioned them. They said

the present is undefined, the future has no reality than as present hope and the past is no more than the present memory. The whole of time has already happened and our cosmos is but a vague memory, a distorted reflection, fragmented, flawed, perhaps even false.

Proponents of the theory of Paleocontact maintain that the development of human technologies and religions is the direct result of interventions by extraterrestrial intelligence. Some have gone as far as to suggest that the deities of most, if not all cultures, are in fact extraterrestrial and that sudden advances in our technologies provide evidence of their influence. They argue that it is precisely the gaps that we see in historical and archaeological records that provide the evidence for these ancient extraterrestrial interventions. Noble prize winner Francis Crick, attributed with discovering the double helix structure of DNA, proposed a counter theory that he termed 'panspermia'. He believed that the earth was 'seeded' with life, probably in the form of blue green algae, by an unknown intelligent extraterrestrial species for the purpose of ensuring life's continuity. He believed that this could have been done on any number of suitable planets. However, Professor Gold, one of a trio of scientists to propose the now largely abandoned 'steady state' hypothesis of the universe, suggests

instead a 'garbage theory' for the origin of life, proposing that life on earth was not planned, but had spread unintentionally after contamination with extraterrestrial detritus.

In 1788, after falling under the spell of the Illuminati, Jacques Cazotte declared himself possessed of the power of prophecy. With political unease hanging in the air, Cazotte unleashed a volley of unsettling and brutal predictions to an audience of dinner party guests. Proclaiming that many of those present would meet their end at the guillotine, Cazotte walked amongst the assembled dignitaries describing in minute detail the grim destinies that awaited them. Although there is no agreement on the exact sequence of events that led to the disappearance of Doggerland, a recent hypothesis suggests that coastal land was flooded by a tsunami around 6200 BCE. The tsunami, caused by a submarine landslide off the coast of Norway known as the Storegga Slide, would have had a catastrophic impact on coastal populations.

Cataclysm*Figure 4: Prophecies*



In 1792 Jacques Cazotte was caught in possession of counter-revolutionary letters and subsequently guillotined.

The tools and apparatuses we use to interrogate both the past and the present are unstable, mutable and often inadequate. They are not neutral – they create noise, and in the process of communication the observer may read these noises as patterns or signals. These chance events have no provenance but are merely produced through noise and only perceived as meaningful.

Channels form, become conduits or barriers. The now submerged territory of which Doggerland was possibly only a small part would suggest that at one time the Thames was a tributary of the Rhine.

Geographies and the territories that opportunistically spring up to inhabit them, to populate their landscapes and exploit their riches are merely superficial manifestations of more substratal tendencies of movement. What appears stable and static is, in fact, volatile, mutable, unstable. Perhaps the garbage in which Gold saw the hand of a higher power was, in fact, just detritus after all. Perhaps the world contains no meaningful convergences, but is instead a network of haphazard acts, apparently isolated, yet in fact interdependent, atemporal, paralactic and hyper spatial.

The socio-economic vagaries of technology and culture create such capricious zones of fecundity. Calderas erupt and rend the crust surging into previously unthought of promontories, as tectonic paradigmatic shifts abruptly subduct the once stable plateaus beneath the surface. The territory is scattered with such lost archaeologies. More will follow. Doggerland is a zone of potential, mythic and real. Lost whilst present, past and future.

A world without interrogatives, an uninhabitable other space devoid of the constraints of the contoured mainland. The space between what is where.

C'est quelque chose qu'on ne sait pas, justement, et on ne sait pas si précisément cela est, si ça existe, si ça répond à un nom et correspond à une essence. On ne le sait pas: non par ignorance, mais parce que ce non-objet, ce présent non-présent, cet être-là d'un absent ou d'un disparu ne relève pas du savoir. Du moins plus de ce qu'on croit savoir sous le nom de savoir. On ne sait pas si c'est vivant ou si c'est mort.

This is something we do not know, precisely, and we do not know if this is exactly, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. We do not know: not by ignorance, but because non-object, this non-present, that being an absent or missing is not knowledge. At least most of what is understood as the knowledge. We do not know if it's alive or if it's dead. (Derrida 2006: 26)

'The raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword, are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man' (Blake).

Coastal erosion, whether attributable to climate change or causes less anthropocene in origin, can be read as a hyper-accelerated manifestation of geological time on a human scale. The processes of geological change, measured out in millennia and ordinarily imperceptible to the evanescent oscillations of human mortality, and the imaginations seated therein are dromologically condensed to a scale measurable in months or years.

Certainly in recent years this process has been thrust into the public consciousness, not only with the summary and effortless destruction of personal and public property in Norfolk and Devon (Happisburg, Brunell's railway) but also in the reappearances and just as sudden erasure of artefacts and traces long thought lost to the oceans, prehistoric footprints in Norfolk, petrified forests in Cardigan. Time folds back upon itself, so that what was once thought proven can now only be imagined.

This sudden access or awareness, or maybe confluence between human and geological time, gives us a glimpse into the scales of the universe normally incomprehensible, and in doing so a glimpse too of our fragility and ephemerality.

As Jameson noted 'Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world' (2003). Increasing concerns about climate change and ecological collapse may confirm that the two are not necessarily mutual exclusive.

Fernweh

A country road. A tree. Evening (Beckett 1953: 7).

Everything is transient and finite. Gradual changes lead to turning points, one force overcomes the other and quantitative change turns to qualitative change. But what is left, a garden of forking paths or a contradictory jumble of irresolute drafts? The perception of quality is informed and calibrated by the quality of perception.

As we build and shape our schema of exploration of such shifting boundaries, is there a better stratagem than to (apparently) aimlessly wander and return with what we have seen and heard?

The geometry of these peripheries is the trajectory of the future.

They are not marked on any maps, for, as Melville tells us 'true places never are'

(1851: 79).

These maps are haunted by the ghost of the territory they have superseded and by the places they do not know or cannot show. The territory is in turn both defined and haunted by the absences indicated and thereby created by the map.

We make new tools to find such ghosts and in doing so fashion new ghosts from the tools that we have made, and the detritus they create, a jumbled and incomplete collection of damaged and unverifiable artefacts: a quantity of faded images accompanied by only partial notations. Our desperate scrutiny of this debris suggests spaces both real and metaphoric. Physics is increasingly be populous with invisible ghosts, strange limpid intangibilities that none the less curve our realities, empty locations in space, containing neither Sun nor planet.

A savage region of previously unimaginable topographies and trajectories, notional, obscured territories, simultaneously inhabiting the past, the present and perhaps even the future.

Le domaine perdu: Ghost lights in Vegas

Figure 5: Vacancy.



Inside, the building is of two story's and contains three thousand rooms, of which half are underground, and the other half directly above them. I was taken through the rooms in the upper story, so what I shall say of them is from my own observation, but the underground ones I can speak of only from report, because the Egyptians in charge refused to let me see them, as they contain the tombs of the kings who built the labyrinth, and also the tombs of the sacred crocodiles.

The upper rooms, on the contrary, I did actually see, and it is hard to believe that they are the work of men; the baffling and intricate passages from room to room and from court to court were an endless wonder to me, as we passed from a courtyard into rooms, from rooms into galleries, from galleries into more rooms and thence into yet more courtyards. The roof of every chamber, courtyard and gallery is, like the walls, of stone. The walls are covered with carved figures, and

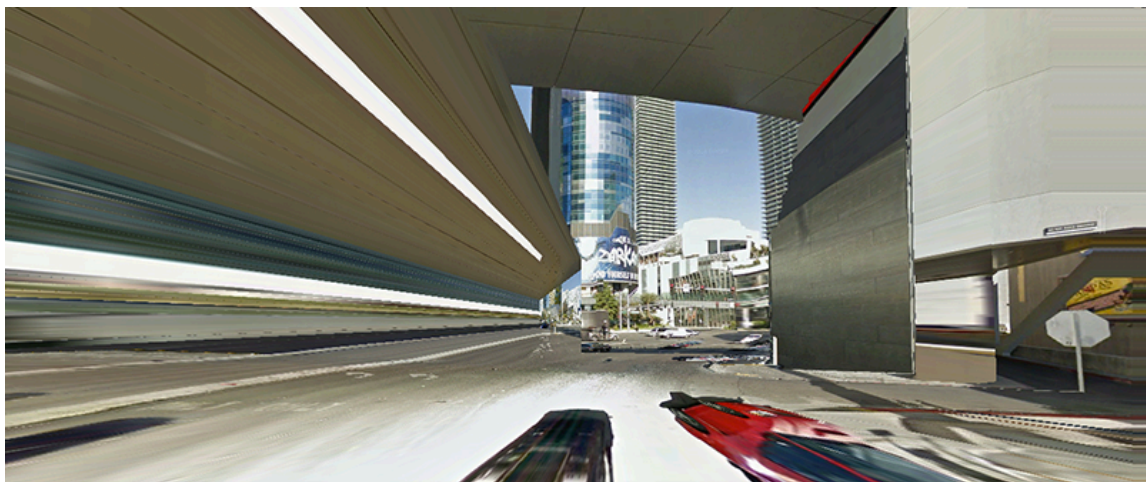
each court is exquisitely built of white marble and surrounded by a colonnade.

(Herodotus 1890)

Las Vegas is a vast coral reef of fibrillating neon, not so much a city as a vast filtration system, flickering in the desert, attracting a populous flow to extract capital before processing it as images.

The reef is in decline, a relic. Since the financial collapse vast swathes of the strip lie as unfinished rubble, a blasted concrete stump marks the site of the old Frontier Sign. Virtual Vegas is supplanting it, the Internet is now its own filtration system to channel the tidal flow of digital money. The signs are no longer needed, the sheds are no longer house rows of slot machines but vast server arrays in remote data centres in Berkley, Iowa, Taiwan and Finland. Out in the desert far from the encroaching waves, preserved in the dry air will be the ersatz remnants of submerged territories of Europe, Venice, Paris, Luxor and Europe still haunted by the spectre of the deep.

Figure 6: *Hyper Vegas.*



Ignis fatuus

Ideas improve. The meaning of words participates the improvement. Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it. It embraces an author's phrase, makes use of his expressions, erases a false idea, and replaces it with the right idea. Diversion is the opposite of quotation, of appealing to a theoretical authority which is always falsified by the mere fate of having become a quotation – a fragment torn from its context, from its movement, and ultimately from the global framework of its period and from the precise choice, whether exactly recognized or erroneous, which it was in this framework. Diversion is the fluid language of anti-ideology. It appears in communication that knows it cannot pretend to guarantee any definitely and in itself. At its peak it is language that cannot be confirmed by any former or supra-critical reference. On the contrary, its own coherence, in itself and with the applicable facts, can confirm the former core of truth which it brings out. Diversion has grounded its cause on nothing but its own truth as present critique. (Debord 1983: 207)

If as Jacques Derrida supposes each age creates its own ghosts, we live in extraordinarily creative times. His infectious term 'Hauntology' seems to have become as persistent and ultimately chimeric as a spectre itself, offering us little with which to navigate the increasingly spectral world we inhabit. The Boolean being and nothing state of the digital world is anything if not analogous the presence and absence of the ghost, a world populated by traces and echoes and inhabiting spaces that are virtual and immaterial.

Each era creates its own spectres, its own phantoms, and ultimately as its legacy itself becomes a ghost to haunt others in impotent rage or to lie forgotten and invisible.

Figure 7: This broken mirror.



Perhaps consequently our rational, technological world is more populous with phantoms than ever. Each ghost exorcised by science precipitates a host of new phantoms rushing to supersede it. Paralysed in a frozen now, smothered by the massed murmurings of the past, stalked by the angry revenants of forgotten radicals and the awful twins of a future, that is at once inconceivable and yet inevitable, from avatars and chat-bots to bump maps and page curls, the digital world is populated with a host of Skeuomorphic phantoms clothed in dust scratches, the imperfections of lost surface patination and process noise, haunted by the loss of body that the Faustian pact of digital omnipresence entailed. Perversely, the spectral digital world is itself haunted by the ghosts of materiality. It does seem strange that the digital world which promised us limitless futures seems instead preoccupied with serving up the ever unfolding past wrapped in a perpetual present.

The ghost, that persistent recurrent visitation of a recalcitrant past, rather than supernatural relic of a primitive age, is an increasingly prevalent aspect of the modern world. Immateriality and spectrality are axiomatic to the digital realms we inhabit. The ubiquity of social media has extended notions of spectral communication, a Social Spectrality. Telephonic dematerialization - the meeting in a mutual void, rather than relayed exchange over distance, a temporary consensual occupancy of a shared undefined, immaterial conceptual area that is neither one place or the other, both places and neither, what Gibson called cyberspace, digitally mediated social spaces, social media - has connected these exchanges in a totality that has laid such claims on the popular imagination to supersede or underwrite reality. Social Spectrality then is what we have acquiesced to. Our social exchanges mediated in a dematerialized state that renders us into a perpetual ghost-like state, an etheric space in which we the spectres encounter only other spectral beings. Brocken Spectres: haunted prosthetic projections, hollow phantom magnifications.

This spectral realm is plagued by anxieties of authenticity at every level, seeking not to embrace its modernity in a conceptual freedom, but instead clinging to a series of simulacra, ersatz analogue artefacts, page curls, bump maps, lens flare filters. Not only is the mediated world of social media a constructed simulacra, an ersatz replica, it is one that seeks to shore up its claims to superseding reality not by transcending it, but by wearing its skin like a mask. And yet its totality is such that it does not so much enable a dialogue of experience as proposed that it is the experience. See the popular practice of participants recording their presence at key events on camera phones. The witnessing of the event itself becomes subordinate to the need to capture and record for later authentication, even if this is at the cost of effective awareness, presence as it

happens, but inhabiting its simulacra online indefinitely. A moment of life thus becomes subordinate to the perpetuation of its revenant.

Whether these persistent incursions are understood in religious, ontological, scientific or epistemological terms, they taunt us by flouting our schemata. Perhaps, as Jameson suggests,

Such ghosts express the fear of modern people that they have not really lived or fulfilled their lives, in a world organized to deprive them of that satisfaction; yet is this suspicion not itself a kind of spectre, haunting our lives with its enigmatic doubt that nothing can dispel or exorcise. (1995: 87)

The manifestation of the apparition

The power of the dead is that we think they see us all the time. The dead have a presence. Is there a level of energy composed solely of the dead? They are also in the ground, of course, asleep and crumbling. Perhaps we are what they dream. (DeLillo 1985: 116)

In advanced consumer societies where postmodern, neo-liberal conditions prevail, life is experienced as an immense accumulation of ghosts. Everything that was directly lived now haunts itself in a ghostly echo. Images and sounds extracted from every aspect of life merge into a common stream and can neither be removed nor recovered. Fragmented images regroup themselves into a new reality as a separate pseudo-world that is omnipresent and yet can only ever be partially glimpsed. These images of the world have dissolved into a digital world of autonomic phantoms, acting out a haunted inversion of life, an autonomous movement of non-living. This spectrality manifests simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society and as a channel of communication. As a part of society, it is ostensibly the focal point of all vision and consciousness. But

due to the very fact that this spectral world is immaterial, it is in reality the domain of a phantom existence, a false consciousness. The unification it achieves is nothing but a shared communion of universal separation. Social media is not merely a society of spectres; it is a spectral realm that is mediated by phantoms. The spectrality inherent in social media cannot be understood as a mere visual deception produced by mass-media technologies. It is both a dematerialized world that has been materialized and the dematerialization of materiality.

Then it seemed like falling into a labyrinth: we thought we were at the finish, but our way bent round and we found ourselves as it were back at the beginning, and just as far from that which we were seeking at first.¹ (Kerényi 1976: 92)

Modern life has become an immense accumulation of ghosts. Everything that was once directly lived is now haunted by itself.

Figure 8: *Lacunae.*



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Note

¹ ‘The Shape of the Void’ explores and develops themes and contains elements which first appeared in Branagan et al. (2012).