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Ghostwriting: working out visual culture

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Abstract

This article offers a hauntology of Bentham's panopticon, reviewing its failure to create a perfect visibility and thereby creating ghosts. The visuality of ghosts is examined in a Jewish genealogy from Freud and Proust to Walter Benjamin and Anne Frank. The article concludes with a theoretical consideration of the 'working out' of visual culture as a non-linear but nonetheless historical process that attempts to work out the double-binds of globalization and digital culture.

Key words

ghost • internet • panopticon • visual culture • visuality

It is the time of the ghost, the revenant and the spectre. The ghost is somewhere between the visible and the invisible, appearing clearly to some but not to others. Within the spectrum lies the spectral. In this digital age, the space warriors even want to militarize the hyperspectral. Some hear the ghost speak, for others it is silent. When visual culture tells stories, they are ghost stories. They are stories of the spectre not of spirit, not ontology but hauntology. The ghost is not a retreat to the margins, whether of art history, aesthetics or cultural studies, but is rather an assertion that the virtual is in some sense real, and the paranormal normal, as what was formerly invisible comes into visibility. The revenant comes back not to address the past but to speak in a voice which is not one to the future. As Jacques Derrida (1996) has argued, it is 'open to a future radically *to come*, which is to say indeterminate' (p. 70).[1] The ghost is in the machine that is the network but it is not of it. It finds a way to reappear but it is not everywhere. It is in between – between the visible and the invisible, the material and the immaterial, the palpable and the impalpable, the voice and the phenomenon. The ghost is that which could not be seen in the panoptic spectrum and it has many names in many languages: diasporists, exiles, queers, migrants, gypsies, refugees, Tutsis, Palestinians. The ghost is one place among many from which to interpellate the networks of visibility that have constructed, destroyed and deconstructed the modern visual subject. By

the visual subject, I mean a person who is both constituted as an agent of sight (regardless of his or her biological capacity to see) and as the effect of a series of categories of visual subjectivity.

Let's imagine a beginning. In 1786 the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham invented a perfect prison that he called the panopticon. The panopticon was an inspection house for the reformation of morals, whether of prisoners, workers or prostitutes, by means of constant surveillance that the inmates could not perceive, a system summed up by Michel Foucault in the aphorism 'visibility is a trap'. Bentham imagined that the panopticon would be built mostly of iron and glass, suitably modern materials for the new system, which he called 'a glass bee-hive' (Semple, 1993: 116). Had it actually been constructed in this way, the Panopticon would have looked more like the Crystal Palace than the Victorian prison. In France, it would have been a cousin to the Arcades, the covered shopping and leisure arenas that have become an emblem of the 19th century, following Walter Benjamin's extensive exploration of their history. An early demonstration in the Passage des Panoramas showed the new gas lighting to intrigued Parisians (Schivelbusch, 1988: 26). From 1822, the Arcades and other public spaces began to be lit by gas as a house-to-house network for the delivery of what was then called the 'spirit' was constructed. Here is a critical mix indeed – the panoptic institution illuminated by the new visual technologies of gas and electricity, yet haunted by spirits and, as we shall see, ghosts. This web of visuality was long held in place by the constraining lines of disciplinary power but is now starting to unravel. This essay is, then, a series of notes towards a possible surfing of the visual network in ghost time. Ghosts are, by their nature, beings that reappear at unpredictable times and places but with cause. They are pure medium, transmitting at certain moments without a published schedule.

Bentham's device was the creature of the global culture of his day. It was borrowed from a Russian system adopted or created by his brother in St Petersburg. It owed its notion of moral discipline to such institutions as the Jesuit missions in Paraguay, and the slave plantations of the Caribbean. Finally, it was devised as a solution to the British prison problem that was actually resolved with transportation to Australia. It was an imperial totalizing vision that sought to recast the world in its own image. To deal with the specificity of panopticism thus requires a wide scope both in terms of time and space. To concentrate on the usual 'specific example' is to examine the instance but not the system. In Foucault's view, the panopticon was a model for the disciplinary society at large but the practices of visibility were not part of his inquiry. Rather, he simply assumed with Bentham that a straight sight line equated to visibility. For visual culture, visibility is not so simple. Its object of study is precisely the entities that come into being at the points of intersection of visibility with social power, that is to say, visuality. In 1841, the bombastic historian Thomas Carlyle made the first use of the term 'visuality', in his proto-Nietzschean paean to the Hero. Describing Dante he argued that in the Divine Comedy: 'every compartment of it is worked out, with intense earnestness, into truth, into clear visuality' (Carlyle, 1841: 149). With the simultaneous invention of photography, the emergent disciplinary society now had both the terminology and the technology to describe this condition, the state of being a visual subject in colonial modernity. By taking another look at the constitution of panopticism, the apparently brand-new

confusion of visuality in the present might come to be seen as the breakdown of an already existing web of visuality that has escaped its disciplinary borders, in all senses of the term. If, as most of its practitioners have asserted, visual culture is defined more by the questions it asks than the objects it studies, then it may be that some of those questions are now becoming clearer: How was the visual subject constituted in modernity and how is it now being refashioned? In what ways can a network be thought and how can a networked subject be understood? How are the politics of visual identity to be constructed in this latest era of globalization? And in what ways can narratives of past, present and future be written to account for these changes, in ways that are fashioned both by an awareness of history and the very Western construct that is History?

Imagining ghosts

Pure visibility was indeed at the heart of panopticism but it proved impossible to achieve either in theory or practice. The visibility described by Foucault was the fantasy of clairvoyance: a crisply focused field of observation, in which nothing is obscure, literally and metaphorically. Only in Neo-Classical painting, like Jacques-Louis David's paradigmatic work, could the required limpidity of the visual field be achieved. It proved impossible to generate the permanent visibility of the panopticon's inmates. Bentham at first suggested that two large windows be placed in each cell, in effect backlighting the prisoners. It also had the unfortunate consequence of making it remarkably easy to escape, as prison administrators were quick to point out (Semple, 1993: 120). So he redesigned the lighting system, first suggesting the use of mirrors and finally gas lighting but never fully resolving the difficulty that has now been solved by closed-circuit television. It might be argued that, as a pure panopticon was never built, these details are of no consequence. However, Foucault (1977) derived from the panopticon the principle of power itself:

> Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes.... The Panopticon is a marvelous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogenous effects of power. (p. 201)

If the distribution of lights, gazes and surfaces within the panopticon were changed, then it would have disrupted the principle of power. The power of visuality was in fact far from homogenous. Bentham knew what lurked within his panopticon papers: 'it is like opening a drawer where devils are locked up – it is breaking into a haunted house' (Semple, 1993: 16). He even came to realize that solitary confinement, a key part of his plan, was in fact its undoing as a system of visibility: 'in a state of solitude, infantine superstitions, ghosts and spectres, recur to the imagination' (p. 132). In short, the marvelous machine was out of order. The prisoner could neither be perfectly visible nor be constantly aware of disciplinary surveillance. Consequently, they were not disciplined, but simply punished: they became ghosts.

A striking example of this process was the transformation of Oscar Wilde during his

imprisonment. While on remand in Holloway, awaiting his first trial in 1895, Wilde wrote to his friends Ada and Ernest Leverson, complaining of loneliness: 'Not that I am really alone. A slim thing, gold-haired like an angel, stands always at my side. His presence overshadows me. He moves in the gloom like a white flower' (Wilde, 1962: 389). He referred of course to Lord Alfred Douglas, seeming here to anticipate Alan Sinfield's (1994) argument that he and Douglas together formed a 'queer image' (p. 123). This Romantic view of imprisonment did not long survive the actual experience of a Victorian gaol. A year later Wilde petitioned the Home Secretary for early release from Reading, uncannily echoing Bentham's words quoted earlier:

> It is natural that living in this silence, this solitude, this isolation from all human and humane influences, this tomb for those who are not yet dead, the petitioner should, day and night in every waking hour, be tortured by the fear of absolute and entire insanity.

The very solitude ensured in Wilde's view that the mind became 'in the case of those who are suffering from sensual monomanias (Wilde's self-diagnosis), the sure prey of morbid passions, and obscene fancies, and thoughts that defile, desecrate and destroy' (Wilde, 1962: 403). After a brief inspection by Home Office doctors, Wilde was found sane. In November 1896, when he received this news, Wilde (1962) completed his transformation into a spectre:

> I shall return an unwelcome visitant to a world that does not want me; a *revenant*, as the French say, as one whose face is grey with long imprisonment and crooked with pain. Horrible as are the dead when they rise from their tombs, the living who come out from tombs are more horrible still. (p. 413)

The disciplinary institution had turned the doubled, queer image of Wilde–Douglas into a single revenant, just as Bentham had belatedly realized it would.

Electric spirits

There have, of course, been ghosts for as long as there have been people. The ghosts under discussion here had certain specific peculiarities. For example, in the 19th century, ghosts became electric. They were supposed to manifest themselves using electricity and they were detected by electricity. You can now buy on the internet a ghost-hunting device that works by detecting changes in electrical current, which reveal the presence of the spectres. Electricity was at the same time the light source of clairvoyant panopticism and was the subject of interminable comment in the period, just like today's obsession with the digital. In his description of the Arcades, Benjamin nostalgically regretted the passing of the flickering gas lights, but quoted Jacques Fabien describing in 1863 how electricity came to illuminate panoptic institutions from bottom to top: 'The bright light of electricity served, at first, to illuminate the subterranean galleries of mines; after that, the public squares and streets; then factories, workshops, stores, theatres, military barracks; finally, the

domestic interior' (Benjamin, 1999: 567). The electricity that modernized the Arcades also showed the existence of ghosts and spirits. Women mediums were suddenly able to access the spirit world on what was called 'the spirit telegraph'. Mediums would pass a cable round the circle that would end in buckets of copper and zinc, thereby creating a 'spirit battery' (Sconce, 2000: 29–30). The séance was a literally shocking affair, as visitors clasped this lightly charged cord. It was held that women's bodies were in some ineffable way more susceptible to conducting electricity and hence to the channeling of spirits that were in effect electric. I have been calling panopticism clairvoyant. Clairvoyance was understood in the period to mean 'seeing with the eyes closed', an accomplishment of spirit mediums, and especially seeing things at a distance, which is what we now call television. Clairvoyance was, then, a desire for unlimited sight that the new technologies of the period seemed all but ready to deliver, just as new media today promise access to all manner of visualized knowledges. It was a willed desire for a clear field of vision, a fantasy that could only be sustained by ignoring its anomalies.

Clairvoyance anticipated the visual technology that would come to epitomize it. In 1837 Mlle Pigeaire, a clairvoyant medium, was examined by the French Academy of Medicine, two years before the Academy of Sciences was astounded by Daguerre's photographic medium (Podmore, 1963: 142). Soon the two media joined together. From 1861 onwards, the presence of spirits was attested to by photographs that were very widely discussed and debated. Despite endless skeptical tests, spirit photographers nonetheless managed to produce their images. In a positivist age these plates convinced many, for, in the words of the editor of *The British Journal of Photography*: 'the photograph itself is not for nothing.' Spiritism was in no sense anti-modern and relied on the same sciences of magnetism and electricity as their materialist opponents. Spiritualists cited Freud in support of their contentions, especially as women and effeminate men were held to be most susceptible to the spirit influence (Owen, 1989).

It is important to note that this internal configuration of the ghost as as a gendered and sexualized other was reinforced by the Western perception that the colonized were in thrall to spirits, spirits that nonetheless succeeded in scaring those 'rational' colonizers. These spirits had long been a part of resistance to slavery and colonialism (Casid, 2002). Descended from that history are such practices as the coming down of the spirit in African American churches, the jazz spirit and the clandestine religion of Santéria. Intriguingly, colonizers in the late 19th century found a wave of resistance in the spirit wars of the period, ranging from the well-known Ghost Dances of the American Indians to the *minkisi* (singular *nkisi*) power figures that so disturbed Europeans like Joseph Conrad in the Congo. The *nkisi* was used to request the help of the spirits against an enemy. There are so many fine examples in American and European museums precisely because the Belgians believed that they worked and did everything they could to eradicate them. In a certain sense the *nkisi* figure is a counter-camera, as its medicine compartment was usually fronted with glass, like a lens, and it would then be activated by having a piece of metal driven into it – in other words, it was shot, like a camera. The interpenetration of the West and its others was nowhere more marked than in the domain of the spirits, even as Hegel and his epigones denied to those outside the European charm circle the possibility of Spirit.

A Jewish hauntology

And even in Europe, the city of light had its own spirit war and the ghost was at once old and new. The Jewish ghost is the vantage point of this hauntology, not because Jewishness is claimed as a new paradigm, but precisely because of its ambivalences and ambiguities. Jewishness, like the ghost, is an identity that is not identical to itself. How is Jewishness even to be defined: as a religion – but what of secular Jews? As an ethnicity – but isn't that the Nazi game? As a nation – but what of anti-Zionist Jews? My interest is in the unconvinced Jewish person for whom Jewish identity is that which refuses to be defined in a singular or exclusive way, but also that which cannot be reduced. In these so-called post-identity times, perhaps Jewishness, which figured very late in the multicultural identity politics of the 1980s and early 1990s, might be an interesting way into the network. Jews had long been considered the internal other of medieval and early modern Europe. But by 1900, this alterity had been complicated in at least three significant ways. In the wake of the French Revolution, nations around Europe gradually lifted the civil and legal restrictions on the Jews, abolishing the legal boundary between gentiles and Jews. Taking advantage of this new freedom, many European Jews acculturated to the hegemonic civil society around them, provoking critiques from within and without the Jewish world. In addition, there were increasingly more Jews in Europe as nations like France and Britain took in many Jews fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe and Russia's Pale of Settlement. This situation made it unclear what it was to be Jewish. For such ambivalent Jews as Proust, Benjamin and Freud, the answer was that they were ghosts.

In the third volume of *Remembrance of Things Past*, Marcel Proust drew an extended comparison between Jews and spirit photographs. Introducing a set piece description of the salon of Mme de Villeparisis, Proust meditates on the presence of Jews in Parisian high society at the beginning of the Dreyfus Affair. Although Proust was himself Jewish, the Narrator of the novel contemplates Jews as an astonishing apparition:

> It struck me that if in the light of Mme de Villeparisis' drawing room I had taken some photographs of Bloch, they would have given an image of Israel identical with those we find in spirit photographs – so disturbing because it does not appear to emanate from humanity, so deceptive because it nonetheless resembles humanity all too closely. (Proust, 1982: 195)[2]

Here the Jew is literally a ghost, something that resembles the human even as it is not human, rather like the cyborg of our own time. Like the Terminator, the ghost says: 'I'll be back.' And indeed throughout Proust's exegesis of this salon, Bloch and his concerns with the Dreyfus Affair recur again and again, skirmishes in the spirit war disrupted high society's image of itself as a sealed elite sphere, just as the spirit photograph suggested that materialist science could not account for the textures of everyday life.

A decade later another Jewish intellectual was forced to confront his own image:

> I was sitting alone in my *wagon-lit* compartment when a more than usually

violent jolt of the train swung back the door of the adjoining washing cabinet, and an elderly gentleman in a dressing gown and a travelling cap came in.... Jumping up with the intention of putting him right, I at once realized to my dismay that the intruder was nothing but my own reflection in the looking-glass on the open door. I can still recollect that I thoroughly disliked his appearance. (Freud, 1955: 248 note 1)

Sigmund Freud concluded that he had not so much been scared by the encounter with his 'double' as that he had failed to recognize it. He was too self-aware not to suggest that there was a trace of what he called the 'uncanny' in his mistake. The uncanny is a rough English equivalent to the complicated German word *unheimlich*, which Freud (1955) himself glossed as meaning: 'everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light' (p. 225). What is visible as *unheimlich* is at once everything that is not at home or domestic and the sense that a house might be *unheimlich* if it were haunted. In Freud's own case, the secret to be concealed is very often his own Jewishness, which he confronts here as the ghost of his father. Freud's uncanny encounter with his own image caused him to make a mistake because the person in the reflection seemed to be Jewish, the Jewish father. Like Salman Rushdie in a recent story, Freud found that after losing his father for many years, he re-emerged one day in the mirror. The meeting took place not on the mythic battlements of Elsinore where Hamlet met his father's ghost but in that paradigm of modernity, the train. At the end of the Enlightenment emancipation settlement, in which Jews were supposed to be men on the outside and Jews on the inside (gender intended), the doubled Jew became two people in a process that Freud called 'a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self' (Freud, 1955: 234). The Jew divided between inside and outside now became two people; or more exactly, one person and a ghost, with neither sure which they really were. That uncertainty was viral in modern Europe, as Proust's account shows. It made the home *unheimlich*, the body a source of suspicion and the name devoid of meaning under the surveillance of an increasingly haunted panopticism.

Writing to Gershom Scholem in 1928 at a time when he himself was constantly deferring a move to Jerusalem to stay on just a little longer in Greek Europe, to use Matthew Arnold's terms, Walter Benjamin claimed:

> This is perhaps my last chance to devote myself to the study of Hebrew and to everything we think is connected with it. First and foremost, in terms of my being ready for the undertaking, heart and soul. Once I have one way or another completed the project on which I am currently working, carefully and provisionally – the highly remarkable and extremely precarious essay 'Paris Arcades: A Dialectical Fairy Play'. (Scholem and Adorno, 1994: 332)

At this stage, then, the Arcades Project itself was a ghost story in opposition to a 'Jewish' experiment. In the very first draft of subject headings for the Arcades Project, there was an entry for 'ghetto' that Benjamin did not develop (Benjamin, 1999: 519).[3] Later the Arcades became a Jewish-free Arcadia until the return of the ghost.

Haunted as he was by the loss of the world of the Arcades, Benjamin saw them as

being the place of ghosts. He recounts a complex dream centered on the fear of doors in which he walked with a friend, only for a ghost to appear in the window of a house:

> And as we walked on, the ghost accompanied us from inside all the houses. It passed through all the walls and always remained at the same height with us. I saw this, though I was blind. The path we travel through arcades is fundamentally such a ghost walk, on which doors give way and walls yield. (Benjamin, 1999: 409)

It seems that we walk in the Arcades not with the ghost but as the ghost, a being for whom walls and houses are no obstacle to the gaze. As Benjamin suggested, houses and doors are not unusual dream symbols. Freud read the house as representing the body, and a door as being an orifice. Benjamin's fear of the open door perceived with his castrated dream vision[4] is then the fear of the open body, the uncivilized or uncanny body that exceeds its limits. In the Western European economy of the period (that is to say, a household or *oikonomos*) the body that cannot be named is the Jewish body, the absent presence in the Arcades. As Benjamin imagines himself wandering through the convolutes of the Arcades, using avatars like Baudelaire and Blanqui, he never encounters Jews, whose peculiar absence becomes ghostly.

Clearly my work is itself further haunted by the ghost of the Holocaust, from its choice of theory to its subjects like Freud and Benjamin who fled the Nazis with differing results. Rather than being an attempt to claim a Holocaust sublime that places one's work beyond question, this positioning is a recognition that the Holocaust is, for a variety of reasons, ever more central to contemporary visual culture. In film alone, recent treatments range from mainstream films like *The Prince of Egypt* and *Saving Private Ryan* to independent pieces such as *Paragraph 175* or *Aimée and Jaguar*. What work are these Holocaust films, TV shows, art pieces and comics trying to do, it might be asked? In this connection, Dominick LaCapra (1992) has emphasized a distinction between representation that simply acts out its trauma and that which finally seeks to work it through. In my estimation, this comforting alternance cannot in fact be enacted. Rather visual culture is currently working out – working itself out, creating work, exercising itself – but with no expectation of working through to another side that no longer seems available. When Attorney General John Ashcroft has used the therapeutic language of closure to justify the closed-circuit television relay of the execution of Timothy McVeigh, some working out of new terms is in order. As the 'West' endlessly deploys the ghosts of the Holocaust to represent itself both as victim and redeemer, critics of visual culture need to follow Marcellus' old advice to Horatio and speak to them. It is of course precisely silence that has so often been demanded in the face of the Shoah but one needs to be able to make a distinction between the abyss that has come to be known by the proper name Auschwitz and its multiple representations in the present.

By way of example, I want to explore briefly the visual culture of perhaps the best known ghost of the Shoah, Anneliese Marie Frank, known to the world as Anne Frank. She began to write what might well be called her prison writings on her 13th birthday in June 1942 (Frank, 1989: 177). By beginning on the day when a Jewish

boy becomes a man, Frank asserted another emancipation, that of Jewish women. Soon afterwards, the family was forced into hiding. Anne immediately pasted the walls with her collection of postcards and film stars, noting: 'I have transformed the walls into one gigantic picture' (p. 217). Some of these pictures have survived and present a striking bricolage ranging from Greta Garbo and other Hollywood stars to by now obscure Nazi-era screen actors, reproductions of Rembrandt paintings, Dutch landscapes, a medieval Pieta and family pictures. The Franks were observant enough to fast for Yom Kippur in hiding and at the same time, despite all the problems that Anne had with her family, these Christian and other graven images were in no way controversial. Anne's picture wall enacted the tensions of her past identity – at once assimilated, Dutch, Jewish and modern – that was now gone, a ghost. Unable to look out openly, she and her sister Margot would take turns peeking out from behind the blinds while the other bathed, turning the front office into their own camera obscura (Frank, 1989: 257). In a peculiar irony, she had received a book entitled *The Camera Obscura* on her birthday that she traded because her older sister Margot already owned it.

The Anne that we know visually through her famous photographs was not familiar to Anneliese. Annotating her own images, Anne wrote: 'This photograph is horrible and I look absolutely nothing like it' (Frank, 1989: 190). Like Freud, Anne Frank was dismayed by her own double, its uncanny quality enhanced precisely by her homeless condition. In response, as she grew older, Frank redoubled herself. In January 1944 she wrote to her imaginary friend: 'Isn't it odd, Kitty, that sometimes I look at myself through someone else's eyes? I see quite keenly then how things are with Anne Frank'. On another sheet, she continued: 'I browse through the pages of her life as if she were a stranger' (p. 455). Anne looks at herself from the point of view of the ghost and sees that she used to think of herself as 'a bit of an outsider', a position that her imprisonment had made unavailable. In her recent series, *Anne in New York*, the American artist Rachel Schreiber inserted the very photograph of Anne Frank that so displeased its subject into Iris prints of Manhattan, using Adobe PhotoShop software. Such is the iconic power of this image that almost all viewers at first wonder how the artist was able to graffiti Anne's picture in so many different places. Despite the well-known possibilities of digitally altering images, the gallery audience finds Anne Frank too iconic to be a manipulation.

What is at stake in this doubled recognition and misrecognition? It might be said that it represents a return of the real. Perhaps, so long as we agree with Avery Gordon that '*it's not that the ghosts don't exist*' (Gordon, 1997: 12).[5] Anne Frank's head seems at home in New York precisely because she is always already there, for real. Anne Frank is always already in New York because she enacts a displacement and disavowal of the new anxieties in the ghost of the old. In New York, there are many survivors of the Holocaust in its various forms and still more people at some degree of separation from those events. In an intriguing counterpoint, the Dutch photographer Renate Dijkstra exhibited a series of large-scale color photographs of teenage Dutch girls in 2001 at the same age as Anne Frank in captivity. In what was her physical home, Anne Frank now needs to be imagined in contemporary as well as historical terms, as if her icon has somehow lost its valency. These local Annes have always been overshadowed by her Other, the Universal Anne Frank, whose half-sentence 'I still believe people are really good' has become a motto of liberal

humanism. This Anne has been so disturbing to some that Cynthia Ozick notoriously wished her diary had been burnt in a 1997 essay that first appeared in the *New Yorker* magazine. The famous diary was represented here as a travesty that had been: 'bowdlerized, distorted, transmuted, traduced, reduced ... infantilized, Americanized, homogenized, sentimentalized ... falsified, kitschified, and, in fact, blatantly and arrogantly denied' (Ozick, 1997). For Ozick, if Anne is in New York, she needs to be exorcised. In line with this thinking, a recent volume addressing the experience of children in the Holocaust (although only Jewish children are considered) makes no mention of Anne Frank, seemingly for fear of displacing the Jewishness of the Holocaust (Brostoff and Chamovitz, 2001). As a new Orthodoxy seeks to define Jewishness in as closed a fashion as possible, the Universal Anne Frank has become an object of contestation that itself reveals past and present aporias of identity.

In May 2001, an ABC television mini-series on the life of Anne Frank claimed the mantle of universality by wrapping her in the family values of Walt Disney. Disney chair Michael Eisner appeared before both episodes to mention the name Disney as often as possible, while warning 'parents' that certain scenes were potentially disturbing to children. What Eisner found disturbing was not Nazism but the glimpses of nudity in the concentration camp scenes. He boasted that the last section would be shown without advertising but in fact only 30 minutes of the 4 hours were without commercials. ABC had no qualms in showing an advertisement for Viagra, the erection-inducing drug, just after a 'teaser' clip showing Nazi violence to come in the next segment. The implied logic that aging S/M Nazi freaks[6] might be inspired by the clip to purchase Viagra would, of course, be anathema to Disney, but today's sophisticated media-viewers – especially children – are adept at making such connections. Anne Frank's ghost is, then, haunting and hunted in New York, while at the same time being invoked for the hawking of all manner of products.

It is not surprising that the Holocaust has come to be named as a young woman in the era of globalization. For globalization has enacted a shift not just in relations of consumption but in relations of production, as Gayatri Spivak (1999) has argued: 'The subaltern woman is now to a rather large extent the support of production' (p. 67). This condition is not acknowledged in the West except insofar as globalization as culture is figured as feminine, which I take to be a contested cultural category rather than a biological given. The contradiction of this moment can be expressed in many ways but here's one that I was using from late 2000 until recently: the Iranian video artist Shirin Neshat is rightly becoming a global star for her explorations of the gendered divide in Islamic culture. Neshat's video work is lushly cinematic, creating 10-minute epics with casts of hundreds. Black-veiled women hired on location pirouette at the edge of the sea in a disidentification with Orientalism that is nonetheless starkly beautiful (Zabel, 2001). Neshat's critique of gender segregation in Islam fits a little too comfortably with Western stereotypes, even as the policing of gender in her native Iran has been somewhat relaxed. At the same time, the Taliban in Afghanistan were holding public destructions of artworks, TV sets and videotapes while forcibly constraining women to the home and making them literally invisible in public behind the veil. The Taliban's anti-modernity relied on the global media to disseminate their actions and discipline their own subjects,

even as it disavowed visual culture, in the knowledge that the least convinced Afghans were still clandestinely watching television. This counterpoint was felt most acutely in the 'West' as part of the ongoing drama of imagining the disjunctures of global media.[7] Even as the dust settles from the disaster of September 11 and the war in Afghanistan, it is worth noticing that, despite the unusual conversion to feminism of figures like First Lady Laura Bush during the war, the new Afghan government announced in January 2002 that adultery by women would still be punished by public stoning to death. Although the war against the Taliban was retroactively announced as, in effect, a war for women (recalling Spivak's famous line: 'White men saving brown women from brown men'), it appears to have ended as another enactment of Baudrillard's hyperreal. In this hypervisual network, past and present, 'West' and 'non-West', real and virtual become more than usually confused. In the time of the ghost, there is no base or superstructure to ground the phantom. Where, after all, do ghosts go to ground?

Ghost histories

To make such an argument is, however, to lay oneself open to an accusation that has been widely leveled against visual culture, namely that in some way it is ahistorical or lacks a base. As visual culture is, despite certain affinities, neither history nor sociology, such accusations can be taken as slightly displaced variants of a more fundamental charge. For in a United States academy still adhering to Fredric Jameson's aphorism 'Always historicize', to be deemed ungrounded in history, or even worse transhistorical, is to be placed under anathema by the intellectual left. So it is important to work this out. It is clear that no ghost is indifferent to the time and place of its hauntings. The spectre is nothing if not historical. So there is no possibility of visual culture's hauntology of visual media being anything other than historical. The question is whose history, told in what way and at what time?

In the first instance, it is now perhaps time to historicize historicism, a process that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have begun with their important book *Empire* (2000). It has been widely argued in postcolonial and subaltern studies that history is itself an important constituent of the modern imperial nation state (Chakrabarty, 2000). In his consideration of the spectre, Derrida highlights ten points of key importance in discussing what he calls the 'new international'. He is critically concerned to displace the 'ontopology'[8] of the nation-state ('an axiomatics linking indissolubly the ontological value of present-being to its *situation*, to stable and presentable determination of a locality, the *topos* of territory, native soil, city, body in general'). As is his wont, Derrida (1994) reverses the usual formulas and asserts that: 'all national rootedness ... is rooted first of all in the memory or the anxiety of a displaced or displaceable population' (pp. 82–3). National history, then, is dependent on the exclusion of those who are or might be or have been displaced. In his gloss on this passage, Homi Bhabha (1996) locates his interest in the

> ... transient intersection where the claims to national culture within the ontopological tradition ... are touched – and are translated by – the interruptive and interrogative memory of the displaced or displaceable

populations that inhabit the national imaginary – be they migrants, minorities, refugees, or the colonized. (p. 191)

These memories are the spectral within the spectrum of the panopticon, whose flickering conjurations are now being made visible.

In this context, it comes to seem less of a coincidence that so many practitioners of visual culture are Jewish, queer, in diaspora, from ethnic or sexual minorities, exiles – in short, the ghosts of history, overlooked and unseen by the endlessly evoked History that depends on displacing what might be called its own transyness. Ghost writing visual culture is certainly transy, so long as that is understood to mean looking at the in-between, the transnational, the transient, the transgendered and the migratory. How do ghosts look? Not from a single point of view, what Donna Haraway called the god-trick. Nor does a ghost see itself seeing itself. The ghost sees that it is seen and thereby becomes visible to itself and others in the constantly weaving spiral of transculture, a transforming encounter that leaves nothing the same as it was before. These multiple viewpoints are the digital equivalent of the 'strange affinities' that Walter Benjamin found in the Arcades, thrown together by the happenstance of the division of labor, the property market, and the new architectural environment of the Arcades. In the view of Fernando Ortiz, transculture is the product of an encounter between an existing culture or subculture and a newly arrived migrant culture that violently transforms them both and in the process creates a neo-culture that is itself immediately subject to transculturation (Ortiz, 1995). This transculturation is in turn subject to difference and deferral. The difference is what James Clifford has called the Squanto effect, named for the Pequot Indian who met the Pilgrim Fathers just after his return from Britain, where he had learnt English (Clifford, 1988). In other words, cultures were never isolated islands, developing by themselves. The deferral comes from what Emmanuel Levinas called the ethical obligation to the Other that results from the 'face-to-face' encounter at the heart of transculture (Levinas, 1990). I cannot privilege my own culture in this encounter but must defer and accept my responsibility to the Other. Ortiz wrote on and about the island of Cuba. Transculture and transyness seem closer to Edouard Glissant's figure of the archipelago, a series of connected islands.

The virtue of the archipelago is that a series of very different entities can be connected. What seems to be critical at the present moment is precisely the means by which cultures and peoples are connected – the medium of cables and electricity, the linking computer code, and the attention economy. This narrative has been linked rather than being temporally consecutive or focused on one moment of space-time. It is part of a wider project to think in ways that might help us to think in networked, connected and linked forms that are not training for global capital so much as a necessary means of approaching resistance. Examples like RTMark.com, the corporate sabotage site, suggest that a certain subversion is possible from within the network, even as it absorbs that subversiveness as 'content'. Events like the Seattle and Genoa protests against global capitalism, the most prominent direct action of its kind, were co-ordinated and arranged on specially created websites. Shareware like Napster and freeware like Linux threatened to undermine the digital boom before it imploded of its own accord. In drawing attention to what is linked, there is at the same time the prospect that value will be created (Beller, 2002). By

their very nature, linking and networking have no inherent, essential qualities but will always be complex, hybrid systems generating both predictable and unpredictable outcomes.

The link is a peculiarity of the internet, perhaps its most salient feature. For digital critic Steven Johnson (1997), 'the link is the first significant new form of punctuation to emerge in centuries'. Yet he at once asserts the historicity of the link, deriving it from Charles Dickens' technique of 'links of association'. He cites a passage in *Great Expectations*, in which Pip muses on his attraction to Estrella:

> What was it that was borne in upon my mind when she stood still and looked attentively at me? ... What was it? ... As my eyes followed her white hand, again the same dim sensation that I could not possibly grasp, crossed me. My involuntary start occasioned her to lay her hand upon my arm. Instantly the ghost passed once more and was gone. (pp. 111–12)

A moment of looking calls up the ghost, a link to some unknown end that can sometimes be accessed and sometimes not. Proust would of course devote many pages to a complex exploration of this sensory link between present and past.

This sensual aspect to connectivity calls up the ghost of connection in its 18th-century sense as a sexual connection (Mirzoeff, forthcoming). It further suggests that Sandy Stone's suggestion that everyone is transgender on-line has been borne out by the expansion of the internet as a medium for sexual experimentation. While it is fashionable to argue that these role plays have had little effect in the 'real' world, it is interesting to note that the Australian Green Party very prominently stood a transgender candidate in the Federal elections of 2001 and saw its national vote increase significantly.[9] The digital link brings together in apparently seamless, but actually unpredictable ways, sites in all senses that may not have any self-evident connection. In their recent mapping of the internet by its links, IBM researchers discovered that the internet does not form an evenly spaced grid, network, or even rhizome. Rather it forms into a bow tie with dangling tendrils of connections, with a dense center of highly connected sites (Yahoo, Google, MSN) and a periphery of diminishingly linked locations. But a significant fraction of materials on the web – up to a third, by some estimates – are what has been called 'dark matter', pages or sites that are inaccessible from any other location. Such pages are in intranets, behind firewalls or simply pages without added links. Far from being rhythmic or automatic, linking becomes a critical act in all senses, an act of agency that makes a connection and grows the network.

From William Gibson's first representation of cyberspace in his 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, there have always been ghosts on the net. In Gibson's case, they were the *lwas* of Haitian vodun. There is a multifaceted ghost net out there now, just as he predicted. Firstly, there are the abandoned networks themselves. Enormous sums have been invested in creating network connections that do not yet seem to be paying off. In July 2001, the fiber-optic communications company JDS Uniphase posted a staggering loss of US$50.6 billion generated by enormous investment in new cable, a lost bet on the apparently never-ending need for connections. It has been estimated that only 5 percent of the fiber-optic cable in the United States is

'lit', that is to say actively carrying information. The rest is the ghost net. The ghost net surfaces in everyday surfing as ghost sites, pages that are no longer updated or maintained but are still there, lurking. As the dot.com boom became the dot.combustion, many sites posted farewell messages and went down. These signs are gateways to the ghost net. At the same time, the active net can be used for ghost hunting. Webcams are trained on reportedly haunted sites and ghost hunters can watch and wait, freezing any image that might be supernatural into a grid of pixels for others to muse over. Just as in the 19th century, the question is always: is it real, faked or a mistake? What would a real digital ghost look like and in what spectrum would it appear?

In this new moment, so haunted by so many pasts and futures that it seems like a moment of eternal return, artists, critics, and image-makers of all kinds are searching for a means to represent the new reality. Just as movements like Cubism expressed a radical recreation of the real, there is a sense that such a recasting is again needed. If it is to be accomplished, it will not look like the old avant-garde with a small group working in a single place whether Paris, São Paulo or Sydney. It will be transient and transforming, a multiple viewpoint for an intensely interconnected time. The abyssal quality of the endlessly returning link is dizzying to behold. The ghost is at once a link and an example of endless return that is nonetheless different on each occasion: think of the ghost in *Hamlet*, who is visible to all in Act One but only to Hamlet in Act Three. Critical work requires working out which cluster of links, or which ghosts, to isolate and highlight and why. Why do it? Not to establish a digital avant-garde but as a tactic to counter the vertigo of everyday life in the late capitalist global economy. This vertigo is occasioned by the anxiety felt by visual subjects as the clairvoyant gaze of the panoptic institution is occluded by the flickering signifiers of digital culture, and as that gaze itself becomes indifferent to what it sees. As clairvoyance withdraws from 'a public space profoundly upset by techno-tele-media apparatuses', there becomes visible '*there where they were already there without being there*' (Derrida, 1994: 79), the ghosts.

Acknowledgement

Notes

1. For a development of this idea see my essay 'The Multiple Viewpoint: Diasporic Visual Cultures', in Mirzoeff (2000: 1–18).
2. In the preceding passages, Proust used the derogatory term *Juif* repeatedly but ascribes Bloch to Israel, thereby making him an assimilated *Israelite*, a 'French' rather than 'Eastern' Jew. See the Pléiade edition of Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1988), tome II, 489.
3. Benjamin's first draft was a collaboration with Frank Hessel.
4. Lacan (1981) argued that 'our position in the dream is profoundly that of someone who does not see. The subject does not see where it is leading, he follows' (p. 75). Benjamin's leap was to transfer the dream state to the historical setting of the Arcades, in accord with his notion that the 19th century was persistently in a dream.
5. Original emphasis; my thanks to Janet Wolff for this reference.

6. These concerns are addressed in Rachel Schreiber's remarkable 1996 video piece, 'Please Kill Me, I'm a Nigger Faggot Jew' that puts into contact a family photograph album of her grandparents' visit to Europe in 1937 and the artist's online questionnaire to Nazi S/M adepts.

7. These terms are adopted from Arjun Appadurai's now classic definition of globalization (1996).

8. I find this neologism less difficult than the language of IPOs, margin calls, GATT, watching the Fed, WTO, rationalization, correlative damage and so on that is the new international's own vocabulary and has passed into common usage.

9. I am not suggesting that the transgender issue alone increased the Green vote – although it may well have done – but that adopting a transgender candidate did not damage the party at the polls as would inevitably be assumed by northern hemisphere social democrats.

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