



Exemplar Chapter 33

A Glossary of Haunting

Eve Tuck and C. Ree

Act so that there is no use in a centre. A wide action is not a width. A preparation is given to the ones preparing. They do not eat who mention silver and sweet. There was an occupation. A whole centre and a border make hanging a way of dressing. This which is not why there is a voice is the remains of an offering. There was no rental.

Gertrude Stein, Rooms, Tender Buttons, 1914 (2007), p. 39

The derealization of the ‘Other’ means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral.

Judith Butler, Precarious Life, 2006, p. 33

Ghosts are never innocent: the unhallowed dead of the modern project drag in the pathos of their loss and the violence of the force that made them, their sheets and chains.

Avery Gordon, Ghostly Matters, 1997, p. 22

A

Alphabet of terms

This is a glossary written by two women, both theorists and artists, in the first person singular. A glossary ordinarily comes after a text, to define and specify terms, to ensure legibility. Glossaries can help readers to pause and make sense of something cramped and tightly worded; readers move from the main text to the back, and forth again. In this case, the glossary appears without its host—perhaps because it has gone missing, or it has been buried alive, or because it is still being written. Maybe I ate it. It has an appendix, a remnant, which is its own form of haunting, its own lingering. This glossary is about justice, but in a sense that is rarely referenced. It is about righting (and sometimes wronging) wrongs; about hauntings, mercy, monsters, generational debt, horror films, and what they might mean for understanding settler colonialism, ceremony, revenge, and decolonization. In the entries of this glossary I will tell the story of my thinking on haunting. Yet this glossary is a fractal; it includes *the particular and the general*, violating the terms of settler colonial knowledge which require the separation of the particular from the general, the hosted from the host, personal from the public, the foot(note) from the head(line), the place from the larger narrative of nation, the people from specific places. This glossary is a story, not an exhaustive encyclopedia (which is itself a container), and this story includes my own works of theory and art as well notations on film and fiction. It is a story that seethes in its subtlety—the mile markers flash-faded instantly from exposure. Pay close attention, and then move very far away. I am only saying this once.

Am I telling you a story?

In telling you all of this in this way, I am resigning myself and you to the idea that parts of my telling are confounding. I care about you understanding, but I care more about concealing parts of myself from you. I don't trust you very much. You are not always aware of how you can be dangerous to me, and this makes me dangerous to you. I am using my arm to determine the length of the gaze.

At the same time that I tell, I wonder about the different endings, the unfurled characters, the lies that didn't make it to the page, the anti-heroes who do not get the shine of my attention. Each of the entries in this glossary is a part of the telling. Together, they are the tarot—turn this one first, and one divination; turn another first, and another divination. Yes, I am telling you a story, but you may be reading another one.

American horror, as depicted in film

This is what I can't help but notice. Mainstream narrative films in the United States, especially in horror, are preoccupied with the hero, who is perfectly innocent, but who is assaulted by monstrosity or haunting just the same. Part of the

horror of US horror films is the presumed injustice that a monster or ghost would tamper with the life of a decent person. We, the audience, are meant to feel outrage in the face of haunting, we are beckoned to root for the innocent hero, who could be us, because haunting is undeserved, even random. The hero spends the length of the film righting wrongs, slaying the monster, burying the undead, performing the missing rite, all as a way of containment. This story arc has the same seduction as math, a solution to the problem set of injustice. The crux of the hero's problem often lies in performing that mathematics. Chainsaw the phantom + understand the phantom = a return to the calm of our good present day.... Until the next breach, which triggers the next round of problem solving.

Select recent Japanese horror films disrupt the logic of righting past injustice or reconciliation, instead invoking a strategy more akin to wronging, or revenge. In *Dark Water*, Hideo Nakata's popular 2002 Japanese horror film (discussed in more detail in this glossary under entry **D, Dark Water**), an unsubdued and vengeful ghost haunts tenants in a leaking apartment building—in particular a newly single mother and her daughter, whose relationship the ghost covets and resents. At the end of the film, to spare her own daughter, the mother accepts the inevitability of the haunting and assumes the role of the ghost's mother; her daughter, in turn, suffers the same maternal abandonment that triggered the first ghost's horrific fury; rather than a heroic slaying, there is an anti-heroic relinquishing. Rather than resolution, deferment.

Similarly, in *Ringu* (Nakata, 1998) and its American remake *The Ring* (Verbinski, 2002), the main character, again a mother, attempts and fails to put a ghost spirit to rest. In the films, a mother and son watch a viral video of disturbing imagery which contains another sort of contagion: A vengeful ghost of a murdered girl turns the act of seeing her trauma into a violent curse, and anyone who views it dies horrifically a week later. As part of the main character's desperate search to save her son, she uncovers the story of the girl's psychic powers and the murder by her fearful father, finds her body in a well and properly buries it; however, the ghost is unappeased by ceremonial closure and continues to kill. The mother discovers the only way the ghost will spare someone is to copy the tape and make sure yet another person sees it, all of which the mother frantically prepares to do at film's end.¹ Until every person has witnessed the tape, the curse continues. At work is a logic of personal rescue through social contamination, a twisted outcome. Rather than spectral containment, spectral dissemination.

The difference between notions of justice popularized in US horror films and notions of justice in these examples of horror films from Japan is that in the former, the hauntings are positioned as undeserved, and the innocent hero must destroy the monster to put the world in balance again (though predictably, several of the hero's companions who are women or people of color will likely be sacrificed along the way). In the latter, because the depth of injustice that begat the monster or ghost is acknowledged, the hero does not think herself to be innocent, or try to achieve reconciliation or healing, only mercy, often in the form of passing on the debt.

American anxieties, settler colonial horrors

Colonization is as horrific as humanity gets: genocide, desecration, poxed-blankets, rape, humiliation. Settler colonialism, then, because it is a structure and not just the nefarious way nations are born (Wolfe, 1999), is an ongoing horror made invisible by its persistence—the snake in the flooded basement. Settler colonial relations are comprised by a triad, including a) the Indigenous inhabitant, present only because of her erasure; b) the chattel slave, whose body is property and murderable; and c) the inventive settler, whose memory becomes history, and whose ideology becomes reason. Settler colonialism is the management of those who have been made killable, once and future ghosts—those that had been destroyed, but also those that are generated in every generation. “In the United States, the Indian is the original enemy combatant who cannot be grieved” (Byrd, 2011, p. xviii). Settler horror, then, comes about as part of this management, of the anxiety, the looming but never arriving guilt, the impossibility of forgiveness, the inescapability of retribution.

Haunting, by contrast, is the relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society’s assurances of innocence and reconciliation. Haunting is both acute and general; individuals are haunted, but so are societies. The United States is permanently haunted by the slavery, genocide, and violence entwined in its first, present and future days. Haunting doesn’t hope to change people’s perceptions, nor does it hope for reconciliation. Haunting lies precisely in its refusal to stop. Alien (to settlers) and generative for (ghosts), this refusal to stop is its own form of resolving. For ghosts, the haunting is the resolving, it is not what needs to be resolved.

Haunting aims to wrong the wrongs, a confrontation that settler horror hopes to evade. Avery Gordon observes,

Haunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither premodern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import. To study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it. This confrontation requires (or produces) a fundamental change in the way we know and make knowledge, in our mode of production. (1997, p. 7)

Social life, settler colonialism, and haunting are inextricably bound; each ensures there are always more ghosts to return.

B

Beloved

As a young child, Beloved was killed by a mother determined to free her from slavery. Now grown, she returns to haunt the broken bits of her family, first as an angry house spirit, then later as a stranded young woman, whom they take in,

drawn by a strange attraction to her. Furious, plaintive, consuming, wheedling, childlike, clever, *Beloved's* haunting is no ordinary rattling. Hers is a familial possession, a cleaving of her hungry violent soul to theirs. As *Beloved's* insatiability grows, her mother wastes away to feed the lost child she finally recognizes with gifts, food and attention. *Beloved* seduces her stepfather who can no longer stop his nightmares of slavery from crashing into his waking thoughts. They are avoided by the rest of town who know about the monstrous mother and her ghost child. As Toni Morrison's (1987) novel layers fragments of voices, memories, and dreams, the violent past and the haunted present seep into the narrative until it is slavery itself in its multiplying psychic forms that haunts the family and readers, the horror and haunting of today. *Beloved* is not a ghost appeased by remembering, nor a ghost to erase. In the end, a now pregnant *Beloved* disappears amidst the confusion of a visit from a group of concerned women and her mother's flashback of a slave owner's return. Morrison ends her story with a note on circulation and silence: "This is not a story to pass on" (1987, pp. 274–275).

But why haunting?

Haunting is the cost of subjugation. It is the price paid for violence, for genocide. Horror films in the United States have done viewers a disservice in teaching them that heroes are innocent, and that the ghouls are the trespassers. In the context of the settler colonial nation-state, the settler hero has inherited the debts of his forefathers. This is difficult, even annoying to those who just wish to go about their day. Radio ads and quips from public speakers reveal the resentment some settlers hold for tribal communities that assert claims to land and tribal sovereignty. This resentment seems to say, "Aren't you dead already? Didn't you die out long ago? You can't really be an Indian because all of the Indians are dead. Hell, I'm probably more Indian than you are." Sherman Alexie (1996) warns, "In the Great American Indian novel, when it is finally written, all of the white people will be Indians and all of the Indians will be ghosts" (p. 95).

Erasure and defacement concoct ghosts; I don't want to haunt you, but I will.

C

Composite narrator/Combined-I

I chose to write in the first person singular to double-fold my wisdom and mask my vulnerabilities. I use the bothness of my voice to misdirect those who intend to study or surveil me. My voice is thus (and always was anyway) idiosyncratic, striated, on the brink. When I write to you, it is sometimes to you, the other woman, and other times it is to you, my reader. I am a becoming-specter, haunting and haunted, a future-ghost, a cyclops, a stain.

Cyclops

She is the monster blinded by the heroic sea explorer Odysseus who eyes the Cyclopes' island and sheep for himself. In Homer's telling, the Cyclopes are a race of gigantic one-eyed cave dwellers, man-eating, barbaric, and easily fooled. Odysseus bamboozles the Cyclops, robs her sheep, maroons her in blindness, betrays her with language ("Nob'dy has destroyed me!"), and becomes celebrated for centuries for his conquests. One the classic monster, the other the epic hero, names easily twisted into cannibal and provider, native witch and colonizer, pre-modern and modern, unsettlementer and settler.

In my telling, the Cyclops' story is a revenge story. She is the anti-hero, anti-host. She wants to be left alone. Her enormous eye sees through deceptive Odysseus who feigns codes of hospitality to receive the sheep as gifts. She will keep her land and sheep out of reach, a thing of myth. She does things that are monstrous to violate the colonizer and to wage vengeance for future ghosts, none of which is legible to Homer. Invaders want to be hosted; she will imprison them in her cave. Hungry Odysseus dreams of stealing her beloved sheep; she will devour his beloved men with wine. But...

Let me tell you the end of this story again, from my mouth. While Odysseus is happily restored at home and publicly celebrated, the Cyclops's story continues. She walks the vastness of his kingdom, slowly becoming a ghost. Her emptied socket becomes a mask. Her revenge feeds her, making her opaque, anti-gravity, a black hole. Odysseus is blind to her, no longer able to see the Cyclops as when he coveted her land and food. She hides in plain sight and crafts her haunting. She will orphan Odysseus as she has been orphaned, but not of family, land or body. She will strand Odysseus in constant unease, bereft of his cherished and clever reason. His house will leak. The walls will sag. He will dream of sheep. He and everyone around him will forget his name; he will become an unremarkable shadow of Nob'dy, the clever alibi and source of his fame.

Revenge requires symmetry with the crime. To the (purported) (would-be) hero, revenge is monstrous, heard but not seen, insatiable, blind with desire, the Cyclops robbed of her eye. To the self-designated hero, revenge hails a specter of something best forgotten, a ghost from a criminal past.

To the monster, revenge is oxygen.

D

Dark Water, v.5

I made *Dark Water*, a series of art installations, in response to Hideo Nakata's popular 2002 Japanese horror film of the same title, in which a persistent ceiling leak in a new apartment is not only a yellow stain on the fantasy of a fresh start for a single mother and child; the leak's increasing seepage and its migration toward the mother's bed threaten to reveal an unfathomable and supernatural horror



Figure 33.1
Dark Water, v.2, 2009—
school trailer, water, bucket.
Photo by author C. Ree.



Figure 33.2
Dark Water, v.5, 2010—
suspended ceiling, water,
buckets. An installation piece
that remade a portion of the
gallery's suspended ceiling.
Over the course of two weeks,
fifteen gallons of water slowly
leaked through the ceiling
fragment into buckets below.
The show culminated with the
ceiling's collapse.
Photo by author C. Ree.

residing directly above. Nakata's simple device of the leak expresses the horror of walls transgressed, physical structures made permeable and violated of their visual promise of protective boundaries. *The roof over our heads* suddenly becomes the very source of a profound anxiety.

The inception of the leak in *Dark Water* (the film) is the return of a furious ghost accidentally drowned while left unattended by a working mother. The child-ghost's possessive rage first presents as a leak and crescendos in a tidal wave of water emanating from the walls, ceilings, elevators, and plumbing, a deluge representing the ghost's uncontainable weeping rage. The entire building gushes through its pores with the ghost's inexorable will to subvert the main character's mother-daughter bond. At the same time, worldly conditions have already initiated a different sort of encroachment on the relationship between mother and daughter—a job with long hours at odds with school pickup times, school leaders who criticize her daughter's behavior as a symptom of living with a single working mother, and a hostile divorce in progress with custody over the daughter as the central dispute.

In the culmination of the film, as a means of saving her child, the main character resigns herself to joining rather than vanquishing the ghost. Abandoning her daughter and her former life, she enters a quasi-spectral alternate realm to become the lost mother the ghost has craved all along, thereby bartering a sort of truce. Mothering the ghost becomes a way to live with ghosts.

Nakata recasts social dysfunction and common anxieties as symptomatic of everyday ruins. His film suggests no resolution to these hauntings but rather coexistence, deferral, and even an embrace of this anxiety. Nakata's horror connects everyday dysfunction, historical violence, the paranormal and the futility of conquering the dead.

My art installation (*v.2, 2009*) in response to *Dark Water* began as a carefully placed drip from my studio ceiling, at the time located in a trailer (the sort used in overcrowded public schools) on a university campus. The moment water seeped through the ceiling, the leak marked the school site as an everyday space of possible horror and dysfunction. Constructed yet also really seeping water, the leak caused visitors to question whether the space was an artwork or a living, breathing problem. It was this disturbance of certainty into openings for horror and anxiety that became the heart of the *Dark Water* works.

Since then, the seed idea of the *Dark Water* installation has been mutating into different pieces that activate misrecognition, ruin, and the fantastic—works which inflect our surroundings with the horror and irrational of the everyday, which glance sideways at specters and the sociological traumas that they haunt. In *Dark Water v.5 (2010)*, I installed a floating ceiling beneath the gallery ceiling and dripped fifteen gallons of water slowly over the course of two weeks; eventually the water-logged floating ceiling collapsed into a monumental heap. As in the first installation, visitors alternately walked unawares below, or with alarm at the “water problem,” or in confusion as to what and how the thin filament of ceiling could leak.

The experience of misrecognition by those who saw the installations is important to me. I want to confront them with the presence of a site that is simultaneously a ruin and a remake, is haunted and haunting, is horrific and very plain, that foregrounds the Now of dripping and the slow stuttering time of grasping

at comprehension as buckets fill with water, a place “we do not yet or no longer understand” (Abbas, 2010). I want you to sense the unrecognizable as you might experience seepage, to see the coordinates of the familiar change from underneath and overhead, to trouble the real into a space that momentarily houses ghosts and into a time and place that is unexplainably urgent.

Decolonization

As much as the discourse of decolonization has been embraced by the social sciences over the last decade, the decolonial project rarely gets beyond the conceptual or metaphorical level. I want to slip a note into some people’s pockets, “Decolonization is not metaphor,” because at some point, we’re going to have to talk about returning stolen land. My guess is that people are going to be really reluctant to give up that ghost. Fanon (1963) told us that decolonizing the mind is the first step, not the only step. Decolonization necessarily involves an interruption of the settler colonial nation-state, and of settler relations to land. Decolonization must mean attending to ghosts, and arresting widespread denial of the violence done to them. Decolonization is a recognition that a “ghost is alive, so to speak. We are in relation to it and it has designs on us such that we must reckon with it graciously, attempting to offer it a hospitable memory *out of a concern for justice*” (Gordon, 1997, p. 64, emphasis original).

Decolonization is a (dearly) departure from social justice. Honestly, I just sometimes have trouble getting past that phrasing, “social justice.” Listing terrors is not a form of social justice, as if outing (a) provides relief for a presumed victim or (b) repairs a wholeness or (c) ushers in an improved social awareness that leads to (a) and (b). That is not what I am doing here, saying it all so that things will get better. Social justice is a term that gets thrown around like some destination, a resolution, a fixing. “No justice, no peace,” and all of that. But justice and peace don’t exactly cohabitate. The promise of social justice sometimes rings false, smells consumptive, like another manifest destiny. Like you can get there, but only if you climb over me.

Desire

Damage narratives are the only stories that get told about me, unless I’m the one that’s telling them. People have made their careers on telling stories of damage about me, about communities like mine. Damage is the only way that monsters and future ghosts are conjured.

I am invited to speak, but only when I speak my pain (hooks, 1990). Instead, I speak of desire. Desire is a refusal to trade in damage; desire is an antidote, a medicine to damage narratives. Desire, however, is not just living in the looking glass; it isn’t a trip to opposite world. Desire is not a light switch, not a nescient turn to focus on the positive. It is a recognition of suffering, the costs of settler colonialism and capitalism, and how we still thrive in the face of loss anyway;

the parts of us that won't be destroyed. When I write or speak about desire, I am trying to get out from underneath the ways that my communities and I are always depicted. I insist on telling stories of desire, of complexity, of variegation, of promising myself one thing at night, and doing another in the morning. Desire is what we know about ourselves, and damage is what is attributed to us by those who wish to contain us. Desire is complex and complicated. It is constantly reformulating, and does so by extinguishing itself, breaking apart, reconfiguring, recasting. Desire licks its own fingers, bites its own nails, swallows its own fist. Desire makes itself its own ghost, creates itself from its own remnants. Desire, in its making and remaking, bounds into the past as it stretches into the future. It is productive, it makes itself, and in making itself, it makes reality.

E

Equinox, by Joy Harjo, an excerpt²

*I must keep from breaking into the story by force
for if I do I will find myself with a war club in my hand
and the smoke of grief staggering toward the sun,
your nation dead beside you.*³

F

Future ghost

I am a future ghost. I am getting ready for my haunting.

M

Mercy

Mercy is a temporary pause in haunting, requiring a giver and a receiver. The house goes quiet again, but only for a time. Mercy is a gift only ghosts can grant the living, and a gift ghosts cannot be forced, extorted, seduced, or tricked into giving. Even then, the fantasy of relief is deciduous. The gift is an illusion of relief and closure. Haunting can be deferred, delayed, and disseminated, but with some crimes of humanity—the violence of colonization—there is no putting to rest. Decolonization is not an exorcism of ghosts, nor is it charity, parity, balance, or forgiveness. Mercy is not freeing the settler from his crimes, nor is it therapy for the ghosts. Mercy is the power to give (and take). Mercy is a tactic.⁴ Mercy is ongoing, temporary, and in constant need of regeneration. Social justice may want to put things to rest, may believe in the repair in reparations, may consider itself an architect or a destination, may believe in utopic building materials which are bound to leak, may even believe

in peace. Mercy is not any of that. Mercy is just a reprieve; mercy does not resolve or absolve. Mercy is a sort of power granted over another. Mercy can be merciless.

Making-killable

I recently had a wonderful visit with Donna Haraway who suggested I consider the process of making-killable (as well as interspecies ethnography) when it comes to my Cyclops and her cave of sheep. Haraway and others describe making-killable as a way of making sub-human, of transforming beings into masses that can be produced and destroyed, another form of empire's mass production. Making-killable turns people and animals into always already objects ready for violence, genocide, and slavery.

Monsters

People who deny the persistence of settler colonialism are like the heroes in American horror films, astonished that the monster would have trouble with them. Denial is a key component of the plotlines, the evil might get you if you look too deeply at the horror. You can only look between fingers on a hand that covers your eyes.

The promise of heroic resolution is a false assurance. Revenge films provide another more useful storyline for addressing the following questions: What is a monster? (A monster is one who has been wronged and seeks justice.) Why do monsters interrupt? (Monsters interrupt when the injustice is nearly forgotten. Monsters show up when they are denied; yet there is no understanding the monster.) How does one get rid of a monster? (There is no permanent vanquishing of a monster; monsters can only be deferred, disseminated; the door to their threshold can only be shut on them for so long.).

Mother

Somewhere between monsters and mutual implication:

Mutual implication

Mutual implication, or *nos-otras*, is a way of describing how the colonized and the colonizer “leak’ into each other’s lives” (Torre & Ayala, 2009, p. 390, citing Anzaldúa, 1987) after centuries of settlement. Mutual implication is evidenced by *leaking*.



Agent O [prelude]

I am Agent O and she is mine. I made her in order to theorize a different sort of justice—one that dismantles, one that ruins—in the flesh. In this ongoing art and performance work, Agent O is embodied and makes appearances in mundane places, aiming to unsettle them. I made her, but she is already outside of me.

I created Agent O to be both law and transgression, (Morrison, 1993), to dig with her fingernails to unearth the relationship of psychic-paranormal knowledge to state-official knowledge. Though her body takes different forms, Agent O is an elderly psychic woman produced through exposure to Agent Orange as a child in Vietnam, and now passes time as a corner psychic advising on simpler affairs. Agent O is a symbol of the constitutive nature of wartime, peacetime, state control, and apocalypse in everyday life.

Agent O is part monster, part residue of war, part paranormal figure outside of law, part opaque agent within the western project. She destroys ceilings, appears in bathhouses, and wears a face visor. A psychic once told me “You may win the lottery one day. But you will only win \$2 to buy another ticket.” She was probably Agent O. (See Appendix O on the haunting of the form O.)

Agent O [melisma]

As soon as a ceiling goes up, I want it to stop being what it is, to become something out of reach. A teacher once told me, “We owe it to ourselves to make our own medium.” After seeing a recent piece, which moved from ceiling installation, to a non-public performance, to its destructive aftermath, to video and photographs, he remarked that my medium might actually be refusal.

So far there have been seven ceiling pieces. Each has included a moment of collapsing. Agent O is often the agent of this collapse—sometimes as saboteur, sometimes as enabler. She has destroyed a room-size ceiling in the middle of the night; she has released a water-logged ceiling to the ground during gallery hours. The why of her agency is always unclear. I only know she is motivated. I have never shown her to the public; or rather, the public never knows she is there as part of the ceiling piece. She seems to muddy the clarity—so I let the ceiling work seem clear. *Isn't this work about architecture, capitalism, and/or social dysfunction?* But I like that she was there, her whiff of strange agency left behind in a room of critique. Except for now (in this telling of this story), she is a secret.

P

Psychic

A psychic told me, “You’re a good girl. A lot of people love you. But you don’t care.”

R

Rattlesnakes saving as ceremony

In Silko’s (2010) memoir, *The Turquoise Ledge*, readers are confronted with Silko’s preoccupation with rattlesnakes. Her stories of encounters with rattlesnakes are relentlessly accounted in the book, and at the podium. In many tales, she risks



Figure 33.3
Agent O
and the
dropped
ceiling.
Photo by
author C.
Ree.

her own safety and comfort in order to rescue a rattlesnake, or even welcome a rattlesnake to make a home near or in her home. At the 92nd Street Y, she told us that her obsession with saving rattlesnakes derived from seeing her father kill a rattlesnake when she was a girl. As her reader (her corner psychic), it seems to me that she exposes herself to danger, to the possibility of the poison, as a fulfillment of a generational debt that originated in her father's killing of the snake, and her witnessing of it. Her attendance to rattlesnakes snared by wire fences, caught in modernity, her wrists bared to the venom; all her penance, her ceremony to recognize the snakes that haunt her.

Red

In Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*,⁵ "Geryon is a monster everything about him was red" (1999, p. 37). Geryon⁶ is a young boy who is red, who is winged. At the age of five, he begins writing his autobiography, recorded in a fluorescent covered notebook. In it, Geryon observes that Herakles, his lover, his enemy, will kill him one day, and get his cattle, and kill his little red dog. In a parent-teacher conference, Geryon's teacher wonders if Geryon's stories will ever feature a happy ending. Geryon goes to his desk and with a pencil writes a happy ending: "All over the world, beautiful red breezes went on blowing hand in hand" (p. 38).

Revenge [recapitulation]

Unruly, full of desire, unsettling, around the edges of haunting whispers revenge. The rage of the dead, a broken promise, a violent ruin, the seeds of haunting, an engine for curses. It can and cannot be tolerated. Not like justice. Everyone nods their head to justice. Who can disagree with justice? Revenge on the other hand... Revenge is necessarily unspeakable to justice. We have better ways to deal

with revenge now. But revenge and justice overlap, feed and deplete the other. In heroic films, justice and revenge slip and slide, exchanging names. Revenge goes drag as justice, or justice reveals its heat from revenge—the renegade civilian, the passionate lawyer, the rogue cop, the violated mother with shotgun on her hip. In ghostly horror films like *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980) and *Poltergeist* (Hooper, 1982), the site of spectral terror, the terrible place, is often a cemetery buried underneath a contemporary mansion; the injustice is literally in the foundation and produces a haunting based on revenge (Clover, 1992, p. 30). The outlines of wrong and right, usually so Hollywood clear, shift out of focus the crime of history, the crime of fact (building over the dead) and instead assert the larger crime of desire that spills outside norms (vengeance). Justice and revenge—both invoke and refuse the other. Revenge is one head of the many-headed creature of justice.

Resolution

Last winter, when I was pregnant but hadn't told anyone yet, I went to an event featuring Maxine Hong Kingston, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Toni Morrison, at the 92nd Street Y.

Kingston's work (1989) is meaningful to me because my mother tugged my ears to return from bad dreams, too. Kingston's work (2004) is meaningful to me because our family home burned in the same fire, too. Morrison opened the night by talking about the friendship shared by the three of them. Silko and Kingston read from their recent memoirs, which were both in many ways about making wrong right again. Kingston stood on a box to read at the podium. Silko's hair kept falling on her pages. Speaking of their long friendship, Kingston said that Silko taught her that ceremony is the only resolution.

Ruin

These ceilings haunt my work. The ceilings I'm thinking about—the ones with acoustic tiles that slowly brown with leaky stain marks—always everywhere but in their own nowhere space. School buildings, grocery stores, office spaces, police stations, libraries, converted basements, temples, sometimes galleries and high-end boutiques. I never see them, but rather, I sense them. I can walk into a space and know without looking if the ceiling, *that ceiling*, is there. Designed to look like a reassuring solid plane, they are in fact an aluminum grid filled with lightweight tiles, suspended by wires here and there. Nothing holds the tiles in place but gravity and the grid. Their cheap, disposable, modular, flexible design was a breakthrough and ensured their spread throughout buildings today, and in many ways, their invisibility. “The building and rebuilding suggest that space is almost like a kind of very expensive magnetic tape which can be erased and reused...What is erased are cultural memories; what is rebuilt are more profitable buildings” (Abbas, 1994, p. 452). The tiles' swappable nature is also touted as a low-cost strategy for hiding leaks. Simply replace evidence of water damage with a new clean tile.

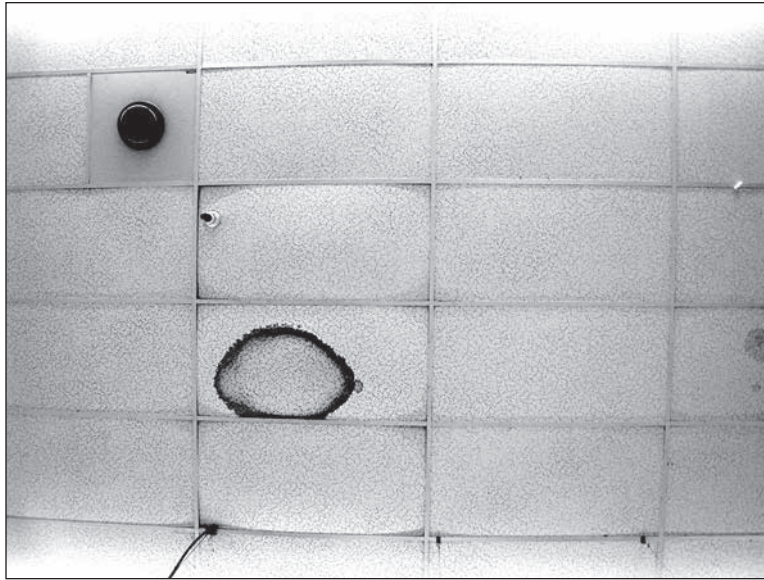


Figure 33.4 Albertsons, 2009, photograph, 4" x 6". Part of a photographic series on evidence of ceiling leaks in public spaces such as schools, department stores, and corporations. If you are reading this in an office building, look up, you may see your own leak stain. This particular leak was in the frozen food section of a popular grocery chain in Southern California. *Photo by author C. Ree.*

Yet, every time I glance overhead, a brown rusty stain looks back, unattended to and forgotten, hinting at leaks which threaten to press through in the next rain. “The ruins look back” (Caws, 1997, p. 303). I hear the downpour and wonder if I will see clear water seeping through from overhead. *Maybe next to the brown circle from the last leak. Will I see the water or feel it first? Which bucket will I throw underneath? Maybe the leak got fixed. Maybe it got fixed, but the fixing won't hold.* This anxiety about leaks is what I dwell on—their source, our inability to keep up with them, the rot they produce, the dysfunction of our ceilings, how they unsettle our sense of space—as well as how unnoticed they can go, how water stains dot most of our institutions. I think of Hurricane Katrina and horror movies, toxic schools, and suburban decay. The leak to me is a sort of sign, the ghost’s *memento mori*, that we are always in a process of ruin, a state of ruining. Our ruins are not crumbled Roman columns, or ivy covered abandoned lots. Our ruins lie within the quick turnover of buildings, disappearing landmarks, and disposable homes, layered upon each other and over again.

And in the tradition of the symbolism of horror, the ruin always points to the scene of ghost-producing violence. The ruin is not only the physical imprint of the supernatural onto architecture, but also the possessed or deluded people wandering amidst the ruin who fail to see its ruinous aspect. The idealistic homeowners

who move into the haunted home; the humans who do not recognize the living dead until it is too late. In these layered always-ruining places, our ghosts haunt, and we are blind to it. They are ghosts birthed from empire's original violence, the ghosts hidden inside law's creation myth (Benjamin, 1986 p. 287), and the new ghosts on the way as our ruins refresh and mutate. They are specters that collapse time, rendering empire's foundational past impossible to erase from the national present. They are a source of persistent unease. This is what suspended ceilings try to hide but only uncover.

S

Suspended, ceilings

Ceilings which leak. Ceilings which stare back. Ceilings which crash down.

W

Wrongs, righting the Wrongs, writing the Wrongs, wronging the

This is the last entry for now, only a temporary stay. More entries wait to be written, and not always patiently. Over our lifetimes, you and I have been told in many different ways that we should try to right wrongs, and certainly never wrong wrongs. Revenge is wronging wrongs, a form of double-wronging. You, like me, have been guided/good-girled away from considering revenge as a strategy of justice. To even consider revenge might be deemed dangerous, mercenary, terrorizing. At the same time, righting wrongs is so rare. Justice is so fleeting. And there are crimes that are too wrong to right. Avery Gordon (1997) writes that our task is to “look for lessons about haunting when there are thousands of ghosts; when entire societies become haunted by terrible deeds that are systematically occurring and are simultaneously denied by every public organ of governance and communication”(p. 64).

Wronging wrongs, so reviled in a waking life, seems to be the work of nightmares and hauntings and all the stuff that comes after opportunities to right wrongs and write wrongs have been exhausted. Unreadable and irrational, wronging wrongs is the work of now and future ghosts and monsters, the supply of which is ever-growing. You'll have to find someone to pull on your ears to bring you out of the nightmares, to call you home and help you remember who you are, and to hope that the ghosts will be willing to let you go [*see also, Mercy*].

Notes

1. In the Verbinski version, the curse is passed by videotape to strangers.
2. "Equinox," from *How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems: 1975-2001* by Joy Harjo. Copyright © 2002 by Joy Harjo. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
3. These same words you passed to me when my father died, because someone sent them to you when your father died. I sent them to you then, too. These words, another dissemination of loss, and that lingering disappointment.
4. In *Secret Sunshine*, a Korean film, (yet another) mother decides to forgive her son's murderer but becomes furious to learn he's found God and forgiven her first. This fury exposes how mercy granting is used to wield power, how one can covet the power to be merciful and feel betrayed when subjected to it.
5. Written in verse, Anne Carson's (1999) work is (or performs) as much about autobiography and language as mythic monsters. To me, her myth feels slippery and true. "I will never know how you see red and you will never know how I see it. / But this separation of consciousness / is recognized only after a failure of communication" (p. 105). Her monster Geryon is stuck in his red monstrosity, obsessed with his own famously bad ending from Greek legend. He self-chronicles, alternating between a notebook and photos, depicting a life desiring his mythic enemy Herakles. Carson's telling, which includes translations, word puzzles, and fragments, advises of both a life's irreducibility to language, and language's power to perform a life, that words can have many folds and be duplicitous, that I am free to rename and unname, that there may be a way to self-write which will not haunt me forever, that stories and their various attachments while they are being put together should also feel like they are on the verge of unraveling, that desire even wrong-desire, is a part of it.
6. In Greek myth, Geryon is the fearsome many-headed monster with a two-headed dog, both slayed by Heracles for his cattle during his Tenth Ordeal.


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Appendix O (on the Haunting of the Form O)

The Haunting of the Form O

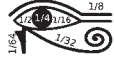
To continue our way backward, sideways and in between, we begin with our letter of the day, “O,” rather unchanged from the Latin O, itself from Greek *omicron*, in turn from the Phoenician *ayin*, likely derived from the Arabic ع *ʿayn*, which all hail from the Egyptian *ir*, a sound whose hieroglyph was . In ancient Egyptian, this glyph was not simply passive sight, but also meant to do, to make or one who enacts. Vision was realizing. In the Eye of Horus or *Wedjat*, the eye was both goddess and a mathematics. The oldest known fractional system, the *wedjat*'s different broken parts were also glyphs representing $1/2 + 1/4 + 1/8 + 1/16 + 1/32 + 1/64$, parts which equaled one when reassembled into an intact eye.

In Greek, *omicron*, “little o” or “o-micron,” was a letter but also a number, 70. Likewise, *Omega*, big O or “o-mega,” began as a doubled omicron (and eventually became, Ω , or ω). Omega took its shape from the mouth forming the long ‘oh’ sound, and was also a letter and a number equal to 800. It also came to signify finality or the end because of its terminal position in the Greek alphabet. With omega and omicron, the O and the o, the eye and the mouth began to share a shape.

Any consideration of O must also consider the void and the circle. The study of the circle drove the development of geometry, calculus, astrology, astronomy, and at multiple points in time, the circle and mathematics itself were considered divine pursuits, knowledge so sacred and powerful that its secrets were guarded by math initiates and priests on pain of death.

Whereas these sciences considered the circle as perfection, a path or a volume, the concept of zero played funnier games. In fact, zero's (0) very number status confounded the Greeks

“How can nothing be something?” Yet zero's null point forms the base for counting in positive or negative directions, the ironic ground for the figure of numbers themselves. Although zero may have wandered from India, to China to Islamic countries and eventually to Greece, its etymological and representational root is Arabic, both as a small circle o, and described by the word صفر *sifr*. Here zero's social potential manifested itself more ingeniously. *Sifr* meant empty, void, devoid, as well as the numerical concept of zero. However, as Arab mathematics spread globally, *sifr* alluded to secret knowledge, a code, encryption. In language, computing, math, *cipher* is empty and full, a way to transform in order to conceal, a void masking a presence.

As a side note, another parallel and earlier development of zero started with the Olmecs, a pre-Mayan civilization accredited with first using zero in their Long Count Calendar in 32 BCE. Similar to the Arabic use of zero as a decimal ordering system, and different from Roman zero as simply another place on a string of numbers, Olmec zero made possible a veritable matrix, a computing system. With the Olmecs, zero was also fundamentally temporal, simultaneously marking the beginning of a cycle of time, and its end.¹ Interestingly, whereas all other numbers in the Olmec counting system were represented by some combination of a dot (•) or a horizontal line (-), the zero was neither point or line or any abstraction at all. Rather peculiarly, zero was depicted as a round shell , hardness shaped by an emptiness within.

Letters that are numbers, mouths that are eyes, voids that hide - the O and the cipher have strange communion with the Korean character ㅇ , also born as a drawing of a mouth, an outline of the throat. When found at the beginning of a character, ㅇ is silent, a null consonant. Placed at the end it commands a -*ng*, a sound more like a fist in the throat.

The Korean spoken language is one of only a few which is believed to be a “language isolate,” likely born without a shared genealogy to any other language. This status,

¹ The Long Count Calendar has been made recently famous by misinterpretations of an apocalypse scheduled for December 2012. In fact, according to many scholars, this is not the end of all things, but a resetting of the Long Count to year zero to mark the beginning of another age, in which the world will be recreated through war or conflict.

conferred after intense study, moves a language from “unclassifiable” to that of linguistic orphan or hermetically generated (or dropped down by alien spaceships). If the source of spoken Korean defies history, then written Korean was born without one. In 1443, King Sejong mandated the creation of a simple writing system for the nation. The resulting system, *hangul*, and the 24 geometric letters of its alphabet were developed as a system for the future. King Sejong gifted this language to a country largely illiterate from the impossibility of learning the labyrinthine pictograms of Chinese, itself a mark of Korea’s colonial past and a living barrier between the elite and the peasants. *Hangul* could be learned in hours, corresponded to the actual sounds of spoken Korean, and once released, was initially taken up mostly by women and the poor. Each letter was designed to be a map for the speaker’s mouth - with one look, a person would know how to shape the lips, place the tongue, tighten the throat and deliver the sound. Eye, mouth, breath. Vision as action. Whereas Egyptian hieroglyphs haunt letter O so many epochs later, Sejong’s alphabet was conceived as modern technology, born fresh and unmarked with the same logic as computer code – to be modular, robust, flexible and intuitive. With *hangul*, Sejong completed the Korean language’s strange linguistic sovereignty - Korean language as isolate, language as science fiction, language as orphan.

O and the eye – connected from the beginning. The shadow of the eye, even in letters shaped like mouths. O that means something and nothing, a phantom vision no one sees. And all this bring us to *Outis* (ΟΥΤΙΣ). Odysseus’ veil and alibi, the name assumed to trick Cyclops, a name translated as “Nobody,” *Outis* could not have begun with a more perfect letter.

Oracle, somewhere in the Matrix, baking cookies in an apartment project, delivering riddles for a savior, waiting for him to get it. She the cynical but secretly hopeful sister of

Onibaba, masked samurai-chopping hag, converts the weapons of her murdered victims into cash for the barest of life in the wake of war’s awful hangover. Destroyer of war’s logic, deliverer of warriors to the round hungry pit. Onibaba, whose wooden mask horrifically cleaves to her face so she, in the end, can only see and be seen through a monstrous screen.

Obaltan (Stray Bullet) – Korea’s most famous film, the wandering lost after the Korean war, haunted by old Hollywood films and the nowhere of liberation. A note on Obaltan - it is considered the best Korean film of all time. But

before what it is now, in its first life, it was banished by the post-war government. In the little window before it was destroyed, it had been sent to the SF International Film Festival in 1963. When Korean cinema became something folks wanted to excavate and archive, people searched high and low and found this one last copy hidden away, subtitled in English for festival viewing. This one copy is the source for the thousands of DVD copies now available. As a result, however, the subtitles have become a permanent tattoo on Obaltan, impossible to remove, present in every screening, marking its resurrection and second life. The subtitles are always striking - their odd font, their odd translation, their odd history. Like a bug in the soup.

Orestes, meaning ‘mountain,’ held up for killing his mother at the behest of Apollo - either to avenge his war hero father Agamemnon like a good son or to remove Clytemnestra’s matriarchy forever like a good man. Afterward goes irrevocably mad.

And finally,

Some say translation is always a kind of betrayal, an excess of meaning which haunts the impossibility of equivalence, an Egyptian eye of action hidden in the Greek O of the mouth. If translation is not only the movement of meaning from one language into another, but also movement between forms, *orphan*, our last word for the day, is both the figure of translation and its transgression. *Orphan*’s marooned quality, the figure of the fatherless child comes from its Proto Indo European root **orbh-* or being stranded, bereft. However, **orbh-* and its derivate forms in Greek also meant to change allegiance, to move into a class unconnected to others, to lose free status. This translation from biological to legal father, from free to slave, from stranded to bonded, sees a further development in modern European words for work or labor, such as German *Arbeit* “slave, or work.” In Slavic languages where leading vowel and consonants were reversed over time, *orbh* became modern day Russian *rabota* “work.” In fact, in 1921 science fiction writer Karen Čapek used the Czech word *robot* (“drudgery,” “slave”) when creating his vision of autonomous labor machines – *robots*. In the finale of his play *R.U.R. (Rossum’s Universal Robots)*, the laboring robots, unhappy with their servitude, overthrow and destroy the human race. Čapek’s robots, the strange great great grandchildren of *orphan*, move from slave to sovereign, and enact translation’s ultimate betrayal. From family through law to science fiction: orphan, slave, robot, overthrown finally and strangely free again.