"Forgettings That Want to be Remembered"

museums and hauntings

Jennifer Walklate

The Lemons and Fish by Nataliia Kutykhina.

introduction

We sit in the gallery space, surrounded by dyschronia, atopic voices, temporally unlocalisable objects, here and now and at the same time bound to, metonymically representing, drawing back to, insisting on the presence of, the past, insisting upon its continuance, its relation to the now and the yet to come. The museum is suspended – "there is no time here, not any more" (Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life* 2), and we are caught within its dyschronic web, unsettled and unsure as to why. Into the corner of our eyes appears the museum's double – not a place of certainty and cultural comfort, but an anxious demon, making voiceless demands.

I write from a haunted venue, and a haunted location, professionally and personally. Whilst this paper was being conceived, novel coronavirus had placed the world in quarantine, and

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museums, forced to close, were being made manifest through a digital dreamland of virtual tours. Coronavirus continues to impact people, and the effects of lockdown are still being felt. The world remains unstable – supply and cost crises, war in Europe, and governmental failures to deal with the climate emergency. In this febrile environment, it seems necessary to reopen for the museum sector – and, indeed, for the world at large – tales of a future we had forgotten existed, in which new representations and honesties are possible.

I write, too, from a haunted location, amidst the whispered privilege of a well-educated white woman to ask – am I the person to ask this question, in this space, at this time; do I have the right to engage with the museal ghosts now manifesting? Can I justifiably hypothesise about the inherently haunted and haunting character of the museum? Do I speak what my own personal ghosts whisper – that from places of unsettlement and trauma comes a different idea of action and of change, based, not on the complacency of fraudulent or passive hope (Stuart), but the knowledge and acceptance of responsibility – that, in other words, to understand the hauntological museum is to offer out a new vision for a socially and politically engaged institution that exists not for its own ends, but for the benefit of the twenty-first century?

In this paper, I want to hypothesise that museums are fundamentally haunted, and hauntological, institutions, and argue that understanding the spectre is necessary to understanding the true position and potential of the museum as a cultural form. In doing so, the paper will address what precisely spectres are, and what hauntology is, before discussing how museums, through their spaces, operations, and objects, are haunted and hauntological. To do so, we will discuss the museums' relation to memory, anxiety, and the *unheimliche*.

Ultimately, the key argument and conclusion of this paper is that understanding and accepting the museum's inherently haunted status can enable us to change how museums behave in the twenty-first century, and how we understand their role in public life.

enter the ghost

Our ghosts are those identified by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx*, the key figures of his hauntology. Derrida's spectres are political, social, and uncanny, but they are abstract and conceptual, too. For Derrida, the Spectre has three "things," three key features: that it is to do with mourning (that we have to know and ontologise remains to understand it); with language (that we cannot speak without it); and with spirit (that it actively does work) (9).

As we can imagine from the reference to Karl Marx, the spectre is – or has the capacity to be – political. Derrida spends much of *Specters of Marx* speaking, unsurprisingly, of "the spectre of communism" haunting Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as true modern capitalism began to fully come into its own (2). That is, an idea, for a different kind of political system, a different kind of future, was already appearing in the imagination of humanity – some of whom found it thrilling, whilst others found it disturbing. The spectre is idea, the spectre is possibility, it is what has been and what might yet be.

If the spectre is political, then, it is also social; it is derived from relationships between people. It does not exist, materially, but it draws us together. To illustrate this, imagine the relationships you have with people at a distance. They are not present, but they tug upon your consciousness and perhaps your soul (such as any of us have one); that tug, the tug of what is not present, the ache of absence, that, too is the work of the spectre. As Derrida writes, the spectre is "neither soul nor body, and both one and the other" (5); incorporeal and yet so vital, the spectre is that which lies – and which works, for the spectre is active – between us all, which means that we all live and die alone, but haunted; borne up and carried along in the world by ghosts.

We cannot, Derrida claims, exist without the spectre's uncanniness. Specifically, he writes "There is no Dasein of the spectre, but there is no Dasein without the uncanniness, without the strange familiarity (*Unheimlichkeit*) of some spectre" (Derrida 125). To clarify terms: *Dasein*, derived from Heidegger, translates directly to "there-being" and is used to mean presence or existence (Heidegger 11). To be human is to have/be *Dasein*. Secondly, the uncanny – in German, the word is *unheimlich*, and means "unhomely," and uncanniness itself is that experience of something strangely familiar, something which is familiar but perhaps should not be. In technology studies, we speak of the uncanny valley which is produced when faced with an android which is only just distinguishable from the human. Derrida's

claim that we cannot exist without "the spectre's uncanniness" can therefore be understood to mean that we – that which exists, and knows of its existence – cannot exist without having a knowledge of the Other, without understanding that we are us, and not, therefore, something else, something Other. And in being imagined, this something Other becomes spectral. "The spectre is also," Derrida writes, "among other things, what one imagines, what one thinks one sees and which one projects – on an imaginary screen where there is nothing to see" (125).

I want to compare Derrida's formulation with those of two more contemporary theorists, partially in order to get something of an idea of not just what the ghost is, but who, and to develop this sense of the ghost's uncanny *Dasein*. These theorists are Avery Gordon, a sociologist whose work *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* provides extraordinary insight into the philosophical power of studying the ghost in the gaps and erasures they stand within, and Mark Fisher, whose writings, particularly those of *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, focus on the temporal and melancholy aspects of the ghost, from a very personal position regarding that which might have been. Once these comparisons have been drawn, we will offer our own formulation of the spectre, as a phenomenon mutually constitutive with and of the museum.

In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon emphasises the social reality and consequential nature of the ghost. Her emphasis on the violence and trauma that produces haunting offers the ghost a more politically ethical dimension than Derrida's – more human and grounded than abstract and ideological (Gordon, *Ghostly Matters* xvi). For Gordon, ghosts are "crucibles for political mediation and historical memory" (18) but they are also active agents, explicitly not innocent and carrying around with them their loss and pain for all to see (22). Their activities include demanding attention – asking something of those who see – and cajoling, both through the medium of haunting (xvi, 6, 9). They reside elsewhere,

she writes, but they are never "intrinsically other" (179) – instead, they are part of social life, with haunting a key structure of feeling within that life (201). Sometimes, because of the violence they possess and are possessed by, they are frightening (Gordon, "Some Thoughts" 2). But I would argue that perhaps the most important feature of this ghost is its capacity to direct attention. Gordon writes, "If you let it, the ghost can lead you towards what has been missing, which is sometimes everything" (*Ghostly Matters* 58).

For Fisher, on the other hand, the ghost is less directive. The ghost acts, but it does not physically exist. Its agency is that of the virtual. Fisher's ghost, instead of being mostly focused on the past, is a temporally unhinged creature that is perhaps more focused on futures that never happened, and trapped by a "formal nostalgia" that emphasises the lack of a real present (*Ghosts of My Life* 11). His emphasis is on the "temporal pathology" of haunting, the "theoretically pure anterograde amnesia" that characterises the early twenty-first century (109).

Where Gordon and Fisher differ most substantially, however, is on what to do with the ghost. Whilst Gordon suggests living with them and seeing them, treating them as an inbuilt part of the social world – acknowledging and loving them, in other words – Fisher's attitude toward the ghost is by turns ambivalent and constrained. The ghost produces some creativity (the characteristic crackle that develops on ageing LPs, for instance) but also quashes it (Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life* 98, 113–14, 144). Haunting, for Fisher, resides in the agency of the viewer, the living – haunting is a failed act of morning, an inability to let go, not the insistence of the spirit (22). This failure to mourn results in a perpetual, stultifying melancholy (22–25). So, whilst Fisher's ghosts are trapped by their timelessness, Gordon's ghosts are freed from time.

the museum as a haunted venue

In this paper, we will focus specifically on the active and demanding spirit of Gordon's

ghost, and the temporal unhingedness of Fisher's spectres, and how these hauntings impact and shape the contemporary museum through the themes of memory, anxiety, and the *unheimliche*. We are, at present, in a context where trust in many public institutions is low in which museums cannot sit on their laurels and presume that they will enjoy continuing support (ONS). Museums have continued as a very modern project visible throughout the post-modern period, and as Gordon writes: "At the core of the post-modern field or scene, then, is a crisis of representation, a fracture in the epistemological regime of modernity, a regime that rested on a faith in the reality effect of social science" (*Ghostly Matters* 11).

Museums, like Gordon's "unhallowed dead of the modern project" are never innocent, dragging the violence and loss which made them along with them (*Ghostly Matters* 22). From both a practical and an ethical point of view, museums need to recognise this crisis of faith, which exists not only in the external public but within their own walls. This paper, at least in part, argues that they cannot persist, or indeed succeed in work in the public interest, if they do not. To follow the ghost, as Gordon says, is to change yourself and refashion your social relations (22). Let us, therefore, summon the museal ghost.

memory

The museum has always been a memorial institution. Findlen argues that it was the pursuit of memory which made the prototypical museum of the Renaissance an enduring thing (177). In *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine*, Horst Bredekamp situates the museum in its early form as a technology for remembering, or reacquiring, "Edenic wisdom" (41). In a key text on the topic, Susan Crane writes,

> Museums deliberately forge memories in physical form to prevent the natural erosion of memory, both personal and collective: this is the task of preservation, of creating a new form for knowledge whose purely mental existence is well known to be ephemeral, or as Rudy Koshar defines it, "the

spectrum of interventions in the physical integrity of movable or immovable objects considered to have historical value." (9)

Yet this physical trace is not the only means by which memory appears in the field. Crane goes on to write that it is also the process of memory which matters, and indeed that it is the interaction between personal and collective memory, in a real, virtual, or imaginary space which constitutes the museum itself (12). In an earlier monograph, Gaynor Kavanagh particularly emphasised the imaginary aspect of this through the concept of the "dream space," an emotive and affective form of memory.

Kavanagh calls the dream space "anarchic and unpredictable" (3). In this formulation, we can clearly see an echo of Derrida's "mad and unlocalizable" spirit. But I do not intend to draw a singular or direct correlation between memory and the ghost here, for that would do both a disservice. Memory is both process and has the capacity to be passive – looked on from afar as if through a screen. The ghost, on the other hand, is not a process (though being haunted is an experience), and it is in no way passive, but insistent and demanding. One could, indeed, make the argument that memory is the consequence of the ghost, given that, as Arnold-de Simine argues "memory is understood to emerge through the mutual interaction of the past on the present and the present on the past" (19).

Given these close relationships between memory and the museum and memory and the ghost, it is not, therefore, a stretch to argue for the museum as inherently haunted, by both the ghosts belonging to the physical objects it contains, and those belonging to the people with whom it, and its objects, interact. But there is a sinister side to this. Memory is also closely associated with nostalgia and amnesia.

Nostalgia can come in many forms. But here, we are using the term in a way akin to *hiraeth* or *saudade*, as a form of longing for a lost place or time (which possibly never really existed) with the associations with that place being positively coloured. Nostalgia is also an explicitly ideological form of memory. As Arnold-de Simine

writes, "discourses of remembrance can be ideologically instrumentalised and exploited to ignore the complexities of a historical event, they can be dehistoricised and mythologised to view the world in simple terms of good and evil, victims and perpetrators [...]" (18).

The museum, of course, has always been implicated in the nostalgic mode. Arnold-de Simine writes that the nineteenth-century museum was part of the apparatus which stabilised the "imagined communities" of the time and this remains crucial to understanding the contested position of museums, heritage, and art in the twenty-first century (7).

Nostalgia can seem paradoxical, because of its tendency to fixate on the past whilst eliding crucial elements of that same past (Arnold-de Simine 54). Museums and related institutions have a complex relationship to both memory and nostalgia, and in the contemporary discourse nostalgia is often cast in a negative light – Hatherley's *Ministry of Nostalgia* showcases how nostalgia for the Austerity Britain of the immediate post-war years has been manipulated and instrumentalised to pacify those of us living in the Austerity Britain of the 2010s (and, it looks like, the 2020s), despite the fact that the causes, circumstances, and outcomes of both Austerity eras have been quite fundamentally different (3–4).

This nostalgia is very visibly haunted and haunting. Like Fisher's ghost, Austerity Britain 2.0 is trapped by this idea of a particular kind of past and its association with the present, in a kind of formal nostalgia that Hatherley associates with Raymond Williams' "structures of feeling" (Hatherley 5; Williams 128–35). Neither fully thought out, nor articulated, a relationship of sympathy and resonance is drawn between post-war and contemporary Britain, instrumentalised in policy and in the popular imagination. In other words, when faced with coronavirus, Keep Calm and Carry On.

Nostalgia is implicated in the instrumentalisation of heritage, and indeed has become something of a contentious object for almost all areas of the publicly political map. One might appeal to a nostalgic mode to promote a particular historical narrative, and one might equally rebel against nostalgia to do exactly the same thing. When Corrine Fowler published *Green Unpleasant Land* in the latter half of 2020, it was polarising for reviewers, with Fowler receiving both praise and death threats. Coming off the heels of a summer in which statues were removed and in which the National Trust published an interim report about the connections of its properties to the Slave Trade (Huxtable et al.), Fowler's exploration of the colonial connections of Britain's country houses was contentious for many, with some, such as the Restore Trust group, demanding a return to the "original" apolitical ethos of heritage organisations such as the National Trust (Restore Trust). In such a demand, there is an overt appeal to nostalgia – a desire to return to "how it used to be" – paired with nostalgia as motivation – "I miss when heritage was simple."

Fisher writes that our formal nostalgia is the postmodern condition par excellence, and makes itself known in the form of a condition he refers to as "theoretically pure anterograde amnesia" (*Ghosts of My Life* 111). Anterograde amnesia is a form of amnesia in which the sufferer finds it impossible to form new memories, though long-term memory remains intact. Fisher writes,

> The present – broken, desolated, is constantly erasing itself, leaving few traces. Things catch your attention for a while but you do not remember them for very long. But the old memories persist, intact [...] Constantly commemorated [...] (111)

In organisations such as Restore Trust, and appeals not to tamper with history, old memories, tinged with *saudade*, are commemorated, and persist, and the present treated as inferior – broken, desolate, and unworthy of memory. To refuse to grow, develop, move on, and accept that previous modes of operation were lacking or incorrect, is to fall victim to theoretically pure anterograde amnesia – to lose the capacity to turn the present into memory, and, worse, to force a reification of a past which may not warrant it.

This strong association between memory and amnesia speaks not only to the idea of the ghost

(for "ghosts are just forgettings who want to be remembered" after all (Keshet 1)) but also to broader discourse around the role – and potential necessity – of forgetting in cultural life.

In his recent book *Forgetting*, Gabriel Josipovici writes of the necessity of considering forgetting in contemporary society – not just because the increasing lifespan of humans is associated with an increase in Alzheimer's and dementia – but because injunctions to remember can be just as dangerous as the forgetting that comes with intentional erasure (5). As Fehr writes in "A Museum and Its Memory," to remember and forget are both required for life,

> Silence, as Cage defined it – freedom from anyone's intentions – or as a completely empty space, is a utopian idea of a space in which any being, and surely human beings, cannot survive. To be lived in, it has to be furnished, at least with memories; on the other hand, the inability to forget, as for example described by Jorge Luis Borges in his story about Ireneo Funes, the man who could not forget anything, leads to death as well. So any place defined only by memories or relics, like many museums, will cause death by suffocation. Therefore, only by remembering and forgetting, by reflecting the past within the present, and by measuring the present against the past, are life and a future possible. (46)

Nostalgia, however, does not have to imply a total failure of criticality. Arnold-de Simine writes of the importance of a subtle understanding of nostalgia for museums, specifically citing Boym's two models of restorative and reflective nostalgia (55). Whilst the first (which we might also term "classic nostalgia") situates the object of its gaze as traditional, immutable, transhistorical, the second accepts the inherent longing of nostalgia whilst remaining capable of critical analysis and understanding the ambiguities of memory.

It is arguable that this is reflected in the philosophy of Radical Hope which shapes the approaches taken by the Pitt Rivers Museum in recent years, and which lie behind such projects as Labelling Matters (Pitt Rivers Museum). Since the appointment of director

Laura van Broekhaven, the Pitt Rivers has been engaged in active reconsideration of its legacy,[1] one part of which is the historic labels which remain on display (Pitt Rivers Museum). The Pitt Rivers is well known for its retention of historic labels on objects – even when new labels are added – and this is one of the features which makes the Museum particularly appealing and unique. However, this also means that the Museum is a space filled with outdated and often offensive language which can cause harm (Pitt Rivers Museum). In the Labelling Matters project, the aim is to review visual and textual interpretation, in the gallery and online, and identify areas which might be improved (Pitt Rivers Museum). However,

> The intention of the project is not to destroy any of these unfortunate archives, but to in fact activate and mobilise them to address some of the problems that lie at the root of racialised stereotypes and other problematic systemic colonial legacies that linger in the present. (Pitt Rivers Museum)

This project is informed by a philosophy of Radical Hope. Radical Hope, taken from Lear, is defined as a concept directed towards the future, a future which is good, but the goodness of which may be unknown or unintelligible to those of us in the present. When the traditional conditions of life are no longer possible or no longer make sense, it is Radical Hope which, its advocates say, allows for reimagining and recalibration (Lear). Radical Hope does not focus nostalgically on the exactitudes of the past, but looks forward critically, seeking new ways for a different future. On the cultural loss and trauma suffered by the Crow people, and specifically the leader Plenty Coups' response to it, Lear writes,

> Rather, the commitment is only to the bare possibility that, from this disaster, something good will emerge: the Crow shall somehow survive. Why that will be or how that will be is left open. The hope is held in the face of the recognition that, given the abyss, one cannot really know what survival means. (97)

In other words, rather than being restricted to a "restorative" nostalgia for a lost cultural world, Radical Hope is reflective; it does not forget, but it does move on.

Both restorative and reflective nostalgia are explicitly haunted and haunting, and so too are memory and forgetting, bound up in the action of the spectre. If ghosts are "just forgettings that want to be remembered" and if museums are places which not only contain memory in objects and ideas, but also forgetting through their inevitable practices, then they are inherently entangled (Keshet 1).

Each in their own way, memory, nostalgia, and forgetting can be related to anxiety, anxiety being an essential human emotion which is closely connected to desire, potential, and loss (Walklate, "Anxiety"). Similarly, being haunted is an inherently anxious condition – one in which the revenant returns to taunt with the question "what would happen if you spoke with me?"

anxiety

Following Huyssen, Arnold-de Simine argues that the spread and centrality of the museum in cultural discourse represents a particular kind of anxiety "peculiar to our own time" (8). The proliferation of museums and museum-like activities, as well as the hyperbolic language and behaviour surrounding projects such as the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries' Prejudice and Pride (Sandell et al.), or the National Trusts' *Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties Now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery* (Huxtable et al.), implies a particular kind of cultural concern with (and sometimes panic over) the status of the past in the contemporary world.

This is not, however, a new concern. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Europe and the United States have been shaped by tectonic cultural, political, technological, and natural forces. The World Wars of the early twentieth century, coupled in the UK with the fall of the British Empire, produced a particular kind of existential edginess which still resonates to this day. And since 2000, financial instability, the War on Terror, and looming climate catastrophe have driven society to an intemperate point. I have written elsewhere about the broader consequences of anxiety for museums (Walklate, "Anxiety"), but I want to make here a direct connection between museums, anxiety, and the ghost.

As noted in that previous paper, anxiety as pathology is not something to be used as an academic plaything (Walklate, "Anxiety" 215). But as part of the spectrum of human emotion (and a fairly necessary one at that), anxiety serves particular crucial functions. In his book *Illusion and Reality*, David Smail writes of those of us who are anxious individuals, "that the unnerving knowledge we may possess of a hard and painful reality represents in fact a true insight into the way things are, and not a form of craziness" (vi). In other words, he suggests that there is a rationale for our responses to the world. But beyond this anxiety serves as a heightener of vigilance – specifically, for the future – and in its future orientation, is something uniquely human, whilst also being a useful cognitive survival mechanism (Mathews 456). This orientation towards the future was key to the way in which Kierkegaard understood anxiety as human experience – as a response to the unknown, to possibility – but also to dreams, desires, and their realisation. Kierkegaard saw anxiety as closely connected not only with melancholy, but with the "childlike" "dreaming spirit" (51–52).

How, then, does this connect to the museum and henceforward to the ghost? Museums are, I have argued, inherently anxious institutions, and not purely on the situational level of day-to-day finance, support, and change (though this does cause anxiety) but fundamentally, ontologically – anxiety is prefigured in their very existence, and form (Walklate, "Anxiety") – after all, to preserve something for the future implies at the least a concern for that future, and for memory.

So, perhaps the question is not really about whether or not an institution, media form, or

individual is inherently anxious, but about how they respond to that anxiety. For all social constructs, and specifically museums, there is a risk of what Cameron calls "psychotic withdrawal" – a pulling back, a turning inwards in which the body no longer needs to consider itself as part of a complex and troublesome real world (64). This is the withdrawal characterised by the heterotopia, and it is not a withdrawal, I argue, that a contemporary museum should be willing to make (Walklate, "Heterotopia or Carnival Site?" 36).

In *Museums in a Troubled World*, Robert Janes divides museums into two types (18). The type most akin to that described above is the performer, a type of institution which is so unwilling to risk failure that it limits its own opportunities to progress: it is, in other words, paralysed by its anxiety (18). Janes' second type of museum, however, is the learner (18). The learner is adept and willing to embrace anxiety, and its projection towards desire, towards the future (18). Here, once again, we see the power of the philosophy of Radical Hope that the Pitt Rivers espouses – to take responsibility to work for some good future, even if that is unknown and unknowable.

The ghost, too, is anxious, possesses dreams and desires, makes "voiceless demands." Gordon writes,

> Haunting always registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or being done in the present, and is for this reason quite frightening. But haunting, unlike trauma by contrast, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done. ("Some Thoughts" 2)

For Fisher, on the other hand, haunting was catastrophic. He writes,

> Referring back to Haaglund's distinction between the no longer and the not yet, we can provisionally distinguish two directions in hauntology. The first refers to that which is (in actuality is) no longer, but which remains effective as a virtuality (the traumatic "compulsion to repeat," a fatal pattern). The second sense of hauntology refers to that which (in actuality) has not yet happened, but which is already effective in the virtual (an attractor, an anticipation shaping current behaviour). (*Ghosts of My Life* 19)

In the first direction, the traumatic compulsion to repeat, we might see the continuance of colonial structures of existing privilege and exclusion, traumatic because they are revenant, because we have failed to listen and make recompense. It is apparent in the demand for an a-political heritage industry which can never be fulfilled, in the unwillingness of institutions to consider the full and direct restitution of objects, and in the attachment of some to an identity as Universal Museums. In the second direction, what is the attractor, the "anticipation?" It is that which lies over the precipice of the present, survival or extinction, relevance, or collapse. The ultimate anxiety of the museum is futural – for an institution so apparently focused on the past, its very creation assumes a future in which it will continue to be relevant. But such a future cannot be guaranteed.

We can see, here, two distinct modes by which haunting and anxiety can be associated, with the haunted subject of Gordon far more active and empowered than that of Fisher. But Fisher too suggests that we should be striving for something more – something beyond the landscapes of social democracy and what he terms "capitalist realism" (*Capitalist Realism*). Capitalist realism is defined by Fisher as the idea that only capitalism is a viable politico-economic model, and the condition of believing that any other alternative is impossible (*Ghosts of My Life* 19). Fisher argues that the "lost futures" which did not transpire – of secure utopianism and socialist promise – should rebuke us for our current fixation on nostalgia, which is a product of capitalist realism (25–27). Here, haunting is intensely political, and those who are able to engage with their haunted status have a particular political power, that those who identify with the outsider, with the alien, can understand and "escape from identity, into other subjectivities,

other worlds" (42). For Gordon, these worlds are,

> precisely the domain of toil and trouble, when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done. (*Ghostly Matters* xvi)

Gordon, like Janes' learners, considers this as a space of potential, where a kind of transformative recognition can take place, though not necessarily one without its own limitations and biases (*Ghostly Matters* 9, 22).

Fisher suggests that the hauntological acts which acknowledge the loss of hope for the future at the same time refuse to let go of a desire for that future (*Ghosts of My Life* 21). Fisher describes it as a particularly political form of melancholy, which fails "to accommodate to the closed horizons of capitalist realism" (21).

There is an analogy to be drawn here between Fisher's work and the contemporary museum. If one is to ignore the haunted quality of the museum, to be an institution anxiously attached to a nostalgia for a particular kind of clean and pleasing heritage, to consider the museum and its regulatory strictures as inviolable and primary, then one is stuck within the traumatic compulsion to repeat – one has fallen victim, it could be said, to "colonialist" realism; the only model for culture and heritage is that which we inherited from the imperial past, and there is no alternative.

But to apply Radical Hope, as the Pitt Rivers does, is a refusal to accommodate to these limited horizons. Whilst most discussions of Radical Hope oppose it to a state of despair, for Fisher – and myself – that despair is actually crucial. For Fisher, it is melancholy, or a "neurophilosophical disposition" of depression that offers us a way out of the bind of contemporary lassitude (*Ghosts of My Life* 59), describing it with reference to British post-punk band, Joy Division,

walklate

> The depressive is always confident of one thing: that he is without illusions […] JD followed Schopenhauer through the curtain of Maya, went outside Burrough's Garden of Delights, and dared to examine the hideous machineries that produce the world-as-appearance. What did they see there? Only what all depressives, all mystics, always see: the obscene undead twitching of the Will as it seeks to maintain the illusion that this object, the one it is fixated on NOW, this one, will satisfy it in a way that all other objects thus far have failed to. (60)

The idea that fulfilment is always meaningless in the end is a disturbing one if one takes it at face value. For museums, one might interpret this disturbance as associated with a desire for a complete collection (or to keep collecting forever, indeed), or with a concern about status and authority – wanting stability whilst at the same time questioning everything about that desire, and acknowledging an urgent need for relevance. When we begin to look behind these immediate desires, like Gordon's disturbed thinker or Fisher's neurophilosophical depressive, we come to see them as illusory hopes which we seek to soothe our unsettlement.

On the other hand, however, to embrace this unsettlement without necessarily giving up on the desire for a better future is precisely where the power of haunting for the museum emerges. In this desirous unsettlement, we are situated upon the edge of potential, on the edge of jouissance – a dizzying place for sure, but for all that, an exhilarating one. If a museum can unhook its desire for a better future from its own desire to persist recognisably into that future, the possibilities open to them for action in the present expand.

the unheimliche

The uncanny – the *unheimliche*, the unhomely – is intimately connected to both haunting and museums. Like anxiety – and like hauntology itself – the uncanny can be utilised as a concept to destabilise any (mis)understanding of museums as coherent, complete, or neutral.

To begin, we should attempt to understand this connection. That between haunting and the *unheimlich* is perhaps fairly overt, at least experientially, but it is also worth noting that both *unheimlich* and haunting are connected to the home – the former meaning unhomely, the latter originally meaning "to provide a house, a home" (Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life* 125).

It is through this concept of home, or the dwelling place, that we can start to connect the uncanny to the museum. Museums such as the V&A Dundee wish to see themselves as "the city's living room," and in languages such as Hindi, the word for museum translates to "house of magic." The museum is easily understood as memory's residence, or a home for culture; the temple of the muses.

But it would be simplistic to understand the museum as uncanny purely etymologically. It is necessary, here, to address the idea of the double. The double is a central figure of the uncanny experience and uncanny literature, appearing in the novella of the same name by Dostoyevsky. The protagonist, Golyadkin, a struggling low-level bureaucrat, encounters a duplicate of himself, who possesses all the skill and charm the original lacks. In the end, the original Golyadkin is committed to an asylum, following a psychotic break. According to Freud, this double or *Doppelgänger* is a repetition or even substitution of the self, beginning as a form of continuance, or insurance against death, but over time turning into a reflection of all our lost potential – everything we might have been had things been different – and indeed something which might replace us, as Golyadkin is replaced by his duplicate (141).

The Museum certainly has a double. As Arnold-de Simine acknowledges, though the Enlightenment institution appeared to have left behind the peculiar wonder of the curiosity cabinet, it has not freed itself from an uncanny reflection even today. Arnold-de Simine writes,

> Today, museums are not only places that aim to establish order, and celebrate what is considered beautiful, grandiose, desirable or precious, they replicate the alienated object-relations that characterise modern

society and reveal dark secrets close to home. (199)

Every museum tells more than one story – not just of preservation and lives lived, but also loss, and violence, and mortality. These may be overt, such as the Memorial Museums that Arnold-de Simine discusses in the same monograph, but it is also implicit in every museum space. As I have written elsewhere, to store and collect objects for their future implies a time beyond the presence of one's mortal consciousness – and Pearce has said that collections represent an extension of oneself beyond the grave (63). Remember, too, that the word *heimliche* means not just homely, the opposite of *unheimliche*, but also that which is locked away, "inscrutable" – a "dark secret close to home" (Freud 133; Arnold-de Simine 199).

When the museum allows for a glimpse of these repressed or untold elements, one experiences a haunting of space in which the uncanny nature of the museum comes into full view. Gordon writes,

> What's distinctive about haunting as I use the term (and this is not the only way, of course) is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely. I use the term haunting to describe those singular and yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world loose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blind field comes into view. (*Ghostly Matters* 2)

This is an act of estrangement – *ostranenie*, in Shklovsky's formulation, in which art or its equivalent can "create the sensation of seeing and not merely recognising, things" (162). It is both destructive and creative – a disruption of the status quo which allows for a new way of seeing. A museum may allow for the estrangement of an idea, culture (see, for instance, the use of the ethnographic present in museum labels), society, or object (see notions of "resonance and wonder," for instance), but it can also be experienced as

estranged itself. In its metatextual critique of itself and its history, made possible by its historically charged atmosphere, the Pitt Rivers Museum allows the public to see the form of the museum as a cultural construct, as specifically located in a particular time and place, produced from a unique context, and thus not as something fixed and eternal. In this way, it allows those who encounter it, in whatever form, the opportunity to not merely recognise the museum, but see it. In this estranged space lies a political power – the power of change, and the power of an institution which has been able to understand itself and its form as non-essential, friable, contextual.

The museum is also uncanny through its complex relation to time. Though I deal with this elsewhere (Walklate, *Time and the Museum*), it is important that the museum, like the ghost, is understood as something dyschronic – that is, in it, time is "out of joint." This in theory should be empowering. But if museums are indeed at risk from a fixing of the past into a singular form, a blurring of boundaries between memory, heritage, and the discipline of history, and nostalgia of the traditional kind, then the uncanny capacities of the museum and their value, are lost. Fisher writes,

> This dyschronia, this temporal disjuncture, ought to feel uncanny, yet the predominance of what Reynolds calls "retro-mania" means that it has lost any unheimliche charge: anachronism is now taken for granted. (*Ghosts of My Life* 14)

As a natural space of postmemory (Kunstman 16), the museum needs to be uncanny, to evoke discomfort and estrangement, to produce anxiety and disturbance in memory if it is to have any meaning or power. In order to do so, it needs to recognise, live with, and speak with, its ghosts.

conclusion

Ghosts are frightening – why else would we thrill at their presence or attempt to exorcise them? But they are also intrinsic to being human, and they are, as this paper has shown,

integral to the form of the museum, and essential in understanding their position and role in the contemporary world. We have thus argued here that, in situating museums as institutions of memory, we must also acknowledge their shadow, as spaces of "deadly sweet" nostalgia which has engulfed the early twenty-first century in spectral nationalisms and populist traditionalism (Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life* 111). We have acknowledged that there are routes through pure restorative nostalgia and out the other side, towards a critical perspective which recognises the past, but which moves on from its attachment to it, either through Radical Hope, melancholy, or both. It has also been suggested here that an increased recognition of forgetting as an important facilitator of cultural development and change must be developed; Derrida writes, though, that we must forget just enough that memory is no longer a burden, just enough so that we can listen to the spectres, understand them, work with them (137–38).

Whilst speaking with and working with museum ghosts is an anxious and traumatic act, with it emerges the possibility (and it is only a possibility, so we must nurse it) for greater ethical and political potential. This is the intention behind the Pitt Rivers' recent projects, and their adoption of the idea of Radical Hope. Radical Hope is radical because it is born in uncertainty, in spaces of unknowing; museums, then, as well as – or perhaps instead of – being spaces of cultural comfort, need to recognise their capacity to be uncanny spaces of unsettlement.

Ghosts are frightening, and this is their power. Museums must recover from their amnesia, their attachment to nostalgia, their "psychotic withdrawal," and to welcome their haunting as a chance for dialogue. "Thou art a scholar: speak to it, Horatio." We have a responsibility, not just to ourselves in the present, or those who have gone before, but to those ghosts of people yet to come: as Williston writes, our descendants are extant members of our moral community, and if we fail to acknowledge them, we cannot exercise moral agency rationally, and thus we cannot flourish (177).

Speaking with ghosts is thus a matter of justice – it is necessary to learn to have a conversation with them, to listen, to not speak over them, and to live alongside them in recognition of guilt for past wrongs, and direct acts to improve in the present. I wish to end here with a quote from Derrida, which makes this point rather well,

> No justice – let us not say no law and once again we are not speaking here of laws – seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some responsibility, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born of who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism. Without this non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and thus respect for justice concerning those who are not there, of those who are no longer or who are not yet present and living, what sense would there be to ask the question "where?" "where tomorrow?," "wither?" (xviii)

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note

1 This is not to say that the Pitt Rivers has not considered its problematic history previously – simply that van Broekhaven's appointment has provoked a new surge of reflection.

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Jennifer Walklate
Department of Anthropology, School of Social Sciences
University of Aberdeen
Edward Wright Building
Dunbar Street
Aberdeen AB24 3QY
UK
E-mail: jennifer.walklate@abdn.ac.uk