



**Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (eds.), *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, London and New York, Bloomsbury, 2013; pp. 584; RRP AU\$49.99 paperback**

*The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* is the first comprehensive critical anthology of the scholarship produced out of the early 1990s 'spectral turn' in cultural criticism, wherein the figure of the ghost and its act of haunting came to function as a powerful conceptual metaphor, and as an analytical tool for contemporary scholars of the Humanities and Social Sciences.

The supernatural has had an historic presence in the study of the arts since before the spectre of Hamlet's father first sought to 'revenge his foul and most unnatural murder'; however, many consider the publication of Jacques Derrida's *Spectres de Marx* in 1993 (translated into English in 1994) and the development of his theory of *hauntology* within it, to have pioneered this shift in academic approach towards the ghostly as a representational subject for theoretical analysis. Now, two decades later, Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren have brought the seminal texts of the 'spectral turn' (a phrase coined by Roger Luckhurst in his 1999 essay 'The Contemporary London Gothic and the Limits of the "Spectral Turn"') into communion together in *The Spectralities Reader*. It is a volume that embraces the interdisciplinary breadth and cross-cultural nature of modern spectrality studies, made evident in the plurality of the *Reader's* title, and the scholarship its global community continues to produce.

The *Reader* contains twenty-five previously published works by prominent contemporary theorists of the spectral from a wide variety of cultural and disciplinary backgrounds, such as Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Avery F. Gordon, Julian Wolfreys, and Roger Luckhurst to name only a few. The voluminous *Reader* stands at almost six-hundred pages and is divided into six sections, or rather, into six fields of study. This approach aims to privilege the multiplicity and heterogeneity of modern spectrality studies by focusing on its researchers' interdisciplinary innovations in the study of the philosophy of the spectral turn: the concept of spectropolitics; the ghostly qualities of the modern media machine; the spectral nature of subjectivity; and the haunting(s) of space, place, memory and history. Included within these sections are the texts Blanco and Peeren have deemed to be best representative of each area of study; however, they maintain that their aim is not to 'definitively define or delimit a field' but rather to demonstrate the 'diverse fertility' of haunting and the figure of the ghost as conceptual metaphors (p. 16). To further this endeavour, in addition to the *Reader's* general introduction, all six sections of the volume are accompanied by a detailed introduction to each area of research, providing the reader with a literature review that contextually situates and justifies the significance of the texts the editors have chosen to include (with passing reference to those they have not).

In the general introduction to the *Reader*, titled 'Conceptualizing Spectralities', Blanco and Peeren attempt to analyse the ghost as 'actuality, metaphor, and concept' while exploring the origins of spectrality studies (particularly its relationship with trauma studies), before considering the current academic climate and its possible evolutions. They also address the structure of the volume, referring to their chapter grouping decisions as 'flexible signposts' that allow the reader a variety of avenues through which they may consider the 'multiple intersections and convergences' of the scholarship, some of which are perhaps 'not yet fully crystallized' (p. 19).

The works included in part one, 'The Spectral Turn', address the movement's *raison d'être*, its Derridian origins, and its post-90s shape (the field continued to evolve, in spite of Luckhurst's declaration of its limits). Part two, 'Spectropolitics: Ghosts of the Global Contemporary', explores the political implications of the spectre as a representational device, often for the marginalised and disempowered victims of historical injustices. The spectralization of technology and its socio-cultural implications are discussed in part three, 'The Ghost in the Machine: Spectral Media', whilst part four, 'Spectral Subjectivities: Gender, Sexuality, Race', considers the spectralization of the differentiated self and the ramifications it has for those who identify as 'non-masculine, non-heterosexual, and/or non-white' (p. 20). Part five, 'Possessions: Spectral Places', contains works that address the importance of haunting's spatial necessity, one that is often overshadowed by a focus on its temporality (this is particularly the case in Derrida's work). These discussions lead nicely into part six, titled, 'Haunted Historiographies', which concludes the volume by exploring the haunted relationship that the past and the present share in 'the *making* of history and the way this process becomes entangled (...) with notions of possession, the gothic and uncanny' (p. 21). This chapter ties the spirit of the entire collection together.

Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren bring to the compilation a wealth of experience in spectrality studies, both as individual scholars and as an editorial team. Their first edited collection, *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Spaces of Everyday Culture* (2010), united a diverse range of contemporary scholars whose studies place cultural theories of the spectral into practice within the context of everyday life. It feels particularly serendipitous, then, that they have now compiled the first critical anthology of this burgeoning field, one that years of their own extensive and detailed research have helped to establish as a legitimate academic pursuit.

*The Spectralities Reader* is an essential companion for researchers whose interest in the liminal has led them in search of the ghosts and phantoms, revenants and spirits (fictional or otherwise) that lurk in the betwixt and the between of our world. As the first of its kind, it is a vital reference text for all students of the spectral. Through the skilful combination of scholarship with insightful commentary, the reading experience becomes, in this reviewer's opinion, a kind of séance expertly guided by the spiritual mediumship of the editors, through which the spectral trace of hauntings past can be summoned and found lingering in the shadows of our present.

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