

*Hauntology: Ghosts of Futures Past*

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For those not familiar with the concept of *Hauntology*, this accessible and engaging book provides an excellent introduction. Coverley emphasises that whilst the ‘origins and antecedents’ of hauntology are unclear and its meaning ‘stubbornly obscure’, it is also an idea, term, and practice that ‘has evolved and entered the cultural mainstream, becoming a shorthand for the ways in which the past returns to haunt the present’ (p.7-8). Hauntology is charted from its roots in the writings of Jacques Derrida, with the vastly important work of Mark Fisher acknowledged throughout. As Coverley puts it: ‘if Derrida is the father of hauntology then it is Fisher who played the greatest role in bringing this concept within the purview of popular culture’ (p.9). Coverley notes that discussions of hauntology can often adopt reductive and narrow definitions of the term. Avoiding the pitfall of ‘a misguided and ultimately futile attempt at maintaining conceptual purity’, Coverley instead champions engagement with the ways in which hauntology can evade and overrun boundaries ‘as it hovers up an eclectic and ever-growing mixture of canonical and pop-cultural elements’ (p.15).

For those already well versed in all hauntological, the focus on the literary and the theoretical, as well as on the visual via discussion of a range of television and of folk horror, will likely be welcome. As Coverley himself emphasises, extensive work on hauntology and its central relationship to sound has been provided by Simon Reynolds and by Rob Young. Less attention has been paid to the literary, though I was glad to see Katy Shaw’s excellent *Hauntology: The Presence of the Past in Twenty-First Century English Literature* featured.

The book is divided into three parts, each exploring a wide range of topics and ideas. Coverley aptly uses concepts of time to structure the book – the return of the past, the discovery of deep time, experiments with time and ghosts of futures past – and weds theory, politics and social movements to authors, texts, and events of note throughout. Like Coverley’s other books, for example *Psychogeography* (2018) and *Occult London* (2017), it

is aimed at a broad readership and uses individuals, places, examples, texts and intriguing anecdotes to tell a story of the topic at hand.

Part one, titled Hauntings, explores histories of haunting in London, 1848, telling the stories of Charles Dickens's *The Haunted Man* and Pepper's Ghost (a device for the theatre that produced an impressive and uncanny ghostly presence on stage). There is a section on the gothic tales of Vernon Lee (the pen name of Violet Page), in which 'the past is experienced as a kind of haunting' (p.45). Next, one on Arthur Machen's tales exploring Darwinism and Victorian responses to the seismic notion that 'human history was a barely significant span of historical time preceded by an unimaginable vast expanse of unrecorded time' (p. 65). There is then a section on Freud's 1919 essay 'The Uncanny' and lastly a section on MR James.

Part two is titled Experiments with Time. It begins in Hertfordshire, England in 1921 by introducing the notion of ley lines as one that provokes a dislocation in time before engaging with the writings of JW Dunne, who set out the theory of serial time and the notion of precognitive dreams. Coverley shows how these foundational ideas challenged perceptions of time and history as linear and provided a basis from which hauntology could evolve. The next section considers TC Letherbridge and the notion of residual haunting, or the idea that 'haunting is in some sense analogous to a recording' wherein the 'natural world is embedded with the mental impressions of emotional or traumatic events' from the past that can 'subsequently be replayed' (p.131). Next up is a section on Nigel Kneale and his television play *The Stone Tape* (1972), which explores hauntological themes of memory, deep time, residual trauma, analogue technology, and the return of the past. Continuing with a focus on England in the 1970s, novelists Alan Garner and Susan Cooper each have dedicated sections. Lastly, an analysis of JG Ballard focus on time and his visions of the near future bring part two to a close.

Part three is titled Ghosts of Futures Past, which is also the subtitle of the book itself, and opens with a little more JG Ballard in the form of an epigraph stating 'I would sum up my fear about the future in one word: boring.' The epigraphs throughout the book are well selected and delightful. Part three begins in Washington in 1989 with Francis Fukuyama and his now much critiqued argument about the end of history before offering a section on Derrida and the term l'hantologie, providing a brief and useful introduction both to Derrida's pivotal role in hauntology and to Mark Fisher's response to Derrida's work. Returning to literature, the ghosts of WG Sebald's writings are the focus of the next section. Then, a discussion of nostalgia that usefully outlines its relationship to hauntology drawing on,

among others, Mark Fisher and Frederic Jameson. A section on Retromania and Simon Reynolds follows, emphasising Reynolds' view that 'much musical output in the UK has become moribund and inert in the face of the technological reanimation of the past' (p.248). This is followed by a section on Laura Grace Ford, who is positioned as 'hauntology's literary exemplar' (.249). This section includes insightful discussion of the relationships between hauntology and psychogeography. Mark Fisher's work on hauntology, capitalist realism and acid communism are considered in a section dedicated to his work before a final section on folk horror as a cultural expression of hauntology.

Coverley's books have found somewhat of a sweet spot between the very introductory and the highly academic. This book is accessible enough that it would make a good gift for family and friends interested in haunting and the supernatural, or more broadly in nostalgia and the place of the past in the cultures around us. It will also likely become a central text to be cited in any academic exploration of the hauntological. It concludes with a select bibliography, film and television and website suggestions and an index. References are provided using endnotes in each chapter. It is very reasonably priced at £12.99. For *Mortality* readers interest in histories of haunting from the Victorian period onwards, with ghost stories, Spiritualism or death in literature and folk horror, or generally intrigued by the current moment's fascination with the past, this is certainly worth a read.