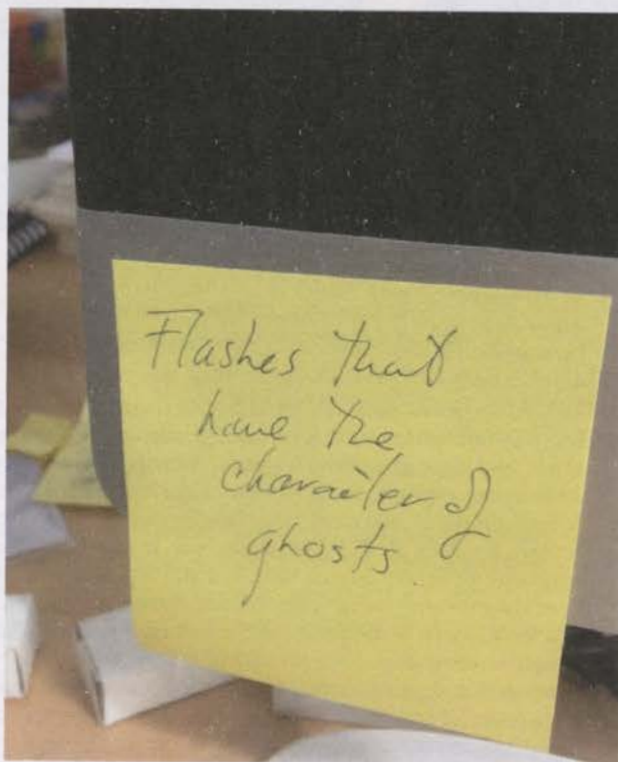


EXCHANGE

# FLASHES THAT HAVE THE CHARACTER OF GHOSTS

PENELOPE UMBRICO AND JEREMY HAIK



Repetition and first time: the ghostly encounter is both a singular event and a single frame in an infinitely looping reel, wholly unique yet utterly banal. In this issue, we are looking for traces and circumstantial evidence of spectral presences, whether ghostly or inert. The spectral, by its nature, hovers on the threshold of the senses: virtual, insubstantial, unreal. Even partial revelation, if it comes at all, comes through the form of a medium: a place; a person; a prism; a photograph. These fragmentary articles provide a useful approximation, yet they are ultimately rigid and tangential, and can offer only small glimpses of the spectral.

What follows is an exchange of fragments, traces, excerpts, and glimpses carried out in the currency of digital images and electronic communication: a navigation between material evidence and immaterial suggestion, following the "logic of haunting." Digital technology has a unique capacity to increase the speed of communication, and by extension, protracts the experience of silence and distance between responses. This artificial protraction seemed an appropriate means of inhabiting the same position of trepidation as Barnardo in the opening line of *Hamlet*:

Who's there?

from: Penelope Umbrico <penelopeumbrico@gmail.com>  
 to: Jeremy Haik <jahaik@gmail.com>  
 date: Fri, Jul 19, 2013 at 12:02 AM  
 subject: Re: spectre

Here's the Derrida paragraph I mentioned - this is the page from my book:

10 SPECTERS OF MARX

to us to follow a g  
 follow a ghost? A  
 by it, always, pers  
 ing? Here again v  
 back in advance:  
 rotten in the state  
 which Hamlet is  
 follow thee" [I, i  
 "Where wilt thou  
 me I am thy F

Repetition and first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost. What is a ghost? What is the effectivity or the presence of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there there, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition and first time, but also repetition and last time, since the singularity of any first time, makes of it also a last time. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *hauntology*. This logic of haunting would not be merely larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being (of the "to be," assuming that it is a matter of Being in the "to be or not to be," but nothing is less certain). It would harbor within itself, but like circumscribed places or particular effects, eschatology and teleology themselves. It would comprehend them, but incomprehensibly. How to comprehend in fact the discourse of the end or the discourse about the end? Can the extremity of the extreme ever be comprehended? And the opposition between "to be" and "not to be"? Hamlet already began with the expected return of the dead King. After the end of history, the spirit comes by coming back [revenant], it figures both a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and again.



from: **Jeremy Haik** <jahaik@gmail.com>  
 to: **Penelope Umbrico** <penelopeumbrico@gmail.com>  
 date: Sat, Jul 20, 2013 at 10:32 AM  
 subject: Re: copies of copies (multiple multiples)



In looking at this excerpt again, I was wondering (especially since it's a recurring metaphor in *Specters of Marx*) what Hamlet would look like if you took out everything but the lines spoken by the ghost, and its stage directions. The refrain of "enter the ghost/exit the ghost/re-enter the ghost" captures his idea of the "logic of haunting" so nicely:

"A spectral moment, a moment that no longer belongs to time... Furtive and untimely, the apparition of the specter does not belong to that time, it does not give time, not that one: "Enter the ghost, exit the ghost, re-enter the ghost"

A lot of the time he (it?) is just floating in the background, without actually speaking any lines, so I cut everything else out and put it up here: <http://www.haikstudio.com/hamlet>

...A dead king returning, recurring, detached from his body and here detached from his narrative. It's a stark contrast to think about this next to these ghostly figures in the TVs from Craigslist; it seems to me that the ghost in the case of Hamlet is the engine of the play (calling for the avenging of his murder, and raising the larger issue of death itself as a central plot device)... you described the figures reflected in the TV screens as unwitting/unwilling participants in these scenes that you've collected, but aren't ghosts supposed to come back from the dead? To give us revelations and directions that we couldn't otherwise come to as living beings?

right: A stack of copies of the excerpt on p. 130 in Penelope's studio  
 left: A stack of copies of *The Broken Image* in Jeremy's studio

**ACT I**

**SCENE I**

Enter Ghost  
Exit Ghost  
Re-enter Ghost  
Exit Ghost

**SCENE II**

**SCENE III**

**SCENE IV**

Enter Ghost  
Ghost beckons HAMLET  
Re-enter Ghost and HAMLET

**SCENE V**

Enter GHOST and HAMLET

**Ghost**

Mark me.

**Ghost**

My hour is almost come,  
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames  
Must render up myself.

**Ghost**

Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing  
To what I shall unfold.

**Ghost**

So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear.

**Ghost**

I am thy father's spirit,  
Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,  
And for the day confined to fast in fires,  
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature  
Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid  
To tell the secrets of my prison-house,  
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word  
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,  
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,  
Thy knotted and combined locks to part  
And each particular hair to stand on end,  
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine:

But this eternal blazon must not be  
To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, O, list!  
If thou didst ever thy dear father love--

**Ghost**

Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

**Ghost**

Murder most foul, as in the best it is;  
But this most foul, strange and unnatural.

**Ghost**

I find thee apt;  
And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed  
That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf,  
Wouldst thou not stir in this. Now, Hamlet, hear:  
'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,  
A serpent stung me; so the whole ear of Denmark  
Is by a forged process of my death  
Rankly abused: but know, thou noble youth,  
The serpent that did sting thy father's life  
Now wears his crown.

**Ghost**

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,  
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts,  
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power  
So to seduce!--won to his shameful lust  
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen:  
O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there!  
From me, whose love was of that dignity  
That it went hand in hand even with the vow  
I made to her in marriage, and to decline  
Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor  
To those of mine!  
But virtue, as it never will be moved,  
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,  
So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd,  
Will sate itself in a celestial bed,  
And prey on garbage.  
But, soft! methinks I scent the morning air;  
Brief let me be. Sleeping within my orchard,  
My custom always of the afternoon,  
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,  
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,

And in the porches of my ears did pour  
The leperous distilment; whose effect  
Holds such an enmity with blood of man  
That swift as quicksilver it courses through  
The natural gates and alleys of the body,  
And with a sudden vigour doth posset  
And curd, like eager droppings into milk,  
The thin and wholesome blood: so did it mine;  
And a most instant tetter bark'd about,  
Most Lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust,  
All my smooth body.  
Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand  
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatch'd:  
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,  
Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd,  
No reckoning made, but sent to my account  
With all my imperfections on my head:  
O, horrible! O, horrible! most horrible!  
If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not;  
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be  
A couch for luxury and damned incest.  
But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,  
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive  
Against thy mother aught: leave her to heaven,  
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,  
To prick and sting her. Fare thee well at once!  
The glow-worm shows the matins to be near,  
And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire:  
Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, remember me.

Exit Ghost

**Ghost**

[Beneath] Swear.

**Ghost**

[Beneath] Swear.

**Ghost**

[Beneath] Swear.

**Ghost**

[Beneath] Swear.

**ACT II**

**SCENE I**

**SCENE II**

**ACT III**

**SCENE I**

**SCENE II**

**SCENE III**

**SCENE IV**

Enter Ghost

**Ghost**

Do not forget: this visitation  
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.  
But, look, amazement on thy mother sits:  
O, step between her and her fighting soul:  
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works:  
Speak to her, Hamlet.

Exit Ghost

**ACT IV**

**SCENE I**

**SCENE II**

**SCENE III**

**SCENE IV**

**SCENE V**

**SCENE VI**

**SCENE VII**

**ACT V**

**SCENE I**

**SCENE II**



from: **Jeremy Haik** <jahaik@gmail.com>  
 to: **Penelope Umbrico** <penelopeumbrico@gmail.com>  
 date: Wed, Jul 24, 2013 at 6:01 PM  
 subject: Further haunting via stickers

Also, speaking of ghosts floating around in the background, I've seen these around the neighborhood a lot, perfect copies of this fuzzy portrait of Marx stuck on newspaper boxes and telephone poles. No information, just a persistent face. I never thought much about them until today, they just blend into the background.



It reminded me of the wall in the 14th street subway station that I pass almost every day. I assume it's the names of the people who died on 9/11 just stuck to the subway walls with what looks like envelope labels... a lot of them have peeled off and all that's left is a trace outline of the adhesive residue. The evidence of the trace is far more haunting to me than the actual names:



Bonheur, Susan  
New York, NY

Bonheur, Andre  
New York, NY  
September 11, 2001



from: **Penelope Umbrico** <penelopeumbrico@gmail.com>  
to: **Jeremy Haik** <jahaik@gmail.com>  
date: Fri, Jul 26, 2013 at 12:18 AM  
subject: Re: Re: Hamlet

Also there's the skull (in Hamlet) - just an object, with speculation as to whom it was.

"That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once."

I guess the dead TV is much like the skull.  
So, the ghost, as central engine (a subject with agency) detached from the body and de-tached from the script, in contrast to the prop of the skull which has no subjectivity or agency: it's just leftover material.... like these old CRT TVs that nobody wants.

(.... and that we step over daily - today on my block):



In the photographs that represent these TVs on Craigslist, the reflections in the screens are ghostly apparitions of subjects selling them.

If these images stand for the TVs, then these are their final portrait, and these portraits will outlast the objects.... and the ghost of the subject is stuck there forever. A literal "ghost in the machine." But these ghosts have no agency - they don't direct, they just haunt.

I like your image of Marx on the "Voice" newsbox - a box containing the Voice, of all things, and that Marx is a sticker, stuck there.

from: **Jeremy Haik** <jahaik@gmail.com>  
 to: **Penelope Umbrico** <penelopeumbrico@gmail.com>  
 date: Sat, Jul 27, 2013 at 1:11 AM  
 subject: Re: Re: Re: Hamlet

If a dead TV is something like a skull, do you think it can provoke the same (or an equivalent) kind of affective response that a skull can? In other words, seeing the physical evidence of death in the one part of the human body that we identify with the most (the face) triggers a deeply rooted, primitive response. When you look at a skull you can't help but imagine what your own will look like. This is the basis for Hamlet's existential breakdown, right? The inability to reconcile the fact of death with the memory of life? Hamlet, when he is presented with the skull:

SCENE I.]

*Hamlet*

113

cayer of your whoreson dead body. Here's a skull now. This skull hath lien you i' th' earth three-and-twenty years. 191

*Ham.* Whose was it?

*Clown.* A whoreson mad fellow's it was. Whose do you think it was?

*Ham.* Nay, I know not. 195

*Clown.* A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! 'A pour'd a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the King's jester.

*Ham.* This? 200

*Clown.* E'en that.

*Ham.* Let me see. [*Takes the skull.*] Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio. A fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times. And now how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kiss'd I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now? your gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now, to mock your own grinning? Quite chap-fall'n? Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come. Make her laugh at that. Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing. 216

*Hor.* What's that, my lord?

*Ham.* Dost thou think Alexander look'd o' this fashion i' th' earth?

*Hor.* E'en so. 220

*Ham.* And smelt so? Pah!

[*Puts down the skull.*]

*Hor.* E'en so, my lord.

*Ham.* To what base uses



from: Penelope Umbrico <penelopeumbrico@gmail.com>  
 to: Jeremy Haik <jahaik@gmail.com>  
 date: Sun, Jul 28, 2013 at 2:41 PM  
 subject: Re: Re: Re: Hamlet

It's funny cause I always thought of Hamlet's reaction to the skull as ironic - since there's no way to actually tell who's who. I love that he's imagining all these individuals around objects that no longer have any individuality.

And further, the extreme polarity of the ephemeral memory of his childhood friendship with Yorick, collapsed into the physicality of imagining Yorick in the skull ("... and now how abhorred in my imagination it is. My gorge rises at it"). I can't help thinking it's kind of funny, since he's already set up the fact that it's impossible to have any idea whom these skulls may have belonged to.

I love this commentary I just came across:

103 a pair of indentures Two copies of a legal agreement would be made on a single sheet of paper that would then be cut on a jagged line so that each party had a copy and the exact fit would prove authenticity. Spencer whimsically suggests that Hamlet may be punning with reference to the two tooth-bearing jaws of the skull.

103-4 conveyances . . . lands deeds relating to purchase of his own lands

104 this box presumably 'this coffin', with an allusion to a deed-box for containing legal documents (but Dover Wilson says the *box* is the skull, perhaps prompted by *memento mori* images of skulls with rolled documents in their eye-sockets as at *MV* 2.7.63-4)

from: **Jeremy Haik** <jahaik@gmail.com>  
 to: **Penelope Umbrico** <penelopeumbrico@gmail.com>  
 date: Sun, Jul 28, 2013 at 4:11 PM  
 subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Hamlet

A google image search for Hamlet and Yorick is interesting in that it offers a superficial read of multiple iterations of this performative contemplation, a range of individuals acting from (or towards) a common source (the play, and to a larger extent the archetypal crisis that Hamlet faces). The same sentiment over and over, for at least the last 400 years in this form, but certainly a lot longer.

So, if you draw a parallel between the TV and the skull as complementary, empty containers, I immediately think of ossuary chapels. These are from the one at St Leonard's Church in Hythe:



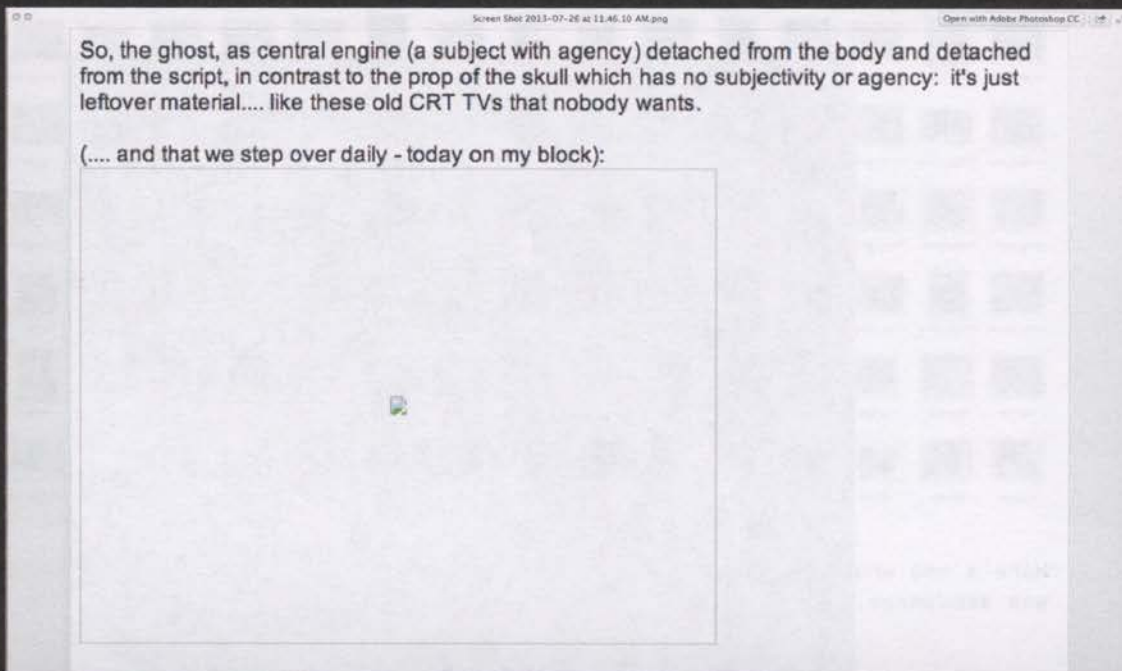
From the website: "Seeing so many skulls in one go makes them less of a sinister object and more of an anthropological souvenir. They come in all shapes and sizes, some with axe wounds and congenital deformities - a sign of the times."

If the connection between the skull and the discarded TV holds true (I think it does) you're almost constructing an ossuary from the bones of the recent past with expired TVs instead of skulls. And the quote from the website holds true, but in reverse: to me the TVs as objects become more sinister as they accumulate, precisely BECAUSE they are a sign of the times, of the pervasiveness of this disembodied and dehumanized form of communication. The skull is familiar and yet ultimately redemptive in its humanity. The TV, on the other hand, is equally familiar but utterly alienating in death.

So then, the TV and the skull are both empty containers? Strangely enough, here's what the photo of the TV on your street looks like in my gmail:

left: Photo, Michael Rowe  
 right: Photo, Clive Thompson





from: Penelope Umbrico <penelopeumbrico@gmail.com>  
 to: Jeremy Haik <jahaik@gmail.com>  
 date: Thur, Aug 1, 2013 at 11:46 PM  
 subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Hamlet

In a way that is how I think of sites like Craigslist and eBay  
 - they are a kind of ossuary for the objects being sold there!

My files from Craigslist:



Here's one whose original file's name (and now the title of my print)  
 was axedamage.jpg:





from: Jeremy Haik <jeremy@haikstudio.com>  
to: **Penelope Umblico** <penelopeumblico@gmail.com>  
date: Wed, Aug 7, 2013 at 11:57 PM  
subject: it's a mirror.

That image of the axe damage is surprisingly unsettling to me. It occurs to me in seeing it that I take the reflective surface of the screen in these images for granted; I accept the images of the interiors and the figures as though I'm looking through a window but they are first and foremost mirrors (or mirror-like at least).

Have you ever come across this object before?



It's a piece of polished obsidian that was allegedly used by Edward Kelley and John Dee starting in the 1580s to communicate with angels and spirits. What reminded me of it is the similarity of the reflective surface to that of the CRT television screen (and the fact that it was meant to be gazed upon for the purposes of telecommunication in the most literal sense; it's a poor-man's medieval TV).

Photo, © Trustees of the  
British Museum

EXCHANGE // PENELOPE UMBRICO

from: **Penelope Umbrico** <penelopeumbrico@gmail.com>  
to: Jeremy Haik <jeremy@haikstudio.com>  
date: Sun, Aug 11, 2013 at 12:03 AM  
subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Hamlet

There's an odd connection of the box/skull to the mirror with no image you sent me. Something about muteness and also sightlessness. The mirror is oddly creepy, maybe just because of how dull it looks in the photograph - as though the photograph itself has emptied the mirror of what would be its content (a reflection).

I actually feel kind of dead, a sensation of visual numbness, when I look at it thinking it's a mirror.

from: Jeremy Haik <jeremy@haikstudio.com>  
to: **Penelope Umbrico** <penelopeumbrico@gmail.com>  
date: Mon, Aug 12, 2013 at 2:05 AM  
subject: Re: it's a mirror.

I think that ironic sense you get from Hamlet assigning memories and personalities to these empty skulls is exactly what we're doing when we look into the pixelated spaces and figures reflected in the TV images. What's compelling for me is that I find myself combing every inch of the image trying to build the details of their face, their clothes, the room they're in. They're like ink blots of domesticity and I find myself trying (unintentionally) to populate the space with a person and a story just as Hamlet is pinning a known narrative to what is (in all likelihood) an anonymous skull.

Re: the mirror - it's obsidian so essentially it's black glass and highly polished. The object and its intended function struck me as both superficially identical and yet fundamentally opposite to looking into a TV screen: On the one hand you are hoping to communicate with the dead (or angels), and on the other you're trying to get rid of (or sell) an old piece of junk.

I found some images online of the mirror in-situ in the British Museum that tourists have taken. I think the parallel is pretty striking:



# IMPOSSIBLE



from: Jeremy Haik <jeremy@haikstudio.com>  
to: **Penelope Umbrico** <penelopeumbrico@gmail.com>  
date: Wed, Aug 14, 2013 at 10:05 AM  
subject: Just passed these on the street...

...they seem shy or embarrassed, like someone intentionally put them screen-side-down. Tomorrow sounds good, see you then.



from: **Penelope Umbrico** <penelopeumbrico@gmail.com>  
to: Jeremy Haik <jeremy@haikstudio.com>  
date: Wed, Aug 14, 2013 at 11:15 AM  
subject: Re: Just passed these on the street...

... like the grave digger's disrespect for the skulls that he is knocking around "with a dirty shovel...".

Those TVs could also sing once :)