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# Spectres of migration and the ghosts of Ellis Island

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This article is based on in-depth interviews carried out with producers involved in the restoration of Ellis Island Immigration Station, New York and those responsible for turning it into a successful national heritage site which opened to the public in 1990. The buildings on Ellis Island operated as an Immigration Station between approximately 1892 and 1924 during which time they processed over 16 million migrants of predominantly European origin. An analysis of interviews conducted as well as readings of Ellis Island taken from archives, folklore and US popular culture suggest that the site is imbued with the spectropolitics of its politically emotive immigrant processing past. Rather than dismissing the spectrality associated with Ellis Island as folkloric or irrational, the article attempts to untangle the different meanings attributed to the 'ghosts' that circulate through the buildings and material objects that inhabit the island. It suggests that a number of 'tropes' of ghostliness can be associated with the island; uncanny ghosts which defy the sanitizing force of the restoration; conjured ghosts, which are deliberately invoked by producers for various political and economic purposes, and the ghosts of deconstruction which make any meta-narrative of immigration history at Ellis Island a precarious if not troubling achievement.

**Keywords:** Ellis Island • materiality • migration • restoration • spectrality

## Spectres of migration and the ghosts of Ellis Island

Ellis Island... a gigantic, urban ruin creaking with history, ghosts and possibilities...<sup>1</sup>

Beyond dry official statistics, beyond the reassuring drone of stories that have been told a thousand times by guides in their Boy Scout hats, beyond the official display of everyday objects that have become museum pieces, the stuff of history, precious vestiges, venerable images, beyond the artificial calm of these photographs, fixed forever in their misleading black and white obviousness how can you identify this place? ...How can you grasp what isn't shown, what isn't photographed or catalogued or restored or staged?<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

In the late 1950s, Shirley Birden, a solitary female photographer explores with trepidation the abandoned ruins of the old immigration station at Ellis Island, New York City, aware of 'ghost friends' all around her as she experiences and later records sensations stranger than those conjured 'by all of the ghost stories and scary movies' she had watched throughout her life.<sup>3</sup>

Years later, against an ethereal soundtrack of music and chanting produced by Meredith Monk, a three-minute video-recorded choreographed scene is performed by contemporary dancers who appear as the 'ghosts' of immigrants that passed through the island whilst it was still in operation.<sup>4</sup>

Later still, as a small section of the immigration buildings on Ellis Island are renovated, celebrity businessman Lee Iacocca, (figurehead of the Statue of Liberty – Ellis Island foundation), gives a television interview in which he talks of how he senses the 'ghosts of the immigrants who once huddled under the arching dome of the Great Hall, clutching their few worldly possessions'.<sup>5</sup> Around the same time, Nevada Barr, a prolific mystery author pens a best selling fictional novel about her heroine, Anna Pigeon's explorations of the same eerie urban ruins in which she uncovers evidence of strange and unexplained happenings in the night:

Below her, floors settled and creaked as if the dead walked there... The skin on the top of her head tightened and she felt the chill that came into her veins when she was very afraid....<sup>6</sup>

Usually more accustomed to interpreting events in the present than the past, MSNBC nightly newsreader Tom Brokaw sits in a recording studio reading from a pre-prepared script in which he tells future visitors of Ellis Island that they will be 'inhabiting history, walking among the shadows of... parents and grand parents and great grandparents. Shifting patterns of immigration and changing regulations... doomed the islands to idleness and decay....' he continues, 'though they never shed their ghosts.'<sup>7</sup>

A decade later, in a busy *New York Times* office, journalist Maria Newman sits down to prepare an article about the need for a fuller restoration of the still abandoned south side of Ellis Island. As she writes, she paints an evocative, descriptive portrait of the effects of time on the dilapidated hospital buildings that remain unseen and untouched:

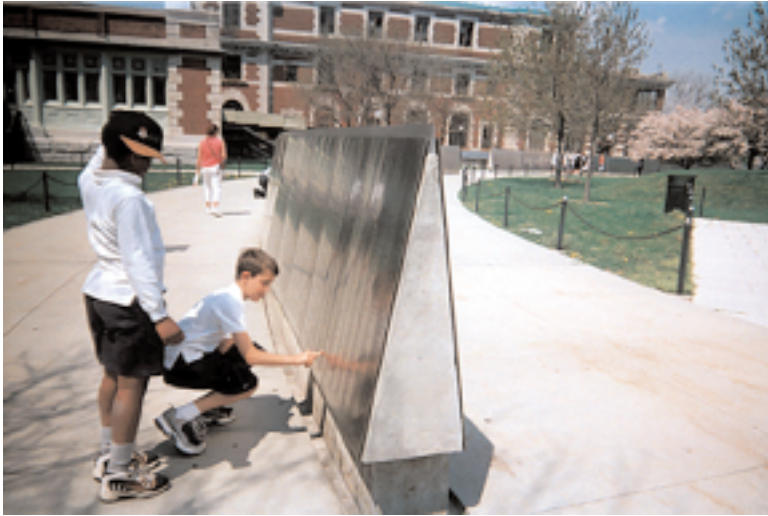
Inside a narrow room, with its grimy concrete floor, a rusted iron cot still sits forlornly by a tall window that faces the Statue of Liberty. A corroded fan hangs motionless above the bed. *There are ghosts in this room.* A cool breeze may have blown over a sickly immigrant here. Another man, misunderstood because of language and cultural differences, may have waited here until some doctor declared him sane or healthy enough to pass through the Golden Door.... Most of the buildings on the 27-acre island have not been used since 1954, and show the effects of time and weather. The spirits of thousands of immigrants, many of whom spent time here healing or being evaluated, still seem to inhabit the abandoned buildings.<sup>8</sup>

Simultaneously, in history classes across America, young schoolchildren read a curriculum piece by Mary Gordon: 'More than Just a Shrine: Paying Homage to the Ghosts of Ellis Island,' before concocting their own ghostly tales of the institutional skeleton that remains on Ellis Island...

If I believed in ghosts I would imagine that, after [museum] closing hours, a wispy Polish girl comes to play... piano, a Chinese boy stares out at the water as he cries for his sister who died on the rough journey, and a Scottish man stands in the registry room and remembers his wife who was sent home because of trachoma. They have come back to haunt Ellis Island...<sup>9</sup>

Sitting down in front of her computer, a slightly older American girl, Jami Attenberg tries to assimilate the experience of visiting Ellis Island with her family in her online journal:

I'm still trying to figure out how I felt about Ellis Island. My aunt and mom were so excited about it, and felt like it was going to be this inspirational moment. I was pretty creeped out by the building. I know that there



Children reading the names of migrants inscribed by ancestors on the 'Immigrant Wall of Honour'.

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were many instances of abuse, and none of that was addressed in anything I read or heard while I was there. It felt institutional and antiseptic and I kept sensing ghosts and shadows.<sup>10</sup>

## **The ghosts of Ellis Island immigration museum**

Separated from each other by time and space, few of the children, teenagers, and adults quoted in the introduction know each other, but collectively from their disparate standpoints, they have unknowingly knitted together a rich vision of a 'haunted' landscape, an island rife with the spectropolitics of its immigrant processing past.<sup>11</sup> Ellis Island is a place of significant memory and heritage. It was used as a space to police European immigration to America through the east coast from 1892 to 1924. It was also a space where eugenic ideas of genetic difference and new medical techniques were tested on the migrants passing through. After 1924, when quantitative and qualitative immigration restriction brought about by nativist interests rendered the buildings surplus to requirements, they lay largely unused apart from as places where enemy aliens were housed and anarchists and other detractors were deported. The buildings gradually turned to ruins until they were adopted by the National Park Service and eventually turned into an immigration museum with the help of a national fundraising campaign headed up by the Statue of Liberty – Ellis Island Foundation. Ellis Island reopened to the public in the early 1990s as a national heritage site portraying the nation's complex immigrant heritage, yet controversy remains about the kinds of stories told and memories articulated there.<sup>12</sup> Some see it as a vehicle for propagating the voices of the powerful and romanticizing immigrants in the past whilst naturalizing the pathologization of contemporary migrants. Others see a more nuanced set of knowledges on display there. It is this controversy that allows the ghosts of the past to live on in the form of disjunctures, ruptures and absences in American metanarratives of immigration history.



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An exterior section of the restored building at Ellis Island.

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Migration is in many ways a phantasmagorical phenomenon, hence Hardt and Negri's comments about the world being haunted by its spectre.<sup>13</sup> Despite the biopolitical projects of national governments, its essence, meaning and significance often remains difficult to adequately grasp, even in an era of advanced globalization. It is within the biopoetics of memory that stories about 'ghosts' haunting Ellis Island abound. Through this case study of Ellis Island we may explore how migration's meaning seeps through the representational and governmental categories it often remains enclosed within.<sup>14</sup> Contemporary folklore celebrates Ellis Island's main hall as the site of unexplained phenomena throughout the years yet relatively little attention has been given to what this omnipresent sense of a haunted migrant heritage landscape might signify.

## Spectres of migration at Ellis Island

A specter haunts the world and it is the specter of migration.<sup>15</sup>

The different meanings of ghosts, whilst diverse and sometimes incompatible, are important to understanding the psychic and material topography of Ellis Island. As Smith notes in her review of the abandoned nineteenth century immigration station, ‘many of those who toured Ellis Island as historic ruins felt deeply moved by experiencing the space as inhabited by the spirits of past immigrants and as ravaged and worn by the passing of time’. Even after the restoration of the building, Smith notes how ‘the relatively extensive space given to pictorial and physical evidence from Ellis Island’s abandoned years seems to be an attempt to grasp the spirit of the actual past even while applauding its disappearance in the tangible artistry and finality of the restoration’.<sup>16</sup>

In understanding how Ellis Island has become such a place of pilgrimage for ‘genealogical tourists’ attempting to conjure up the spirits of their ancestors, and as social scientists interested in the affective mechanisms and politics of place<sup>17</sup> we may either retreat from the specters conjured by the consumers of Ellis Island in favour of more rational or orderly accounts of places and their social histories or we may stop and instead ask, why are these seemingly inexplicable presences, ruptures in the temporal fabric, so often evoked at Ellis Island? What function do they serve for their chroniclers? How do they relate to larger questions of heritage, representation, place and identity?

J. P. Jones III has argued that, ‘genealogy is... a ghostly method’.<sup>18</sup> This is true in both the *popular* and the *Foucauldian* sense of the term. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Nash argues for instance that both ‘[p]opular genealogy and Foucauldian genealogy can do similar work’.<sup>19</sup> As Foucault writes, ‘the purpose of history guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit itself to its dissipation’.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Nietzsche’s controversial work is concerned with developing a genealogical critique of the idea of history as possessing a disinterested, and complete teleological body of facts about the past, arguing that history is always ultimately unknowable, yet it is constantly invoked as a tool by the powerful to dominate the less powerful.<sup>21</sup> Genealogy as a movement had its roots in the eugenics movement of the late 1800s and early 1900s, as a study of human relatedness foregrounded at immigration sites such as Ellis Island, which championed racial purity by asserting the ancestral pedigree of certain family groups over others. Indeed the discourse of eugenics was so based on notions of certainty and biological and genealogical truth that it eventually culminated in the atrocities of Nazi genocide.

By contrast, to construct a ‘genealogy of ghosts’ is not to revel in a narrative of certainty, of blood connections, connected pasts and corporeal relatedness, but rather to attempt to retrieve networks (or to use the Derridean term ‘traces’) of what has vanished, what has been lost, what has gone awry, and what remains unresolved through the passing of the generations. For Derrida this is an inherently political act.<sup>22</sup>

Despite different levels of comfort towards being ‘haunted’ by the spectres of the past, all actors involved in Ellis Island are in some way involved with producing, as well as experiencing a sense of ‘ghostliness’ or spectrality. For example, an early ‘concept plan’ for Ellis Island Immigration Museum suggested that the ‘registry room, the focus of the building and



the immigration process will [be made to] “speak for itself” with a minimum of modern intrusion... [in an] attempt to retain its “haunting character”. Phyllis Montgomery, a MetaForm contract researcher, tells a particularly poignant story:

The thing that has stayed with me [through the restoration of the immigration station] is the stories of the individuals. I will tell you what the single most moving thing that happened [was]. An achievement, I feel that transcends even the entire museum. A letter came in from a woman who was born in [the US] but her parents came over from Switzerland and she said that her mother was now in her early nineties and she wondered if we could help solve this mystery. When the parents came they had a three-year-old son who was sick and was quarantined, and they could only see him through a window. He was in that section of the island where people who were in quarantine were kept. So they could only look through the window. He died and they saw them pushing the gurney down the hall and they never knew what happened to the body. The next day they left the island. It has *haunted* them, of course the mother, all these years.

She continues:

They asked if we could find any information about what happened to her brother. So I had [an assistant]... work on that and she did all the things in the city, checking death certificates and all of that because of course there weren't any records anymore at Ellis. So she did track down the birth certificate and there were errors in it... inaccuracies like the countries of origin of the parents. But everything else fit. We knew the name of the child and so on. Anyway, [Mary] got copies of that and sent it to the daughter... it was just so incredibly moving. Mary found out where the body was buried and all of that accurate information. The mother was so relieved to know this before she died, and could say, 'I can go now that I know this'. That affirmation of helping a woman who had been in that torment for sixty years or so was so gratifying. (Phyllis Montgomery, November 2001)

Following on from this very evocative story<sup>23</sup> recounted by Phyllis Montgomery, a researcher at Ellis Island, the remainder of this article constructs a heterogeneous typology of ‘haunting’ at Ellis Island, by categorizing two main tropes of ‘ghosts’ that are important to understanding the processes at work there: uncanny ghosts and conjured ghosts. These conceptualizations of spectrality somewhat reproduce the (often contradictory or exclusive) insights in the academic fields of psychoanalysis and Marxism.

Such a project highlights the perilous difficulties of attempting to document that which is fundamentally apparitional and defies an adequate representational economy. Further, there are inherently *slippages* and *porous boundaries* between the differently informed categories of spectrality presented. Nevertheless, to define the different meanings of ghosts as they relate to Ellis Island is an important step in delineating a ‘concern with occurrences in social spaces that are not immediately there – but are either present in their absence or absent in their presence...’.<sup>24</sup> As such it provides a significant resource for ‘[opening] up ways of understanding social space not yet fully investigated’ and ‘pinning down’ some of the representations of ghostliness in recent geographical literature not yet fully developed.<sup>25</sup>

## Uncanny ghosts

For many theorists it is the very fabric of large urban buildings, designed to instill a sense of awe or wonder that produce certain *affects* – a sense of being somehow ‘haunted’ or spectral.<sup>26</sup> Vidler’s work on the *Architectural uncanny* uses the theme of haunting to join architectural

speculation to more general reflections on questions of individual estrangement, alienation, exile, and homelessness. Vidler contends that certain buildings are able to bring to the surface particular collective affects such as *homesickness*, *nostalgia*, even a sense of *mourning*.<sup>27</sup> Gordon also takes up the theme of the uncanny. She notes that whilst 'ghosts' may have until recently held a rather marginal place in social theory, psychoanalysis has a well developed paradigm within which the work of 'unseen,' shadowy forces may be perceived. Psychoanalysis

attempts to provide a scientific approach to the unconscious and to those symptomatic effects whose origins lie elsewhere, repressed, out of our conscious grasp. It has much to say about the process, such as displacement, projection, denial, rationalization, and wishing, by which things appear and recede....<sup>28</sup>

Hetherington further elaborates on the notion of the uncanny as it relates to the development of a theory of spatial spectropolitics, by suggesting that haunting brings up the issue of temporality through an unsettling of the order of space. To haunt is to remain where one does not belong – *unheimlich* (uncanny, but literally 'unhomely'), thereby blurring the ordering of space through a folding of time.<sup>29</sup> Developing the Freudian concept of the 'uncanny,' as the condition of being *in place* and *out of place* simultaneously, or of feeling at home whilst simultaneously experiencing a sense of strangeness or 'foreignness' intruding unexpectedly, Gelder and Jacobs apply the term to explain the legacies of unresolved land claims in post-colonial Australia:

Freud's 'uncanny' can be applied directly to conditions in postcolonial Australia, in particular after the Mabo decision in 1992 and the subsequent anxieties about who might come to own what. An aboriginal claim to land is quite literally a claim concerning unfinished business, a claim which enables what should have been laid to rest to overflow into the otherwise 'homely' realm of modernity.<sup>30</sup>

Here a vision of history tainted with the postcolonial traces of a ghostly past is constructed, in which the 'uncanny' re-appears to alert inhabitants to the 'unsettled-ness' which folds into Australia's historical lineage as a 'settler nation'.

In a similar way, one can invoke the metaphor of the ghost in an *uncanny sense* in describing the disquieting experiences of visitors to Ellis Island, who whilst not necessarily *looking* for ghosts, find that they unexpectedly leap out of the stonework to be 'present' with them, seeking a lost person or object or attempting to right a wrong, and alerting the visitor to elements of their collective pasts they may not have been aware of. For the actors involved in the production of the museum on Ellis Island, the architectural landscape has a particularly important part to play allowing the uncanny nature of the past to become somehow *visible* to visitors. A derelict, ruined landscape is seen as particularly conducive to invoking the 'ghosts' of the past in ways that contemporary architectural landscapes cannot, hinting at the materiality of memory – the linkages between subject and object, past and present, absence and presence.<sup>31</sup> As Michael, one NPS employee remarks:

[I]t was quite a quandary because of the vastness of the place and the immense cost associated with it no matter what we did, and so in 1981 we developed a plan that basically was espousing the idea of what's called 'benign neglect.' The idea was that certain areas, particularly the main building would be stabilized to a certain extent and it would have some degree of interpretation take place there, but the other building would essentially be left to deteriorate because of the huge cost associated with that and um, the plan I guess, called for a limited amount of exhibits and mostly interpretation – personal services: ranger led tours. And I guess the prevailing philosophy



was to let the building speak for itself... I think the private sector was really pressuring the Park Service's decision to do a minimal treatment of this place. I guess the thinking was that it was of such great significance that it deserved better.

He continues:

You know, I guess as the project evolved, certainly we felt that certain spaces were very evocative and should remain... should be kept to a minimum in terms of intrusion, and so the baggage room has very little development there and then in the bigger exhibit areas I think there was an idea to keep the exhibits away from the architecture, so that the building always, was *sort of speaking for itself*... so to speak.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly Peg Zitko a member of the Statue of Liberty – Ellis Island Foundation also remembers:

Just prior to 1976 they [the NPS] did get about a million dollars in congressional funds to do like a partial clean-up, so that they could open it as kind of national park, but you had to take guided tours as you were basically walking through the ruins. They had constructed wooden walkways, which prevented plaster from basically falling on your head, and they were essentially hardhat tours. People would be given hard hats and walked around.<sup>33</sup>

Many of the producers of the museum shared concerns about preserving this ruined and evocative quality as a way of keeping 'alive' the original 'ghosts' of the buildings. For instance, Mary, one of the MetaForm design team members, remembers:

I had worked [on Ellis Island] when it had been an abandoned site and it was just so evocative. People came out for these two and half hour tours and two and a half hours wasn't enough. They just wanted more and more. *There was just so much you could feel. The buildings spoke for themselves almost.* It was just such a human drama and one of the reasons I wanted to work on the project with the museum people was because I wanted to try to make sure that that evocative quality was preserved, that once the buildings were restored and were pristine, it was more back to what it had been, that the evocative quality, of kind of the 'haunted Ellis' would you know, somehow be preserved.<sup>34</sup>

For Mary then, the walls of the ruined landscape are almost conscious agents 'speaking for themselves'. For her the ruined landscape produces certain sublime and uncanny sensations of being haunted in which she becomes particularly aware of her own self and its relationship to what she sees as a record of the 'human drama' that surrounds her. For Alan Kraut, immigration historian, the company of these uncanny 'phantoms' haunting the dilapidated ruins were seen as rare and precious things to be treasured, objects/subjects able to convey an important message, rather than gruesome presences to be exorcised:

In the 1970s when [Ellis Island] first re-opened on a very limited basis to the public... I went over there and I was very impressed with the drama of the setting, with the plaster falling down, but you could still hear sort of *the ghosts, the voices* and I was very, very taken with it... Clearly, what we had on our hands at the beginning of this was a ruin: a genuine historical ruin of the kind people pay a great deal to go and see in Rome and Greece and so on and there was some discussion about whether or not we should leave part of it as a ruin, because it had such magic. As I said, the sort of... *the ghosts seemed to be there.* On the other hand, American visitors, museum visitors don't like ruins, except in other countries...<sup>35</sup>

In this quote, Alan links ruination of the abandoned immigration station to a sense of affective *drama* in which the 'ghosts' of the past are clearly audible. He is particularly *ambivalent* about the need for the restoration of the building, seeing this as something driven by

commercial needs and the desires of future visitors. Alan hypothesizes that the visitors' need for modern 'conveniences' seems to be the driving force behind the decision for an 'adaptive restoration' of the building, a process which he saw as running the risk of 'evicting' its resident 'specters.' He jokes that, 'American visitors... like the conveniences of clean bathrooms and souvenirs and being able to buy a Coca-Cola when they want to...'

These concerns echo those of architectural critic Huxtable who notes how architectural 'abandonment has its own meaning and message' so that 'a sanitary rehabilitation' of a building can often serve to 'exorcise its ghosts'. Of Ellis Island, she writes, 'abandoned chairs in Ellis Island's empty and decaying rooms could speak of transition and displacement with more eloquence than artful museum arrangement of specimen baggage and computer generated information displays.... In the completed restoration, all the ghosts are gone'.<sup>36</sup>

Harlan, a National Park Service employee also describes the deteriorated landscape he found in 1978, as full of the small, random, discarded objects:

You had trees growing in the main building, inside, you know, windows were broken, things were scattered about. Walking through the hospital building the first time I went through there, filing cabinets were turned over on their side, and medical records were on the floor. Um, y'know the place was in a state of severe deterioration... When I went there in 1978, you would go into some offices [and] it was like the people had just left. I mean their coats were still hanging on the hooks; there were shoes in their lockers. It was almost like people *just left*.<sup>37</sup>

Rudolph Vecoli, advisor to the project, remembers too:

It was a shambles, it was scandalous. The windows were all broken and there was plaster falling off the ceiling, you would have to wear hard hats and carry flashlights, there were vines growing in through the windows but then there were artifacts that were just left there like old beds, a wheelchair and stuff and utensils and then there were papers scattered over the floor and I picked up some which were from the files on different immigrants, just lying there... Ellis Island was literally being washed back into the sea....<sup>38</sup>

The ghosts then as they are found in the heterogeneous discarded objects described by Harlan Unrau and Rudolph Vecoli are, 'the enem[ies] of... the world as a sequence of events that flow in a single direction, a world of now-time, of capitalist time, of the time of the bustling city'.<sup>39</sup> When these objects and artifacts were found by Harlan and other employees it seemed as though it had been left as if the bureaucrats and medical personnel would return: with files, desks, furniture, dishes, beds and mattresses clogging the old rooms. As such, the ruined structures represented a period of time that the 'hustle and bustle' of New York City has elsewhere concreted over in its relentless forward march of progress, a biopolitical project that had been abandoned. Indeed, as Perec and Bober note, Ellis Island was basically a factory for making Americans, for turning emigrants into immigrants, 'an American-style factory as quick and efficient as a Chicago pork butcher's. At one end of the assembly line, they would put an Irish man, a Ukrainian Jew or an Italian from Apulia, at the other end – after their eyes and pockets had been inspected, and they had been vaccinated and disinfected – there emerged an American'. Thus, the ruination of the imposing bureaucratic buildings on Ellis Island, symbolic of the end of the period of 'official, institutionalized and... industrialized emigration'<sup>40</sup> and an efficient Fordist production line that produced migrants, the raw, cheap human 'might' with which to fuel the industrial expansion of capitalist America. Its reappearance serves as an unwelcome reminder (for museum producers) of the fable of linear progress – in social

thought, in industrial *and* institutional terms.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the rotting wooden cadaver refrigerator, in the corner of the old autopsy room, (whilst significantly it remains off limits to the average visitor); can be seen as both a literal and figurative symbol of a death of an American dream. In its state of ruination and abandonment, it also becomes a mysterious material object of enquiry. Who died here? What were their stories? Whose fault was it? Did the experimental biopolitical ideals and medical discourses pioneered at Ellis Island help or hinder those that passed through? As a journalist has written in the US publication *The daily record*, 'half a century after the closing of Ellis Island, eight vaults in the musty morgue and autopsy theatre are reminders of the 3500 immigrants who died there, laid to rest with unfilled dreams of a new life.'<sup>42</sup> The rusting securely gated hallway, corroded button hooks scattered across the floor (once used for inspecting migrants for trachoma) and austere crumbling single patient rooms of the still-to-be-restored psychopathic ward hint at the now outdated and strange 'rational' discourses, arcane forms of abandoned knowledge and medical gazes of an array of Ellis Island public health officials that once held court over the pathologized immigrants. In its corroded state it also hints at a malevolent past it may or may not have possessed, something that can never be known with all certainty.

Whilst some producers found the ruin, and its odd assemblages of social and medical paraphernalia – 'wild objects stemming from indecipherable pasts'<sup>43</sup> – fascinating, dramatic and awe-inspiring, others such as Nathan Glazer, a National Park Service employee centrally involved in the restoration, experienced it as gloomy and disheartening:

I do remember a rather impressive meeting of the group in an abandoned Ellis Island. I must say I was impressed and startled and to some extent depressed by how a great building had been allowed to decline into a ruin and what had to be done to restore it. It certainly reminded you of the oddities of government that will spend fortunes to build a building and then when it's time to close it, it seems there's no money left to maintain it.<sup>44</sup>

For Nathan, the ruins serve to highlight what he calls the 'oddities' of a society with its changing perceptions of what places and material objects are important over time. For him, these discarded elements and symbols combine to evoke an industrial and institutional project discarded in the rush towards the new. It is the *discontinuity* that Nathan finds so threatening.

Furthermore, many producers felt an overriding concern for distinguishing the authentic or organic 'ghosts' to be found in abandoned ruins from the 'faked phantasms' and commodified ghosts conjured by the heritage and tourism industry with their 'nostalgic potted accounts of the past'.<sup>45</sup> Many producers found themselves grappling with issues concerning authenticity and nostalgia: as Thomas Kessner, an academic advisor to the project remarks for instance,

[we had to] struggle with the question of how do you deal with the poetry of it, that is you know, coming over [to America as a migrant] and... and how much with the hardness of the real process? On the one-hand the openness of opportunity and on the other hand you know the immigration inspectors, the people who came through, people who were quarantined, families that were broken up: how much of that went on? Um, how do we portray the massive amounts of people? How do you give someone who is coming there a sense of that kind of mass, that kind of quantity?<sup>46</sup>

Just as de Certeau, Giard and Mayol postulate, then, 'national heritage... is made up of creative capacities and of the inventive style that articulates, as in a spoken language, the

subtle and multiple practice of a vast ensemble of things that are manipulated and personalized, reused and “*poeticized*”.<sup>47</sup> Many of the producers talked about themselves and their contemporaries as *magicians* having to figure out how to somehow ‘conjure’ the past out of thin air<sup>48</sup> in a way that preserved the ‘drama,’ poeticism and inherent ‘ghostliness’ of the setting.

The process of restoration involved simultaneously *exorcising* and *conjuring* ghosts, *excavating* and *burying* histories and material assemblages: judging absences and presences of knowledges and commemorative objects. The recent body of work by authors such as Urry and Callon and Law<sup>49</sup> on the phenomenon of ‘absent presence’ is a useful explanatory tool. As Hetherington puts it, ‘disposal expressed through its material forms, is part of the accomplishment of the ordering work that goes into making a society.... [S]ocieties develop conduits for the disposal of unwanted images and meanings and not just for the objects of waste’.<sup>50</sup>

As well as burial, the metaphor of ‘archeology’ and digging for knowledge also has a resonance at Ellis Island, both in a popular and Foucauldian sense. For instance, Mary Angela Hardwick, talks about her role as a kind of ‘detective,’ looking for clues, digging the archives for knowledge and in the process unwittingly stumbling across what she calls ‘buried treasure’ during her research:

[O]ne of the most exciting finds that we had.... Robert Watchorn had been the commissioner during the peak years of immigration through Ellis, which was like about 1905–1910. His papers were thought to not exist anymore. No one knew what had happened to these papers... Watchorn’s papers were thought not to exist, that they had been lost, destroyed or whatever. In the process of doing the research, we actually found Robert Watchorn’s papers in the basement of a church in England, in a little county. It was the town that he had originally immigrated from himself. Either before or right after his death, the stuff was shipped right back to his home town, put in the basement like right before the war and then was stuck right there... in boxes for years and years and no-one knew what they were, so that was a tremendous find. That I would say in some ways for me was one of the most exciting, was one of the best-buried treasures... I have spent many years looking for buried treasure, but for me that was one of the best finds... There are definitely aspects of the job where you feel like you are being a detective.<sup>51</sup>

Mary Angela Hardwick’s quote shows how the project of producing a heritage site often relies on ‘chance finds,’ serendipitous encounters and on unearthing ‘buried treasures’ that have been long forgotten about, conjuring them up through iteration, so they are once again visible and a relational whole. Phyllis Montgomery tells a similar tale:

The uncanny things that happened [you never forget.] Somebody in Chicago was out walking the dog found a whole carton of notebooks. They had belonged to a matron who had worked at Ellis in the early 1900s and so they were utterly invaluable to us. It was just *uncanny* that she had the presence to read it and recognise what it was and send it to the Park Service. So we got all of these things and they were written in 1907 and 1908 and it was just spectacular. (Phyllis Montgomery, November, 2001)<sup>52</sup>

Sometimes however, producers ‘stumbled across’ evidence from the past that they both did not expect to find and did not know how to deal with. When an Indian burial ground was unintentionally unearthed at Ellis Island 1987 for example, the decisions concerning whether to bury or unearth the kinds of pasts it signified, became pertinent and immediate:

In 1987, during the first restoration of the Main Building at Ellis Island, human remains... were recovered by NPS archeologists. When the senior physical anthropologist at the New York Museum of Natural History and a New York University Professor of Physical Anthropology identified the remains as being of prehistoric origin, NPS began a dialogue with the Delaware tribes (Inhabitants of the region when first contact with Europeans

occurred)... to determine final disposition of the remains... The recently erected Wall of Honour commemorates European migration to the United States, but there is not yet a memorial to the original inhabitants of the land... A model of [a]... monument proposed by the Grand Council of the Delaware Tribe has been submitted. It use to be a bronze piece consisting of three individuals – approximately life size.<sup>53</sup>

An archeology of matter and knowledge can uncover evidence that it did not intend to, just as easily as it can discover that which it was looking for. Degen and Hetherington posit ‘experiences of absence in presence are most of the time revealed when places are changing, transforming, and when a debt is not being acknowledged in that transformation. The native burial ground under the newly built condominium with pool is a familiar trope from horror movies’.<sup>54</sup> Decisions had to be made over whether to ‘conjure’ up the long buried remains of the Delaware Indians by erecting statues in their honor. Producers had to make value judgments about how the primarily euro-centric and time specific narratives planned for the museum would incorporate pre-historic remains. The producers decided that the narratives provoked by possible Delaware Indian statues were incongruous with the types of migrant stories planned for Ellis Island. Reburied, the final museum does not allude to the excavated remains, so that only ghostly traces of their existence remain in National Park Service archives, and the flurry of internal memos their discovery provoked. In this way, it is possible to see how ‘objects themselves may suffer a social death [through] being discarded or passing into storage in archives or attics’.<sup>55</sup>

The quotes included here begin to illustrate the conjuring process that producers must engage with in developing a spatialized account of the past. As Heather, another NPS worker suggests in her interview, in constructing a historic narrative, many of the non-NPS producers, used to writing academic accounts of the past, were just as interested in what was *gone*, what was *missing*, what was seen to be *absent* from the landscape as they were in what had been randomly preserved over time:

When historians come across any historic site, their question is ‘what happened here? What’s the story?’ When a historic preservationist comes at it, somebody from the National Park Service comes at it to say, ‘What’s left?’ ...The historians are as interested in what has *gone* but was part of the story, and so it is a natural tension that you have all the time and the work is best if everybody understands it’s a normal and natural tension and that you have to work it through.<sup>56</sup>

The tension here is one of *absence* and *presence*, the tension between *materiality* and the *immateriality*. This is a tension in which that which is seen to be missing assumes an importance at least equal to (if not more important) than the historical artifacts that remain. This is a tension between the discursive and the figural, between that which is easily perceived and that which is not – a space that ghosts inhabit. Even in the restored museum, the absent presences are gapingly obvious. Erica Rand describes a ‘normalization of absences’ at Ellis Island during her research there.<sup>57</sup> In her discussion of the heteronormative nature of displays and the ‘silencing’ around issues of sex and sexuality apparent at the site, she suggests, ‘one needs to look for sex [at Ellis Island] even though it cannot be precisely described as missing or buried’ in order to understand ‘what techniques and discourses contribute to the silencings around sex’:

The lack of information available, even through digging; a certain aura of reverence about the site – for heritage, hard times, ancestors, ...may make polite discretion or silence seem appropriate or unremarkable.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, for Kelly and Morton research into the life of Annie Moore, a well-known Irish-American immigrant who passed through Ellis Island, resulted in the figure ‘disappear[ing] in a series of dead ends, gaps and ellipses within an archive that represents an Irish-American woman as an exemplary U.S. citizen’. For them, ‘the tautological structure of the archive reinforces a systematic amnesia of the social and historical conditions that lead to Moore’s arrival and eventual assimilation’.<sup>59</sup>

Conjuring even recent histories then, poses immediate philosophical difficulties – much like those explained by the phenomenon of Derridean *différance*, in which the inherent instabilities and indeterminacies of meaning found in textual and linguistic sources are highlighted. Producers ultimately fail to achieve complete epistemological control over the past and instead are confronted with producing concrete knowledge from the fragments of the past that they unearth. The next section looks at processes of *conjunction* in more detail, and the ways in which producers have attempted to give a visual language to heterogeneous memories through various ‘conjuring tricks’.

## Conjuring tricks: phantasmagoria

Experience the spirit of our ancestors through the technology of today.<sup>60</sup>

Ours is a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange... like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.<sup>61</sup>

Connor argues that if we want to find today’s ghosts, we should look not at the abandoned ruins of the past, but to the workings of the telecommunications industry, the activities of the media, ‘that omni-present absent-presence, in which our “contemporary spectrality” is to be found’.<sup>62</sup> This conceptualization of spectrality is nowhere more evident than at the restored Ellis Island where NYNEX, corporate sponsors of the ‘Video Wall’ invite visitors to ‘[e]xperience the spirit of our ancestors through the technology of today’.<sup>63</sup> This Ellis Island inspired advertising campaign is a particularly literal example of *conjuring up* ghosts for a living, making money from invoking ancestral ghosts and invoking the past on demand – a pastime reminiscent of the activities of *Gypsy Rose Lee* on a much grander scale.

Inglis and Holmes’ excellent work on the ‘haunted highlands’ provides an analogous examination of the history of the parts played by spectres in constructing and reproducing prime tourism locations. In interrogating shifting relations between ghosts/haunted spaces and tourism, they expose some of the mechanisms developed to stimulate the heritage industry. Drawing on the writings of Sir Walter Scott, they trace the development of Scotland’s landscape as a repository of the mysterious and the ghostly and their role in its emergence as a destination, which stretches to the very beginning of modernity. They suggest that contemporary tourism in Scotland sells the country largely through the use of ghosts and other supernatural phenomena. The quote can be equally applied to heritage destinations such as Ellis Island:

A ghostly past clearly is felt to sell... The places where ghosts are held to live out their spectral non-lives are constructed as being authentic through the very presence of the ghost, which operates as a hallmark of the archaic nature of the locale in question.<sup>64</sup>



A sense of the past is mediated and guaranteed by the 'reassuringly un-reassuring' presence of the spectre. Rather than something that frightens people away, the sublime spectre has been turned into entertainment:

[the] tourism industry of late capitalism makes the spirit talk, compelling it to act as the voice of a past that in some ways never was. The history of the heritagization of ghosts is one that essentially concerns a making tame of that which once inspired terror.<sup>65</sup>

As rationality has banished spectres in place of an everyday life determined by primarily commercial, money-driven considerations, an absence of the more ineffable aspects of experience has been created. Paradoxically, this has created its own ghosts, hauntings and spectres. Marxist literature on *phantasmagoria* conceptualizes this notion of spectrality succinctly. Britzolakis writes that 'it is often said that the machine based rhythms of metropolitan life produce a new aesthetic corresponding to a transformed perception of the urban environment as "phantasmagoric"'. Such understandings highlight the 'apparitional quality of objects [on display] that are uncannily abstracted from the processes of their own making' so that the world of 'things' assumes a 'phantom objectivity' and uncanny power over people within certain aesthetic and historical configurations. As such, objects replace relationships between people with relationships between people and 'things'.<sup>66</sup> It also represents the penetration of commodity fetishism into the realms of the imagination and the psyche, supposedly the last 'impregnable stronghold' against the instrumental logic of capital.<sup>67</sup>

At Ellis Island, conjuring the 'spirits' of deceased migrants is a trick that suggests that the nation is an immortal social organism that endures the individual lives and deaths of its members. Through the material objects and spaces of Ellis Island, the dead and the living find a sense of connection. Conjuring ancestral ghosts on demand then, is a particularly literal example of the phantasmagoria of the modern city. Here the supernatural is also drawn on as a way of narrating what has been called a 'dissonant heritage' where uncomfortable subjects are given a more palatable edge through particular temporal distancing strategies.<sup>68</sup>

In one instance of resurrecting the past through communications technology, designers of the museum decided that a good way to bring 'alive' the ghosts of Ellis Island was to make the *voices* of former migrants fill its rooms. Peg Zitko, of the Statue of Liberty – Ellis Island Foundation, a private-not for profit organization, describes the process:

The foundation realized that the real key to the stories were the oral histories, and we knew that if we didn't start getting them soon the people would be dying. So even before restoration started on Ellis Island, we started collecting oral histories. We hired a firm and they were out soliciting these people, locating people that came through Ellis and interviewing them. That really started in the early 80's because... because people were getting to an age where they weren't going to be around too much longer and so we [thought we] best get their stories while we can... [I]f you read books on how to do your genealogy, the first thing people will say is talk to your relatives before they die because that is the best way to get the stories.... Because it is the easiest way to get the story, you know. Um so these folks, you had to ask them the right questions in order to get them to talk and once we did... phew... [expansive hand gesture] sometimes they would just open up.<sup>69</sup>

Similarly, Michael talks about how the NPS took the unusual step of collecting oral accounts from former migrants, using them as a key element of the museum:

A very unusual thing that we have never done, before or since, is created an oral history studio... [W]e felt that those personal reminiscences were just a valuable, an invaluable asset, and so we went to great lengths to create

an environment there for a recording studio to enable people to... we envisioned that people would come with their families and 'boy I remember back when' y'know, we took advantage of that opportunity.<sup>70</sup>

As a result of the creation of the oral history database, tourists are able to walk around the exhibits and pick up telephone headsets through which the continuously looping, crackling disembodied voices of former immigrants can be heard. Though most of these immigrants are now deceased, a 'conjuring trick' brings them to life to selectively recount memories of treatment on the island and memories of the 'old world'. The recordings repeat themselves incessantly with no regard for time or mortality. Contrary to the assumption that oral histories are from the migrants themselves, and thus untainted by larger cultural processes at work, Marian Smith, INS historian suggests that these histories are 'conjured up' in a very *deliberate* and *controlled* way which conceals as much about Ellis Island's past as it reveals:

Have you noticed how much of it is based on oral history of people who were three years old when they came through Ellis Island and spent five hours there, and then it was another seventy years before they told their story? Can you believe this? ...It is absolutely ridiculous. But they made the decision long ago to go with oral history as the foundation of their story and as a result they have got everybody coming and telling the American myth story and they reinforced it that way.<sup>71</sup>

Thus a metanarrative of immigration history is propagated, dissenters and discontinuities are erased and the voices of migrants are repetitive, regulated and unchallenging. Unlike today's American immigrants, who may protest about unequal opportunities or the discrimination they face, the immigrants of Ellis Island now speak in a uniform voice about their experiences of America.

The Great Hall, a large, empty, imposing room with a high vaulted ceiling of Guastavino tile represents another attempt to invoke ghosts – as the presence of an absence is deliberately used to generate a 'contemplative spirit'. A conjuring trick leaves the hall practically empty so that visitors may fill it 'with their own images and feelings'.<sup>72</sup> This again may be viewed as a strategy to depoliticize migrant heritage, to remove the ambiguous materiality of the Progressive Era (cattle pen like structures to herd migrants around in a systematic fashion). An extract from an archive dating from the period of restoration indicates some of the difficult choices made in restoring the main hall:

I am concerned that the exhibits and apparatus of interpretation not detract from the impact that the restored rooms [the baggage room, ticket office, and the registry room] in an uncluttered condition might have upon visitors. These rooms are crucial to a clear appreciation of the immigrant processing procedure and should be allowed, as much as possible to stimulate the *imagination* and *contemplative spirit* of the visitor. I especially hope that the stairway from the baggage room to the registry room will be reconstructed so that visitors may ascend it as the immigrants did.<sup>73</sup>

This is an attempt to invoke ghosts in a controlled, tamed and domesticated sense, to control the affective mechanisms of the restored building. The decision to leave this hall empty may be more complex than it first appears, since it contained different aesthetic objects at different times, some of which (such as 'cattle-pens' used to herd migrants around in a systematic fashion) may conjure negative emotional states for visitors. However, officially at least, museum producers describe their decision to leave the hall empty as one that would conjure up most effectively and dramatically the ghosts of the past for visitors as they walked through it:

One of the best decisions that we ever made from my perspective is to keep the exhibitory out of the great hall and to let people experience the great hall at least a little bit, the way the immigrants would have seen it, and it's

the echoes, that play off of the beautiful tiled ceiling, and the ability to really see that and appreciate it, and to imagine what it must have looked like to an immigrant from a small village somewhere in southern or eastern Europe that really packs a wallop, I think, in terms of the emotional impact of the museum.<sup>74</sup>

Much of the rest of the museum space is taken up with *life-size* [sic] black and white visual images of migrants.<sup>75</sup> Either through visitor enactment of the past or material objects, lost generations, and ancestors are provided a powerful presence in the here and now. Memories remain manifest through an array of images, garments, trinkets, and mementos at Ellis Island. At other times, the financial responsibility of conjuring up ancestral memories is placed squarely on the shoulders of the visitors themselves as leaflets promoting the wall of honour confront them with the searching question, 'if you don't keep their names alive... who will?'<sup>76</sup> Ironically then, rather than rendering the past enigmatic, conjuring ghosts is an attempt to disenchant a spectral history of migration, by making ghosts rational, ordered and natural – a way of disenchanting the world by making it real. In this way, historical narratives in the restored museum become a form of exorcism.<sup>77</sup> Conjuring, making things 'appear', is attempting to represent through intervening textually in the cultural landscape. Whether through a concern with exhibiting the phantasmagoria of objects on display in a cavalier fashion for purposes of profit, or through a genuine attempt to resurrect the ghosts of the past and make them 'speak' out of a concern with justice such practices are fraught with effects and consequences (both intentional and unintentional).

## Disentangling geography's spectral 'tropes'.

[I]f we let the ghosts out of the attic of geography, then... we will require new ways to think about the stale divisions that discipline our objects – between the there and the not there, the present and the absent, the real and the unreal, the remembered and the forgotten, the material and the transparent, the rationally behaved and the madly unruly.<sup>78</sup>

Ghosts are a problem for historicism precisely because they disrupt our sense of a linear teleology in which the consecutive movement of history passes untroubled through the generations.<sup>79</sup>

Spectropolitics... is always with us. Whether as benign spirits or frightening spectres, or, most likely, some uneasy combination of the two that we find hard to disentangle, those dead will continue to haunt us and to defer the possibility of any end to history.... As heirs to the past... we have no option but to extend history, and the spectropolitical project that invariably accompanies it into the indefinite future.<sup>80</sup>

In this article the subject/object of the ghost has deliberately been used in a broad and inclusive sense. For instance, the first section uses the ghost in an *uncanny* sense in describing the disquieting experiences of visitors to Ellis Island who, whilst not necessarily looking for ghosts, find that they unexpectedly 'leap out' of the stonework to be 'present' with them, seeking a lost person or object or attempting to right a wrong. This analysis chimes with Foote's understanding of the way in which sites of memory can play an active role in their own interpretation, how objects can have their own uncanny agency despite the intentions of their producers.<sup>81</sup> Hoskins also explores the uncanny agency of 'objects' at Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco and finds that objects play a role in their own narration.<sup>82</sup> The second section explored the attempts of producers to 'conjure' the ghosts of

migrants through deliberate affective strategies, and explored all of the questions of authenticity, poetics, and authority that this inevitably provokes. A third theme running through both sections of the paper is that of the tricky undecidability of meaning encountered by consumers and producers trying to resurrect a material history of Ellis Island and their roles as 'ghost hunters,' actively negotiating a historical graveyard and *looking for* the spectral elements that the bio-political spaces of Ellis Island contains.

For Leighton the figure of the spectre indulges a desire to believe in *other* (sometimes more fearful, sometimes more utopian) worlds.<sup>83</sup> The spectre then is a particularly appropriate subject/object of analysis at Ellis Island, the *contact zone* where Old Worlds and New Worlds have collided, and the space where world-views concerning heritage, memory and identity continue to meet inter-subjectively. As Buse and Stott succinctly articulate it: 'the question of haunting neatly encapsulates deconstructive concerns about the impossibility of conceptually solidifying the past'.<sup>84</sup> Spectres are such a prevalent and productive trope in both popular and scholarly spheres because in their amorphous ethereality they are paradoxically able to 'represent' the fatally flawed nature of historicism that postmodern critics (with their incredulity towards meta-narratives) often summon. Caught in an eternal and simultaneously present and absent moment, spectres are able to *transgress* the prisms of time and space that often imprison history, precisely because of their very unknowable and irresolvable nature. In this sense, spectral traces may in fact provide a more unmediated access to memory than the disciplining rationality of more discursive and utilitarian forms of the past displayed in the refurbished Immigration Station at Ellis Island.

Where the state (in the form of the National Park Service) and its private sponsors (including the Statue of Liberty – Ellis Island Foundation) claim to have dealt with all 'unfinished business', to put everything in *order* at Ellis Island in pursuit of the nation's forward march towards its metaphysical and political-economic destiny, *revenants* serve to unsettle and disrupt these modernist conventions by rearing up when least expected with a message from the figurative world outside of historical discourse. Migrants from the past continue to speak to the concerns and worries of today's migrants (displacement, separation, discrimination, exile, alienation, marginalization). Despite a romanticization of Ellis Island migrants, traces of politicization remain. In not knowing, or wishing to accept that they are 'dead' they simply continue their familiar rituals, rendering time (and space) *out of joint*, for those who happen to stumble upon them. In the post 9/11 era when the sovereignty of nation-states remains largely absolute (despite the pledge of extra-national unity promised by globalization), migration continues to be a ghostly phenomenon, something threatening and uncanny, on the outer edge of what is sayable. It remains something to be quantified, measured, tamed and understood – the 'other', the shadow, the outer force that threatens to disrupt the centre. Wylie carefully explores the relationship between journeying and spectrality through his analysis of the writings of W. G. Sebald. Sebald's literary works use a variety of textual and pictorial methods to highlight the inherent spectrality of themes such as wandering and exile. His personal experiences of exile and migration have led him to experiment with modes of representing the figure of the wanderer in juxtapositions of images, found pieces of paper, memories and writings. Wylie argues that much can be learned from W. G. Sebald in generating spectral geographies of place and the self.<sup>85</sup>

In a liberal democratic climate heralding the end of 'history with a purpose',<sup>86</sup> the relationship between producers and *spectropolitics* at Ellis Island is an uncertain and sometimes uneasy one. For some of those involved in the restoration of the buildings and the production or maintenance of the museum, such as Jeff Dosik (museum librarian), restoration of urban ruins is seen as a process through which the immigrant spectres of the past are laid to rest prematurely:

With the new conveniences in place... everything seems artificial, so creamy, and so avant-garde that the historical perspective can get lost. I've encountered visitors here who have told me that while they have found the museum exhibits on Ellis Island all well and good, very fascinating to see what survived over time, when they walk around the building some of the groups tell me that they can't get a feeling for history because the restoration work has been so creamy and artificial and so glossed over the way the building has been restored.<sup>87</sup>

Jeff Dosik's quote strengthens the convictions of those who see the postmodern, late capitalist, postcolonial world as 'repressing' and 'projecting' its ghosts and phantoms.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, for another National Park Service employee, Michael Paskowsky, the spectres remain, though the phantasmagorical processes of conjuration at work within the museum have hidden them somewhat:

[Ellis Island]...is a moving place even today I think, and probably even more so when it was more ghostly and dilapidated. In some ways I think the old dilapidated look was even more haunting and evocative than perhaps today.<sup>89</sup>

Whatever the different sets of producers' relationships to the spectres of the past, (and despite any 'ghost-busting' motivations harboured), one cannot police meaning or history, as Derrida's *spectropolitics* maintains. The fragmented and indeterminate iterations – always-incomplete interpretations of the past at Ellis Island mean that the uncanny ghosts continue to slip through its architectural cracks, as Alan Kraut notes:

The magic is still there and it comes out at peculiar times. Often in the midst of the crowds that come, it is hard to catch the magic, but I happened to be there one very snowy morning and in 1996, a January morning, I was working... on a temporary exhibit called 'Doctors at the Gate', which was about the public health presence on Ellis Island. Because it was snowy... not many people had come, the school groups had cancelled and so there was nobody running around and it was all quiet and still with the snow sort of falling outside and you really could hear the voices there then.... just a magical feeling about the place.<sup>90</sup>

As Derrida writes then, 'they are always there, *spectres*, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet'.<sup>91</sup> Whilst 'the products that come out of restoration are compromises... places for transit between the ghosts of the past and the imperatives of the present... [these] passageways on the multiple frontiers that separate periods, groups, and practices... play an important role in the urban polyphony. ...[R]estored buildings, mixed habitats belonging to several worlds... deliver the city from its imprisonment in an imperialistic univocity. However enamel-painted they may be, they maintain there the heterodoxies of the past... safeguarding [the city's] multiplicity'.<sup>92</sup>

In conclusion, even though ghosts are echoes which refuse construction, fragments that lend themselves only to speculation and imagination, the ghostly and the uncanny still returns at Ellis Island as a sublimated set of affective memories and sensations, creating *bumps, jolts*

and *shocks* on the smooth utopia of the newly refurbished buildings, whilst continuing to slumber in the dormant buildings awaiting attention on the south side of the island.

Whilst to the living world at least, many ghosts *do* die, many are exorcised by the passage of time and no longer haunt, or at least haunt in ways that are not apparent to the living, other times ghosts remain tenuously but virulently alive within, and possess the 'spirits' of, their genealogical ancestors – the unfinished business of ancestors can reverberate invisibly but forcefully down the generations becoming particularly apparent at sites like Ellis Island.<sup>93</sup> In this way, a spectral genealogical consciousness has a manifest destiny of its own, one that may be totally at odds with the progressive ideologies and commemorative practices of the state.

Indeed, it is because of the very persistence of these *revenants* at Ellis Island, that *visibility* is possible for those once hopeful migrants and their American dreams that do not fit in to the orthodox narrative of upward mobility and cultural assimilation. Unearthing spectral fragments might contribute to an *aesthetic of resistance* so that the present remains permanently engaged in phantasmic dialogue with what has passed. Perhaps now more importantly too, the possibility of *social equality* and *understanding* for their genealogical ancestors, whose familial and biological revenants have reverberated down the generations, might, because of, (or perhaps despite) the conjurations of the heritage landscape, have a '*ghost*' of a chance.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> N. Barr, *Liberty falling* (New York, Avon Books, Inc., 1999), preface.
- <sup>2</sup> B. Perce and R. Bober, *Ellis Island* (New York, New Press, 1995), p. 39.
- <sup>3</sup> Quote taken from the interpretive board at Ellis Island Immigration Museum, 2002. Photographs exhibited from a set taken by Shirley Burden, 1954.
- <sup>4</sup> M. Monk, 'Ellis Island'. Greenwich Film Associates.
- <sup>5</sup> B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination culture: tourism, museums, and heritage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1998).



- <sup>6</sup> N. Barr *Liberty falling*, p. i.
- <sup>7</sup> Quote taken from Ellis Island audio-guide, narrated by Tom Brokaw, 2002.
- <sup>8</sup> M. Newman, 'The rust must go but the ghosts linger', *New York Times*, New York, 2001. Available online at: <http://www.saveellisland.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5023> [accessed 06/07/06].
- <sup>9</sup> S. M. Kurin, 'Ellis Island: a haunting return'. Available online at: <http://www.toowrite.com/new-comp2/0548.shtml> [accessed 03/07/08].
- <sup>10</sup> J. Attenberg, Online journal. Available at: <http://www.whatever-whenever.net/111900.htm> [accessed 07/03/08].
- <sup>11</sup> I use 'spectropolitics' here to suggest the power-laden nature of that/those which/who can be represented but cannot 'speak.' Derrida suggests that the motif of the spirit or spectre is regularly inscribed in contexts that are highly charged politically, in the moments when thought lets itself 'be preoccupied more than ever by what is called history, language, the nation...', see J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new international* (London, Routledge, 1994), p. 72.
- <sup>12</sup> The author's research explored the production of immigrant knowledge at this national heritage site through interviews with the producers of the museum and archival research which uncovered the politics involved in the museum's creation. Fieldwork was carried out between 2001 and 2002 and consisted of around 40 in depth interviews with key actors involved in restoring the buildings and turning Ellis Island into a museum. The site was chosen because of its unique status as a national museum which focuses on *immigrant* memories and was therefore a model which followed the geographical connectivity acknowledged by new social historians to be largely absent from most Anglo-American heritage institutions.
- <sup>13</sup> M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2001).
- <sup>14</sup> Avery Gordon has been one of the few recent social theorists to take the notion of haunting seriously by arguing that the spatial 'presence' of ghosts can signify a history of unaddressed social injustice and state repression. In her book *Ghostly matters* she draws on several case studies including the state terror of disappearance in Argentina and lingering inheritance of US racial slavery, as a way of developing a social understanding of how 'hauntings' work on and through people and place in everyday life. She describes the ghost as a 'seething presence' where an absence is expected, and argues that the spectre is a social figure that deserves further investigation'. See A. F. Gordon, *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination* (Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 5. The opaque history of immigrants' treatment in the US in the nativist and eugenic era also remains largely unaddressed in the present and thus remains fertile ground for continued speculation.
- <sup>15</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 213.
- <sup>16</sup> J. Smith, 'Exhibition review: celebrating immigration history at Ellis Island', *American quarterly* 44 (1992), pp. 82–100.
- <sup>17</sup> See N. Thrift, 'Posthuman world of technology', in *Paper session of the IGC – UK (2004) One Earth – Many Worlds*. Glasgow, UK and B. Anderson, 'Practices of judgement and domestic geographies of affect', *Social and cultural geography* 6 (2005), pp. 645–60.
- <sup>18</sup> J. P Jones III is perhaps here drawing on Derrida's phrase 'a genealogy of ghosts'.
- <sup>19</sup> C. Nash, 'Genealogical identities', *Environment and planning d: society and space* 20 (2002), p. 49.
- <sup>20</sup> M. Foucault, 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history', in *Language, counter-memory, practice* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 162.
- <sup>21</sup> For Nietzsche, an interest in 'history' represents an obsession with the past and the dead. For Nietzsche, the strength to 'let go' of the dead and forget the past was a step away from 'slave morality' towards the superman to come. See F. Nietzsche, *On the genealogy of morality: a polemic* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000 [1887]).
- <sup>22</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*.

- <sup>23</sup> Others have also actively ‘hunted’ for ghostly traces of the past at Ellis Island. Barry, a NPS librarian at Ellis Island comments for example, how during the course of his job: ‘a lot of people called me up and asked me how to get the record of their brother or aunt that died at Ellis Island’ (Interview with Barry Moreno, March, 2002).
- <sup>24</sup> M. Degen and K. Hetherington, ‘Hauntings’, Spatial hauntings special edition of *Space and culture* 11/12 (2001), p. 1.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> S. Pile, ‘Spectral cities: where the repressed returns and other short stories’, in J. Hiller and E. Rooksby, eds, *Habitus: a sense of place* (Hampshire, Ashgate Publishing, 2001), pp. 219–39. For recent research on this see A. Frood, ‘Ghosts all in the mind’, *BBC News online* 21 May 2003. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/3044607.stm> [accessed 07/03/08].
- <sup>27</sup> A. Vidler, *Architectural uncanny: essays in the modern unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1992).
- <sup>28</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly matters*, p. 196.
- <sup>29</sup> K. Hetherington, ‘Secondhandedness: consumption, disposal and absent presence’, *Environment and planning d: society and space* 22 (2004), pp. 157–73.
- <sup>30</sup> K. Gelder, and J. M. Jacobs, ‘The postcolonial ghost story’, in P. Buse and A. Stott, eds, *Ghosts: deconstruction, psychoanalysis, history* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 179–99, p.181.
- <sup>31</sup> See T. Edensor, ‘Mundane hauntings: commuting through the phantasmagoric working-class spaces of Manchester, England’, *Cultural geographies* 15(3), pp. 313–333.
- <sup>32</sup> Interview with Michael Paskowsky, October 2001.
- <sup>33</sup> Interview with Peg Zitko, October, 2001.
- <sup>34</sup> Interview with Mary-Angela Hardwick, Metaform, 2001.
- <sup>35</sup> Interview with Alan Kraut, October 2001.
- <sup>36</sup> A. L. Huxtable, ‘The way it never was’, in *The unreal America: architecture and illusion* (The New Press, New York, 1997), p. 31.
- <sup>37</sup> Interview with Harlan Unrau, October 2001.
- <sup>38</sup> Interview with Professor Rudolph Vecoli, 2002.
- <sup>39</sup> K. Hetherington, ‘Phantasmagoria/phantasm agora’ materialities, specialities, and ghosts’, Spatial Hauntings special edition of *Space and culture* 11/12 (2001), p. 28.
- <sup>40</sup> Perec and Bober *Ellis Island*.
- <sup>41</sup> As Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, a member of the history advisory writes in a letter to Gary Roth of the NPS on 23 October 1985, ‘Immigrants came to get work in America. And America wanted them to work, to fill the demand for labour in an expanding industrial economy. [Any museum]...exhibit must convey the sense that Ellis Island was not just a point of entry; it was a labour market distribution centre. Much of what went on at Ellis was intended to make sure that those who came to the United States would be healthy workers, that they could in fact work, and not end up as charges to the state’ (NPS private archives, Boston).
- <sup>42</sup> S. Strunsky, ‘Coming out of the dark’, *The daily record*, date unknown. It is estimated that 3500 persons (including 1400 children) died on the island between 1900–1954 (Chermayeff, Wasserman and Shapiro, 1991).
- <sup>43</sup> M. De Certeau, L. Giard and P. Mayol, ‘Ghosts in the city: an uncanniness of the “already there”’, in M. De Certeau and L. Giard, eds, *The practice of everyday life: Vol. 2: living and cooking* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998), pp. 133–43, p. 135.
- <sup>44</sup> Interview with Nathan Glazer, April, 2002.
- <sup>45</sup> E. Hallam and J. Hockey *Death, memory and material culture* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2001), p. 9.
- <sup>46</sup> Interview with Thomas Kessner, October 2001. Similarly, Alan Kraut writes in a letter to Gray Roth, NPS project manager, 27 May 1988, ‘the History Committee appreciates how difficult it has

- been to reconcile the preservation of Ellis Island's quiet dignity as a genuine American ruin with the need for modern interpretive equipment to make Ellis Island understandable to all...'
- <sup>47</sup> De Certeau, Giard and Mayol, 'Ghosts in the city', p. 141.
- <sup>48</sup> Steve Briganti recalls, 'most museums start slowly and they are... lets say the Metropolitan Museum was put together as I understand it by a group of people who were interested in art and four or five wealthy families, and from there expanded and expanded and expanded. Ours was different. It just grew full-blown. I mean it was born full-blown and so that was very challenging, a very challenging thing to do' (October 2001).
- <sup>49</sup> J. Urry, 'Connections', *Environment and planning d: society and space* 22 (2004), pp. 27–37. M. Callan and J. Law, 'Guest editorial', *Environment and planning d: society and space* 22 (2004), pp. 3–11.
- <sup>50</sup> Hetherington, 'Secondhandedness', p. 161.
- <sup>51</sup> Interview with Mary Angela Hardwick, 2002.
- <sup>52</sup> George Tselos (April 2002) tells the same story during an interview, though he thinks that is was 'scavengers... people who had a hobby of going through the alleys and checking out the trash for anything interesting,' that found the material and handed it to the NPS.
- <sup>53</sup> Marie Rust, NPS Regional Director, North Atlantic Region, in a memorandum to the Director of the US Department of the Interior (2 May 1994).
- <sup>54</sup> Degen and Hetherington, 'Hauntings', p. 3.
- <sup>55</sup> Hallam and Hockey, *Death, memory and material culture*, p. 9.
- <sup>56</sup> Interview with Heather Huyck, February, 2002.
- <sup>57</sup> She writes, 'in the beginning of visiting [Ellis Island] I felt some creepy nausea that felt like oppression overload or something, but more so I remember thinking, like, oh, those are the ghosts people are talking about' (Erica Rand, personal email communication, 9 October 2003).
- <sup>58</sup> E. Rand 'Breeders on a golf ball: normalizing sex at Ellis Island', *Environment and planning d: society and space* 21 (2003), p. 443.
- <sup>59</sup> S. A. Kelly and S. C. Morton, 'Annie Moore and the archives of displacement: towards an immigrant history of the present', *Social and cultural geography* 5(4) (2004), pp. 633–50.
- <sup>60</sup> NYNEX promotional campaign at Ellis Island, in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination culture*, pp. 177–87.
- <sup>61</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, *The communist manifesto* (Various editions, 1848).
- <sup>62</sup> S. Connor, 'The machine in the ghost: spiritualism, technology and the "direct voice"', in P. Buse and A. Stott, eds, *Ghosts: deconstruction, psychoanalysis, history* (London, Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 203–25.
- <sup>63</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination culture*, p. 185.
- <sup>64</sup> D. Inglis and M. Holmes, 'Highland and other haunts: ghosts in Scottish tourism', *Annals of tourism research* 30 (2003), p. 56.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- <sup>66</sup> C. Britzolakis, 'Phantasmagoria: Walter Benjamin and the poetics of urban modernism', in P. Buse and A. Stott, eds, *Ghosts: deconstruction, psychoanalysis, history* (London, Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 72–91.
- <sup>67</sup> 'Phantasmagoria' was a device invented for the exhibition of optical illusions usually produced by magic lantern. It created an optical effect so that figures on a screen appear to dwindle into the distance or to rush towards the observer with rapid changes in size. The term is also more generically utilized to denote a constantly shifting, confused succession of things seen or imagined, whilst in a dreaming, delusional or feverish state. Importantly, the term phantasmagoria is pejoratively used to describe the illusions created by commodity fetishism.
- <sup>68</sup> B. Graham, G. J. Ashworth and J. E. Tunbridge, *A geography of heritage: power, culture and economy* (London, Arnold, 2000).

- <sup>69</sup> Interview with Peg Zitko, October 2001.
- <sup>70</sup> Interview with Michael Paskowsky, October 2001.
- <sup>71</sup> Interview with Marian Smith, immigration historian for the Immigration and Naturalisation Service, 2002.
- <sup>72</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination culture: tourism, museums, and heritage*, p. 185.
- <sup>73</sup> Alan Kraut, Historian, in a letter to Bruce McHenry, NPS, 18 December 1983.
- <sup>74</sup> Alan Kraut, October 2001.
- <sup>75</sup> Royle's book length treatment of 'the uncanny' demonstrates how the photographic image creates a parallel world of phantasmic doubles alongside the concrete world of senses verified by positivism. See N. Royle, *The uncanny* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003).
- <sup>76</sup> Statue of Liberty – Ellis Island Foundation promotional leaflet.
- <sup>77</sup> J. Baudrillard, 'The year 2000 will not take place', in E. A. Grosz, ed., *Futur\*Fall: excursions into post-modernity* (Sydney, Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney, 1986).
- <sup>78</sup> J. P. Jones III, 'What's the matter with ghost stories?' Paper presented at *Association of American geographers* conference. New Orleans, 2003 p. 5.
- <sup>79</sup> Buse and Stott, *Ghosts*, p. 14.
- <sup>80</sup> S. Sim, *Derrida and the end of history* (Cambridge, Icon Books, 2000), p. 63.
- <sup>81</sup> K. Foote, *Shadowed ground: America's landscapes of violence and tragedy* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1997), p. 5.
- <sup>82</sup> G. C. Hoskins, 'Materializing memory at Angel Island immigration station', *Environment and planning a* 39(2) (2007), pp. 437–55.
- <sup>83</sup> A. Leighton, 'Ghosts, aestheticism, and "Vernon Lee"', *Victorian literature and culture* 28 (2000), pp. 1–14.
- <sup>84</sup> Buse and Stott, *Ghosts*, p. 11.
- <sup>85</sup> J. Wylie, 'The spectral geographies of W. G. Sebald', *Cultural geographies* 14 (2007), pp. 171–88.
- <sup>86</sup> F. Fukuyama, *The end of history and the last man* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1992).
- <sup>87</sup> Interview with Jeff Dosik, museum librarian, 2002.
- <sup>88</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly matters*, p. 12.
- <sup>89</sup> Interview with Michael Paskowsky, October 2001.
- <sup>90</sup> Interview with Professor Alan Kraut, 2001.
- <sup>91</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 176.
- <sup>92</sup> De Certeau et al., 'Ghosts in the city', pp. 137–8.
- <sup>93</sup> See Nash, 'Genealogical identities', p. 49.