Playlist

Ghost

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What is a ghost? Georg Hegel's **"**Geist," clumsily translated to "spirit," is other to the self-consciousness that provides an outer world for the phenomenological inner world, a mystic mirror that proves our self exists (Sinnerbrink, 2007). In German, the phoneme "Geist" can attach itself to an epochal moment (Zeitgeist) or a people (Volksgeist) in a magical way that first emanates from and then transcends that moment or people (Sinnerbrink, 2007). The term "ghost" in English often refers to entities that act through mythos as a function of memory. A nineteenth-century religious sect of the Lakota Sioux danced the Ghost Dance to bring the world back into pre-colonial balance. A dead person's ghost haunts the living so as not to be forgotten. Ghosts of soldiers haunt battlefields; ghost dogs guard their masters' graves. In other contexts, the ghost is something that is theorized but unperceived. Physicists use ghosts to stand in for unmeasured or unproven phenomena in the place where the math says a phenomenon should be. People with amputations may feel an itch on a ghost limb.

Media theorists have long understood that it takes a medium to chase a ghost. An echo must travel in air; a shadow requires photons to scatter on the cave wall; a non-entity, ironically, must have a material effect by which to manifest its non-existence. Taking the term another way: a presence that has moved on can only linger in a substance. In *Speaking into the Air*, John Durham Peters (2012) uses his now-famous example of the dead-letter office, full of unopened envelopes and never-received engagement rings, to posit that "every new medium is a machine for the production of ghosts" (p. 143). If texts (or messages, or information) are media engaged with intention, ghosts may be media's accidents. Both texts and ghosts are ontologically dependent on media, but where the text denotes a relation of necessity, the ghost denotes a relation of possibility.

In the spirit of the relation of possibility rather than necessity, my method for constructing this playlist was whimsical; I decided that the word "ghost" itself was a trace of ectoplasm. A simple search of the term in the *Canadian Journal of Communication*'s archive yields interesting, scattered results that do not speak to

the synthesis of a normal literature review. The freedom of a "playlist" as a frame-work, though, helps me come at a synthesis sideways and avoid a declarative claim. The ghost I find here is a concept at the crux of the perceivable and the imper-ceivable—one that media studies, with its deepening commitment to radical ma-terialism, struggles to describe. The list divides its evidence into two broad themes. The first is a ghost that occupies our understanding of how ideas reside in and with media, and the second is a ghost that occupies our understanding of how identities linger in landscapes.

The first song and the last song on a playlist are important. The first song should set the scene. It also can't be too heavy. And because my mother-medium for a playlist is the cassette tape, I hold that the last song on a playlist (essentially a mixtape) must somehow connect back to the first, so that when the car stereo automatically flips the tape over, the thematic transition is smooth. Jacques Godbout's Southam Lecture, which functions as the first song, appears in the search for the term "ghost" because Godbout observes that the movie *Ghostbusters* topped box-office sales in the U.S. during a week in 1985 when *Amadeus* did the same in Europe. He uses this comparison to suggest that something about the media culture in Europe circa 1985 was more serious and adult than that of the U.S. and Canada at the same time. I would chuckle and reject the piece as an incidental mention of the word, except for the fact that, even in this illustration, Godbout is grappling with a Hegelian Geist as traced through what he calls "discourse on culture," or the cultural aspect of communication, which the scholarship of the time labelled "media effects" (p. 342), in contrast to scholarship on media technology. The last song, Peter van Wyck's search for "residues and other forms of leakage," complete with real geiger counters, is a thematic echo of Godbout's *Ghostbusters*, with their backpack ghost-traps powered by (fantastical) nuclear physics. Van Wyck travels with one identifiable ghost and names him in a sentence that is a direct reference to the Paul Simon (1986) song "Graceland." In Simon's song, the "travelling com-panions are ghosts in empty sockets." Instead of "ghosts and empties," van Wyck is travelling with the ghost of Harold Innis. Innis disappoints him as an interlocutor, though, because of what Innis's colonial-cultured gaze fails to see: the empty land-scape is not empty at all; it is full of Indigenous ghosts.

Though the other five texts are not woven together into a full synthesis, the potential to do so exists, and to multiple productive ends. These texts connect in delightful, ominous, and surprising ways. Van Wyck's narrative, haunted by the smashing of a uranium atom, is echoed in the second article, by Donald Theall and Joan Theall, in James Joyce's linguistic incorporation of nuclear science as he tries to "smash the etym" (p. 61). The privileging of poetics in both Joyce and van Wyck make me wonder if Joyce was a chorographer, as van Wyck is. There are less idiosyncratic, more overarching themes, as well. Godbout, Brian Osborne, van Wyck, and Alexa Conradi could be combined in a consideration of indigeneity and

Canadian identity, with van Wyck and Osborne both questioning a "mythopoetic Canadianness" and nordicity that occupies the Canadian North, especially. Other themes include the idea of non-identity or alienated identity (in Southern, Theall & Theall, van Wyck, Osborne, and Conradi), the theme of a landscape or space being open to contestation and possibility (in Thibault & Bardini, Southern, van Wyck, Osborne, and Conradi), and the potential for art as a modality for such contestations (in Southern, Theall & Theall, van Wyck, Osborne, and Conradi).

Finally, there is the original and persistent question of ghost ontology. Though ectoplasmic entities and hauntings may actively resist a theory of being, and though I support the spirit (ahem!) of that resistance, I will submit two tentative propositions: 1) The ghost is a certain kind of unmediated body. Joyce (via Theall & Theall) and van Wyck tell us that the ghost is not the trace it leaves; "cinders and pictures" (van Wyck p.174) are media's evidence of the ghost. 2) The ghost is an unresolved memory, a memory that has not been fit into mythos; a lingering trace of cultural bad faith (and this may be a kind of unmediated body, tying proposition two to proposition one). Conradi is the only author here who uses the term "ghost" as a verb, by citing Elizabeth Povinelli. Povinelli uses it in its millennial coinage, saying that the Canadian state's national reconciliation efforts ghost their own economic motives, thus producing bad faith between a Canadian nation-state and its Indigenous populations. The bad-faith ghost is the body forgotten by shared media, mediated merely in the body, often in many bodies, a primarily oral object of memory.

Playlist

The media-haunted concept

Article 1

 Godbout, Jacques. (1985). The 1985 Southam Lecture on California and the media. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 11*(4), 341–352. doi:10.22230/cjc.1985v11n4a401

Jacques Godbout writes at one of many moments in which the future of public broadcasting was in question, and he makes an eloquent argument for publicly funded media as a way to preserve media that preserve culture. A few of his statements are outdated misfires—the aforementioned shade thrown at *Ghostbusters*, for example, and a prediction that computers will "never be anything more than message plumbing" (p. 343). But more of Godbout's observations precisely tag cultural ghosts that haunt us to this day: capitalist media's erasure of Indigenous cultural productions; a mass-media erasure of thoughtful cultural forms resulting in nihilism and mistrust in news reporting; and the prophetic diagnosis of Walter McDougall, whom Godbout cites as saying that U.S. democracy "has evolved into

technocracy … [and Russian influence on] American liberal society has been greater than the Americanization of Russian society" (p. 349).

Article 2

Theall, Donald, & Theall, Joan. (1989). Marshall McLuhan and James Joyce: Beyond media. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 14*(4), 46–66. doi:10.22230/cjc.1989v14n4a531

In a 1989 special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Communication* devoted to the legacy of Marshall McLuhan in both literary and media studies, Donald and Joan Theall argue that McLuhan owes much of his conception of media, especially its relation to orality and the body, to the work of James Joyce. Specifically, they position Joyce as a media theorist preoccupied with the relation of possibility that occurs in embodied semiotic action—theatre, dance, song, drinking and talking in bars—and escapes the totalizing action of electronic media. Such media and their markets are recognized in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* as "a gain control of circumcentric megacycles" (p. 59). Theall and Theall see the working-class hero of *Finnegans Wake*, the most modern of Joyce's texts, as "mechano-electric man" described with "medleys of media metaphors" (p. 59). A media studies, myth-infused nostalgia emerges for the body (Joyce's mother as "flesh-without-word" contrasts neatly with Friedrich Kittler's (1990) mother tongue, for example, though Theall and Theall do not note this particular connection) alongside a gleeful reaching for more ways with which to destroy and recreate modes of language.

Article 3

Thibault, Ghislain, & Bardini, Thierry. (2008). Éther 2.0: Révolutions sans fil. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 33*(3), 357–378. doi:10.22230/cjc.2008v33n3a1975

Ghislain Thibault and Thierry Bardini directly address mythos (via Barthes) as they extend the history of wireless technology, especially the history of discourse about the wireless myths of redemption and immateriality, further back than what is commonly considered the "wireless revolution." They trace two myths, "the oracle" and "the ether," that preoccupy discourse around electronic communication technologies during two historical epochs. Thibault and Bardini posit "two revolutions," one in the mid-to-late nineteenth century and the other at the end of the twentieth century. The ghost manifests here in two ways. The first ghost is the haunting bad faith of both of these mythos. The authors assert that a myth such as the oracle can promise to redeem without ever delivering redemption; technology will never provide a solution to the problems it causes, and wireless technology is not immaterial (no technology is). The second is the nineteenth-century idea of the ether and ethereal bodies. Nikola Tesla articulates this idea by saying that the problem of electronic leakage from wires and walls will end when

we access the ether: "the ghost will vanish with the wireless dawn" (p. 366). These authors maintain that now, after the second wireless revolution, we still fear "leaving our bodies into the wireless network through disembodied limbs" (p. 359).

The identity-haunted landscape

Article 4

Conradi, Alexa. (2009). Uprising at Oka: A place of non-identification. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 34*(4), 547–566. doi:10.22230/cjc.2009v34n4a2133

Alexa Conradi treats the Oka Crisis of 1990, a punctuating event in Canadian history that resulted in a "before" and "after" in Canadian Indigenous-settler relations, as an event of ontological opening with the potential to produce new forms of rhetorical listening and silence, possibility-oriented spaces of non-identification, and movement toward a Mohawk rhetoric. Conradi's ghost is of the bad-faith kind; it is an unsolved problem produced in the discursive space of bad translation. Specifically, Conradi points out the popular perception that Canadian government military forces behaved well, managed the situation, and kept the peace. She points out that in Mohawk languages, the word for "warriors" translates to "those who carry the [spiritual] burden of peace" (p. 548) and by labelling the Canadian military "peacekeepers," the public steals that spiritual burden from the Mohawk warriors. Further, to the Mohawk, "peace" does not equal "order," whereas the two notions are equated in the colonial/settler imaginary. The Oka conflict has never been resolved, and the larger Canadian colonial conflict goes unresolved: a bad-faith ghost that haunts the national mythos. Conradi notes, though, that the protests around Oka produced "gaps where the ground belongs to no one" (p. 552) to re-negotiate these myths and identities, and that the witnessing public is in a space of non-identification (*pagus*) and can judge from that place. Conradi explores the potential implications to Canadian public rhetoric, the conventions of behaviour and presence, and even laws and governance, should such spaces be used to advantage.

Article 5

Osborne, Brian S. (2006). From native pines to diasporic geese: Placing culture, setting our sites, locating identity in a transnational Canada. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 31*(1), 147–175. doi:10.22230/cjc.2006v31n1a1781

Brian Osborne takes on Canada's emergent globally diverse identity as it conflicts with the modern mythos of colonial national identity. Ghosts appear as "shadows" here, the failures of attempted inclusivity that must be atoned for if a nation that considers itself a liberal democracy is to call itself such. In keeping with emerging themes in ghost ethics evidenced in this playlist, Osborne points to the arts as a

space for relations of possibility in symbolic landscapes from which new national identities can emerge. He deems Canada a "nationalizing-state" that needs to allow identical hybridity by "negotiating different concepts of the nation … [and] re-imagin[ing] the standard mechanisms of a social solidarity" (p. 161). This article is rich and useful as a consideration of memorial and public mythos/memory and a thorough theorization of the difference between "space" and "place." The difference is a kind of ghost; place is the emotive answer to space's geometry because place is linked to identity over time.

Article 6

Southern, Jen. (2012). Comobility: How proximity and distance travel together in locative media. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 37*(1), 75–91. doi:10.22230/cjc.2012v37n1a2512

Jen Southern offers a case study of locative media producing "comobility," "an awareness of others' movement at a distance" (p. 76), through "Comob," an app used for open-ended comobile play. Put simply, players use a mapping app to take walks together, separately, through urban and rural landscapes. The group awareness of each other through the app creates an "absent presence," a ghostly group identity. Comob was designed after other comobile games of chase, but whereas those had a necessity-oriented aim of chasing and finding a body, Southern's exploration presents possibility-oriented play, which asks players to explore space as members of a dispersed group. Southern details the networked media apparatus involved in producing the body in a symbolic reality: group members have to stay in the "line of sight" of a satellite and become frustrated when they are disconnected from the mediated group awareness. Ultimately Southern theorizes comobility as a combination of "location presence, temporal presence, [and] virtual co-presence" (p. 85).

Article 7

van Wyck, Peter C. (2008). An emphatic geography: Notes on the ethical itinerary of landscape. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 33*(2), 171–191. doi:10.22230/cjc.2008v33n2a2007

Perhaps because his approach to his subject is the least well-defined, Peter van Wyck comes the closest to explicitly defining a ghost out of all the writers featured in this list. Van Wyck's 2010 book, *The Highway of the Atom*, pieces together the story of Canada's involvement in the Manhattan Project. This article comprises bits of his field notes from his trip to Great Bear Lake, the site of a uranium mine that fuelled the bombs detonated over Japan during World War II. The notes are an exercise in poetics as semiotic method, what van Wyck calls the "field work of words" (p. 174). He "seek[s] a different world [that] might help invent a different and critical language" (p. 175). When an elder at a wedding tells him not to swim

in the lake because it is too full of ghosts (hundreds of Inuit dead and dumped after an ancient raid), van Wyck briefly glimpses the aspects of the landscape that are impossible for him to see. "The territory asserts a non-conformity with its representations" (p. 182), he writes. The places he visits are "marked by a radical non-registration of the ontic and the epistemic" (p. 182). The stories he seeks, ghost stories, are ironically inarticulable, dwelling in "the abyss and the silence of no language game" (p. 183).

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