

Video essay: “Ghostliness in art” (Task #1)

This video essay introduces the students to the concept of ghostliness in art. The video is under three minutes and can easily be played multiple times. It is inspired by ideas and concepts from various authors and presents them in a very accessible and comprehensible way. Below, you can find a transcript of the video’s voice-over as well as the passages the voice-over is based on. This document also contains a detailed bibliography.



[The video can be streamed or downloaded here.](#)

Or by copy-pasting this link: www.dropbox.com/s/svmubkiiiaqdwehj/Ghostliness%20in%20Art.mov?dl=0

Voice-over transcript

“Ghost (noun): a disembodied soul

Especially: the soul of a dead person believed to be an inhabitant of the unseen world or to appear to the living in bodily likeness” [A].

We are scared of and yet fascinated by ghosts. We write stories about them, try to prove their existence, or invent new ways to portray them in art.

In a way, the art we create is similar to the ghosts it depicts. Like a photograph, or a film. It captures a moment and makes it permanent, repeats what cannot be repeated in real life [B], turning the places or people in it into ghosts coming back to haunt those who look at it [C]. The person in the photo or film may no longer look like this - or may have died. The subject of the photo, like the ghost, isn’t here, but isn’t entirely absent, either. Does it have a body, or not? Is it here, or is it not [D]? Is it in the present, or in the past [E]?

Sound recording and reproduction technology does something similar. Since the invention of the phonograph in 1877, we can hear voices long after the sounds were spoken by a human, even after the speaker has died. We can actually listen to voices from the beyond. The body has been separated from the voice; the voice has become disembodied [F]. But rather than replacing the real voice, the recording creates a Doppelgänger, a ghostly double of the real voice [G].

And then of course we have literature - maybe the ghostliest kind of art? When we read, we look at words on a page and invest them with life in our minds. Some of us may hear voices when we read, some of us may see images. Aren’t we essentially hallucinating when we read, embodying the disembodied characters and giving voice to the voiceless in our minds? Could reading be described as a ghostly experience, a haunting from a different place or time, from voices long dead, or not yet born?

Passages from the works the video essay is based on

A: “Ghost.” Merriam Webster Dictionary, Online Version.

B: “What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially” (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 4).

C: “And the person or thing photographed is the target, the referent, a kind of little simulacrum, any eidolon emitted by the object, which I should like to call the Spectrum of the Photograph,

because this word retains, through its root, a relation to ‚spectacle‘ and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead” (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 9).

D: “[...] as Marx himself spells out [...] the specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some “thing” that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the revenant or the return of the specter. There is something disappeared, departed in the apparition itself as reappearance of the departed” (Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 4-5).

E: “Das Gespenst ist eine unheimliche Figur, die sich, selbst wenn es sich eine feste Adresse gesucht hat, nicht domestizieren lässt. Gleichwohl sucht es heim. Es trägt ein Anderswo und ein Anderswann in den konkreten Ort, den konkreten Zeitpunkt seines Erscheinens ein” (Wagner-Egelhaaf, “Autofiktion und Gespenster,” 135).

F: “[...] this is a practice so familiar to listeners today that we take it as a given: the separation of the voice from the body from which it originally emanated – the emergence of the disembodied voice” (Young, *Singing The Body Electric: The Human Voice and Sound Technology*, 17).

G: “Wie nicht anders zu erwarten war, misslang die Doppelung jedoch, und ein ekto-plasmatischer Überschuss haftete der angeblichen Identität von Stimme und Maschine an. «Sprache ist in gewisser Weise unsterblich geworden», schrieb der *Scientific American* 1878 über Edisons Apparat; jedoch gerade in dieser ‘gewissen Weise’ residieren die Geister. Die Behauptung der Austauschbarkeit erzeugt Doppelgänger. Wie alle Science Fiction- und Stephen Hawking-Leser wissen, impliziert eine Zeitreise immer eine stoffliche Replikation, und die dabei entstehenden neuen Körper haben fast immer etwas Unheimliches an sich” (Durham Peters, “Helmholtz und Edison: Zur Endlichkeit der Stimme,” 306).

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Image and audio sources (of the video essay “Ghostliness in Art”) in order of appearance

1	<i>Soundtrack</i>	MacLeod, Kevin. “Ghost Processional (Alternate).” <i>Incompetech</i> , 2021, incompetech.com/music/royalty-free/index.html?isrc=USUAN1100219 . Licensed under Creative Commons: By Attribution 3.0 License.
2		<i>A Ghost Story</i> . Directed by David Lowery, starring Rooney Mara and Casey Affleck, A24, 2017. <i>YouTube</i> , uploaded by A24, 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmQ2MnSs6q0 .
3		“Image of a ghost produced by double exposure.” 1899. <i>Wikimedia Commons</i> , uploaded by Co9man, 20 January 2015, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Image_of_a_ghost,_produced_by_double_exposure_in_1899.jpg . Accessed 11 November 2021.
4		Daguerre, Louis. “Boulevard du Temple.” 1838. <i>Wikimedia Commons</i> , uploaded by Quibik, 18 November 2011, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Boulevard_du_Temple_by_Daguerre.jpg . Accessed 12 November 2021.
5		“Sir Roger Casement.” <i>Library Of Congress</i> , Prints & Photography Division, LC-DIG-ggbain-19597, 2001, loc.gov/pictures/resource/ggbain.19597/ . Accessed 14 November 2021.
6		“The only extant footage of Roger Casement (1864-1916).” <i>YouTube</i> , uploaded by Grainne Mhaol, 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q45khUNFMP8 . Accessed 12 November 2021.
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8		“Thomas Edison.” <i>Library Of Congress</i> , Prints & Photography Division, LC-DIG-cwpbh-04044, 2003, loc.gov/pictures/resource/cwpbh.04044/. Accessed 13 November 2021.
9		“1920s Radio Broadcasting.” <i>YouTube</i> , uploaded by MyFootage.com, 2010. www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRp2u8d7lrg. Accessed 17 November 2021.
10		Master of the Vanitas Texts. “Vanitas.” 1650. <i>Wikimedia Commons</i> , uploaded by Canaan, 24 November 2019, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vanitas_MNAC.jpg#/media/File:Vanitas_MNAC.jpg. Accessed 14 November 2021.
11		Ancher, Anna. “Interieur mit Mohnblumen und lesender Frau (Lizzy Hohlenberg).” 1905. <i>Wikimedia Commons</i> , uploaded by Mefusbren69, 19 January 2010, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anna_Ancher_-_Interieur_mit_Mohnblumen_und_lesender_Frau_(Lizzy_Hohlenberg)_1905.jpeg. Accessed 12 November 2021.
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14		Harlamov, Alexei. “Literary Pursuits of a Young Lady.” <i>Wikimedia Commons</i> , uploaded by Staszek99, 24 February 2008, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Harlamoff_Alexej_Literary_Pursuits_of_a_Young_Lady.jpg. Accessed 17 November 2021.
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