Sites of Research or ‘no layers of the onion’: *Phantom Europe*

Ghosts: the concept of the other in the same, the *punctum* in the *studium*.[[1]](#endnote-1)

 - Jacques Derrida, 2007

Even this article is metaphorical.[[2]](#endnote-2)

- Michel Leiris, 1989 [1929]

\*

Last year, after visiting an exhibition in Ostend entitled *European Ghosts: The Representation of Art from Africa in the Twentieth Century*,[[3]](#endnote-3) I was curious to try writing a review of it. The text was accepted by a journal that, having finally read it, decided that they could not publish it without a change in its basic premise. While this attests to the mistaking of an editorial agenda on my part, it also raises questions concerning differences in the understanding of research as between the empirical and the speculative; or, between the positivistic and the phantomatic. Offering a trace of opacity in the traditional technology of exhibitions, the phantom of the subject – reflected in the putatively transparent vitrine that presents (and preserves) an object – was not to be mistaken for the proper concerns of a review. It turned out that what had been expected was a discussion of the things shown in the exhibition without the apparitions testifying to the contingency of the reviewer’s encounter with them. The conditions of ‘representation’, through the apparatus of making things visible in museums and galleries (in this case, of ‘art from Africa’ in twentieth century Europe), were not themselves to be the object of reflection in the testimony of museum ethnography. Exploring the relations between the visual and the verbal, however, might there be a lexical echo of such reflections, blurring the claims of and for a transparent viewpoint in research? Addressing the very subject of the question as itself a site of research, might this opacity be registered by splitting the appearance of synoptic statement through the limited and partial refraction of questions? Distinct from a window onto the infinite horizon of possible answers, such questions might hold to that ‘permanent finitude of engaged interpretation’, which Donna Haraway evokes with the figure of ‘layers of the onion’.[[4]](#endnote-4)

{Insert here “Introduction” photo. Caption: “Photograph of *European Ghosts* exhibition, ‘Introduction’ (29.12.2016).”}

Beginning a discussion of such sites of research with this story of an exhibition review – apocryphal, allegorical, actual? – is to affirm that reporting ethnographic experience is never direct, but always mediated; indeed, that it is subject to codes of remediation that legitimate some narratives and not others, according to variable, and contestable, contexts. Presenting *this* article in the initial guise of another one highlights its relativity (as a ‘construction site’, perhaps); indeed, ‘suggesting that its source is not social reality but scholarly artifice’ (Geertz 1973, 16).[[5]](#endnote-5) Rather than resolving the juxtaposition of reflection and ‘reality’ in favour of the latter, as if the depth of vision was without surface (or, indeed, reflection without projection), this article offers, like the layers of the onion, a site of research as a palimpsest. Thanks to the editor’s reply concerning the review, I heard the echo of a question in my attempt at writing, evoking associations for me with the obsidian mirror once owned by the astrologer John Dee. This strange piece of ethnographica (now on display at the British Museum) offers evidence that the space of reflection is no novelty amongst sites of research,[[6]](#endnote-6) even for a researcher in the digital world. Indeed, as Franco Berardi observes:

The current evolution of digital technology is transforming the human environment in such a way that the very relation between the Ego – as actor – and the Self – as mirror – is being reformatted. The reflective function of the Self investigates the Ego and the contexts, meaning, ethics, and implications of its actions. Yet what if that space of action is technically fabricated, simulated?[[7]](#endnote-7)

Where my review had wanted to engage with the exhibition’s conjuring of spirits (in a reflexive catoptrics between anticipation and actuality), the journal seemed to want discussion of the former reduced, as I saw it, to the evidence of the latter. It was as if the medium of the exhibition would – or, rather, should – become intelligible in terms of its material, as if this already offered answers to the questions that it might raise; as if to exorcise the phantom of reflection. But just as the ghost of Dee is not explained by catalogue reference to Walpole,[[8]](#endnote-8) even presuming that the issue of provenance pre-empts that of presence; neither is the encounter with materials wholly distinguished from the projections already evoked by advertising the exhibition and giving publicity to its ghosts. Here the question of the site turns on how the curators, having invited them, dealt with the phantoms of their own endeavour in anticipation of the gallery’s visitors.[[9]](#endnote-9)

In this respect, my curiosity was particularly prompted by the function of the introductory chronology, covering an entire wall, that – despite the promise of the exhibition’s title – instantiated the phantomachia typically expected of historical research. Did this textual version of the exhibition work as a synecdoche or a parergon? Or was it itself one of the exhibits? As a model or guide for the visitor, was this introduction meant to de-exoticise the representation of either or both the ethnographic and the aesthetic? The exhibition, indeed, offered ethnographic artefacts juxtaposed with newly commissioned art works (including works by Manfred Pernice and Patrick Wokemi), but these were divided between the outer galleries and the central rooms. This spatialized distinction of time – an historical core and a contemporary rim – appeared to reproduce the colonial mapping of centre and periphery, metropole and margin. Was this deliberate or contingent; haunted or historical? As notes to an essay-film that I subsequently made with photographs taken in Ostend, the present reflections, revisiting the exhibition’s ‘representation’ of appearances between art and anthropology, offer a response to its spectral site of research.[[10]](#endnote-10)

\*

Critical reflexivity, or strong objectivity, does not dodge the world-making practices of forging knowledges with different chances of life and death built into them. All that critical reflexivity, diffraction, situated knowledges, modest interventions, or strong objectivity ‘dodge’ is the double-faced, self-identical god of transcendent cultures of no culture, on the one hand, and of subjects and objects exempt from the permanent finitude of engaged interpretation, on the other. No layer of the onion of practice that is technoscience is outside the reach of technologies of critical interpretation and critical inquiry about positioning and location; that is the condition of articulation, embodiment, and mortality. [[11]](#endnote-11)

 - Donna Haraway, 1997

\*

While writing my review of the exhibition, I had found myself wondering how – or even whether – I could say (with Michael Taussig[[12]](#endnote-12)), ‘I swear I saw this’; as if, in the great claim of ethnographic ‘fieldwork’, going to visit the exhibition and engaging with what it presented as significant for itself, allowed me to say that I had indeed seen it. This question of how the possibility of seeing might be ‘evidenced’ subsequently became the subject of my essay-film, a virtual site of research in place of the review. But in both there is the same question of how either project could ‘enact a specific strategy of authority’[[13]](#endnote-13) as a question of ethnography, where the traditional sense of fieldwork is one of questions put to others rather than to oneself. Of course, the very distinction between self and other is part of what is in question concerning the subject of ethnography. To cite but one ‘authority’, affirming the sense that ‘in ethnographic experience the observer apprehends himself as his own instrument of observation’, Lévi-Strauss proposes that: ‘Clearly, [the observer] must learn to know himself, to obtain, from a *self* who reveals himself as *another* to the *I* who uses him, an evaluation which will become an integral part of the observation of other selves.’[[14]](#endnote-14)

{Insert here “Poster” photo. Caption: “Photograph of *European Ghosts* exhibition, ‘Poster’ (29.12.2016).”}

Concerning phantoms, what would convey critical ‘credibility’ for museum ethnography in a review, distinct from ‘simply’ a piece of travel writing; or, in an essay-film, distinct from simply a tourist slide-show on Facebook or Instagram?[[15]](#endnote-15) For all their differences – between, for example, the professional and amateur in coding the visit as ‘work’ not ‘leisure’[[16]](#endnote-16) – these engagements in semiotic practices overlap (like the layers of the onion), even as they are supposed to be separated out into distinct sites of research. Paradoxically though, it is marking that distinction through the citation of ‘reflexive statements’, as a counter-point to abstraction, that standardly characterises the desired ‘checks on reality and fiction’[[17]](#endnote-17) within such narratives from the ‘field’. When, for example, Francis Huxley[[18]](#endnote-18) raises the question of the travelogue, he proposes that it is the anecdote that allows for the voices of his informants to be heard – locating the research in colloquial situations when written-up, rather than in synoptic ‘objectivity’. It is the directly cited observations, distinct from indirect summaries, which invite credence – albeit perhaps not always as intended. For the anecdotal evidence also exhibits Huxley’s own preconceptions, ‘marking’ a temporality[[19]](#endnote-19) in the authorial conditions of knowledge that is not particular to him.

By the 1970s, narrating the conditions of and for ethnographic knowledge as fieldwork had been recognised by some as a subject – or site – of such research itself, especially through reference to ‘reflection(s)’. If the disciplinary resistance to this at the time[[20]](#endnote-20) seems dated today, we might suppose that this is only in its institutional understanding of knowledge rather than in its practice of power (reproducing a discipline through appropriate qualifications and the recognition of research through funding decisions and acknowledged publications). These enduring traces of power in knowledge are not the least of the reflexive interests in, for example, George Stocking’s review of the history (or the self-mythologisation) of fieldwork within the ‘magical’ overtones of anthropology’s disciplinary formation of its student-initiates;[[21]](#endnote-21) and they are also the underlying concern with ‘the challenge of practice’ in dialogues between art and anthropology discussed, for example, by Arnd Schneider and Chris Wright.[[22]](#endnote-22)

Concepts or modes of reflexivity are manifold and, as Michael Lynch cautions, the ‘attempt to “do” reflexivity or to “be” reflexive does not control its communal horizons and eventual fate’.[[23]](#endnote-23) This is true also for the present refraction of questions addressing the ‘representation of African art’ for a European exhibition visitor curious about the phantoms that might ask what it is that interests the visitor in wanting to see them. My essay-film is, in fact, voiced by one of the exhibition’s ‘subjects’, taking but one of the many books on display and citing its argument concerning the spectre of colonialism. Distinct from an ethnographic documentary, then, the film offers no interviews – intercutting various voices to camera – but rather one ‘participant’ voice off, as its ostensibly authorial subject. (Indeed, interviews seem to function as the equivalent in terms of footage to the former requirement of citing fieldwork within ethnographic monographs.)

The question remains, however, as to what kind of ‘informants’ the artefacts in this European ethnographic séance might have been, re-constituted now as a site of research in the film’s phantomatic conditions of time and place. One might even suggest that the obsidian claims for the hauntological here point to that ‘asymmetric reflexive break’ upon which Peter Pels insists in his discussion of ethnographic authority ‘after objectivity’.[[24]](#endnote-24) The standard expectation (in a review, for instance) would be that the presentation of artefacts already supposed an answer to the question as to why one would be interested in visiting the exhibition. Here, however, the interest is in discovering how such artefacts (or, indeed, the apparatus of their exhibition) might prompt that very question, addressing something not already known but waiting to be discovered: something to be learnt from, rather than simply about, the artefacts and their representation.

\*

The exhibition was one of a series of ‘pop up’ shows associated with the temporary closure of the Belgian Royal Museum of Central Africa (which is currently being renovated)[[25]](#endnote-25) and the site of the Ostend gallery was not itself neutral. That this city was also a major beneficiary of Leopold II’s legacy was barely touched on in the exhibition, however, with just one reference to an incident in 2004 when a commemorative sculpture of a group of Congolese, looking up at an equestrian statue of the Belgian monarch, supposedly in gratitude for his ‘saving them from Arab slavery’, had their hands cut off by unknown activists in the city. The haunting power of this gesture, migrating through both official and unofficial knowledge of the former ‘Belgian-Congo’, transforms an understanding of historical agency in such sites of public commemoration as of (post-)colonial complicity.[[26]](#endnote-26) The ‘arch of severed hands’, invoked as Leopold’s lasting memorial by Emile Vanderwelle in the Belgian parliament already in 1905,[[27]](#endnote-27) was not part of the Ostend exhibition’s representation of ‘European ghosts’ attending the collection of ‘African art’. But besides this instance of seeing what was not exhibited, there also remains the question of what was exhibited and not seen, at least by this potential reviewer.

{Insert here the “Flight Map” photo. Caption: “Photograph of *European Ghosts* exhibition, ‘Flight Map’ (29.12.2016).”}

Rather than providing answers to the reflexive question concerning the claims of ‘being there’, my review tried to explore how the time and place of research – its ostensible ‘site’ or ‘field’ (subsequently turned into a film) – might be the consequence, as much as the cause, of this research itself. Here the question of visibility touches upon how techniques of both exhibition and testimony – in the historical imbrication of modernity and colonialism (or, in a word, exploitation) – engage with their own ambiguity concerning autonomy (or art) and representation (or contextualisation). Where the presence of ghosts attends that of ‘African art’ in its European ‘representation’, what might be *their* point of view concerning such an exhibition, being simultaneously included and excluded, as both participants and observers? This question returns in the composition of the essay-film that has become the research site for these reflections, precisely in its fracture between a point of view within and without – no longer ‘there’ but not yet ‘here’ – evoking the presence of ghosts, which is always that of a return or a revisiting.

Questions of perception are necessarily troubled when invoking the spectral and what it might mean to see ghosts, let alone to be seen by them. How does the phantom of visibility itself become a question, or a site, of research with respect to objects identified, historically (or, indeed, phantomatically), as ‘African art’? How might something specific to ‘being there’, to visiting the exhibition in Ostend, be realised in either a review or a film? As with most ethnographic scenarios, these questions were also haunted by issues of translation – to take only the exhibition’s title as itself another ‘informant’. The Anglophone version was ghosted by its French alternative, *L’Europe fantôme*, which echoes Michel Leiris’ evoking of phantoms (in his record of the Dakar-Djibouti expedition in the early 1930s), *L’Afrique fantôme*.[[28]](#endnote-28) The ‘ghost’ of the English speaks of something that is, indeed, phantomatic, since Leiris’ book does not (yet) exist in this language. Its citation here, then, adds another layer of reflexive opacity, especially as his text makes of its own writing a site of research – an example of what James Clifford (suggesting another ethnographic alternative to the travelogue) famously called ‘oneirography’.[[29]](#endnote-29)

Furthermore, when Leiris is quoted in the epigraphs to this essay from his *Documents* article on metaphor, the citation of ‘this’ exposes precisely the reflexive paradox of being simultaneously specific and abstract. Between object and phantom, or between document and dream, the ethnographic research cited by the exhibition’s curators already invited the visitor to question claims of and for ‘seeing’; not least, for seeing what is European in ‘the representation of art from Africa’. In this context, relating my visit to the exhibition to these subsequent reflections, Leiris offers a particular testimony to the double condition of observer and observed. For, as Joseph Mwantuali notes, in another of the many books (or ‘informants’) on display at Ostend, ‘the capacity to see the Other without objectifying him or her makes Leiris a precursor of what the Americans call “reflexive anthropology” and also, as Michel Beaujour found in him, of ethnopoetics’.[[30]](#endnote-30) Here an ethnopoetics of fieldwork – and the translation of claims for ‘seeing for oneself’ into those for a reflexive envisioning – exposes the sense of what is discovered afterwards with respect to the phantom of ‘being there’.

\*

The technical and the political are like the abstract and the concrete, the foreground and the background, the text and the context, the subject and the object… shifting sedimentations of the one fundamental thing about the world – relationality. Oddly, embedded relationality is the prophylaxis for both relativism and transcendence. Nothing comes without its world, so trying to know those worlds is crucial. From the point of view of the culture of no culture, where the wall between the political and the technical is maintained at all costs, and interpretation is assigned to one side and facts to the other, such worlds can never be investigated. Strong objectivity insists that both the objects and the subjects of knowledge-making practices must be located. Location is not a listing of adjectives or assigning of labels such as race, sex, and class. Location is not the concrete to the abstract of decontextualisation. Location is the always partial, always finite, always fraught play of foreground and background, text and context, that constitutes critical inquiry. Above all, location is not self-evident or transparent.[[31]](#endnote-31)

- Donna Haraway, 1997

\*

Questions of ‘location’, as a site of research concerning this exhibition specifically, are taken up by T.J. Demos in his *Return to the Postcolony*, another of the many books chosen by the curators to participate in their séance. For Demos, the concern with ghosts and ‘knowledge-making practices’ is evoked by citing Derrida’s transposition of ontology into hauntology, addressing the task of ‘learning to live *with* ghosts… more justly’.[[32]](#endnote-32) Indeed, the question of justice informs fundamental issues of research here, as with material and symbolic borders, instantiating the powers of separation (and of translation) that construct disciplinary knowledge with regard to the spectral. One might think again, for instance, of the ways in which interviews are used in ethnographic films (as themselves ‘an approach to aesthetics’) when wondering how the photographic might resist the supposition that what is visible is simply what is seen. Demos notes:

If such a hauntological study necessarily proceeds by rejecting – along with Stengers, Latour, and Gordon – the clear separations between modern science and pre-modern animism, objective positivism and subjective belief, the real and the imaginary, then it corresponds… to an… approach to aesthetics that joins the factual and the fictional… As such, it is entirely appropriate that this investigation is conducted in the medium of… photography.[[33]](#endnote-33)

Quoted in *Phantom Europe*, this observation is an example of not simply looking at the objects in the exhibition, but attending to what they themselves have to say. Offering a reflection on the conditions of its own representation in the film, the Demos text poses a question as to how photography might itself admit an (‘appropriate’) unsettling of institutionalised document-dream, fact-fiction distinctions of disciplinary knowledge. After all, these distinctions haunt the photographic (like the catoptrics of Dee’s ‘shew-stone’), involving what we might call, with André Bazin, ‘the ontology of the photograph’. In this context, what would be the supplementary sense of swearing to what I – or even the camera – had seen in the exhibition?

Taken out of the vitrine, Demos’ book (seen fleetingly in the photographs of the exhibition) offers a paratactic narration to the film’s images. The time of seeing is split through a juxtaposition of what is seen with what is heard, each image being itself a still photograph without deictic sound. Unlike in Dee’s mirror, or in Bazin’s proposed scrying between word and image, there is no hierarchy of interpretation – even if it might seem that the montage follows that vector ‘from ear to eye’ which belongs to the early definition of the essay-film, as offered by Bazin (1958) in his advocacy of Chris Marker’s *Siberian Letter*.[[34]](#endnote-34) For Bazin, it is this ‘lateral relation of word to image’ (distinct from the visual relations within and between, preceding and succeeding, images) that makes Marker’s film watchable in terms distinct from those of documentary or dramatic film montage (or more simply, in terms of the movement-image, of ‘cinema’).

{Insert here the “Gallery” photo. Caption: “Photograph of *European Ghosts* exhibition, ‘Gallery’ (29.12.2016).”}

In *Phantom Europe*, however, Bazin’s vector for making sense is only apparent, as the lure of actuality in anticipation. The fiction-creating montage of two factual elements occurs not in a unidirectional encounter, but in an oscillation between them, also evoking what is not seen in what is heard. A ‘third’ site of research is produced, which it is the very claim of the film that neither the showing nor the telling defines. This hybrid ‘approach to aesthetics’ is nothing new in Demos’ cited invocation. Already in 1960, for instance, André Labarthe had proposed that ‘the *transition to the relative* is the sign of a reconciliation between pure fiction and pure documentary’,[[35]](#endnote-35) although in *Phantom Europe* such a ‘reconciliation’ is but the appearance of an underlying reflexive asymmetry.

The factual fiction of ‘being there’, as read into a ‘return to the post-colony’, becomes the very subject of the film-essay; or, in Haraway’s cited image, the layers of its onion. Indeed, as distinct from a review, the question of the essay – that which ‘makes a ruin out of its own conflicting desires for aesthetics and adventure’[[36]](#endnote-36) – is precisely evoked in this figure of the onion, whose layers simultaneously offer something and nothing. Rather than being descriptive or exegetical, the essay narrative suggests its own displacement – it no more ‘speaks for itself’ than for the images it accompanies. One’s sense of the text would also be different if read in terms of what has been edited out in constructing a continuity that is both a quotation of Demos’ book and a variation of it. Here montage – the modernist principle of composition (and comparison), which cuts across romantic metaphor (and the identity of difference) – displaces the familiar sense of reflexivity, of an identification between voice and subject. In the film’s non-synchronisation of word and image, instances of reflection are mediated by fragmentary citation rather than the silhouette of a transcendental ego.

Exploring the dynamic of a simultaneous de-contextualization and re-contextualization of images, the film’s site of research is constituted by the *appearance* of continuity between past and present, here and there, sight and sound, in conjuring the possibility of return. The medium of photography offers an example of – and for – a phantomatic ethnography of modernity, as it addresses what might still prove visible in the ‘European representation of art from Africa’. As with the example of Leiris, whatever I could swear to have seen in Ostend becomes the site of a research that is dreamt in translation. Here oneirography touches on a reflexive ‘concept of consciousness’ once evoked by Aby Warburg in the image of a griffon: ‘Beneath that dark flutter of the griffon’s wings we dream – between gripping and being gripped – the concept of consciousness’.[[37]](#endnote-37) Active and passive are not opposed in this instance, but translated in an asymmetric reflection between word and image, in a site of research where, as Warburg already understood (long before Latour’s famous declaration), ‘we have never been modern’.[[38]](#endnote-38)

\*

The important practice of credible witnessing is still at stake.[[39]](#endnote-39)

- Donna Haraway, 1997

How should we proceed so that the documents (observations, objects, photographs), whose value is tied to the fact that they are things taken from life, may retain some freshness once confined within books or locked up in display windows?[[40]](#endnote-40)

- Michel Leiris, 1938

\*

Unlocking ‘display windows’, as in Malraux’s ‘museum without walls’ (as one, albeit stalled, possibility of a new mode of understanding art history[[41]](#endnote-41)), photography offers an endlessly repeatable instance of (and not simply in) the history of images. Besides this modernist ambivalence concerning contextualisation, photography offers another dynamic site of research for reflection concerning dis-enchantment and re-enchantment, touching upon the powers of the ‘fetish’.

{Insert here the “Fetish 1” photo. Caption: “Photograph of *European Ghosts* exhibition, ‘Fetish 1’ (29.12.2016).”}

The framing of the photograph (and its ambivalent work of decontextualisation), indeed, offers its own testimony to the (re-)sacralisation of artefacts by the magic of vitrines. This mode of isolation in exhibitions is the corollary of the assumed ‘authenticity’ of handling and exchange – of the reverse investment in notions of ‘use value’ concerning the ‘fetish’. Distinct from either the assemblage of materials that compose an artefact in culturally specific forms, including pieces of mirror in the fabrication of *minkisi*, or their transposition into the articulations of verbal syntax (whether as magic spells or curatorial explanations), what might be ethnographically particular about evoking ‘European phantoms’, in the representation of African art, through a montage of photographic images?

The sense of the spectral in photography specifically – from Balzac (*Cousin Pons*) to Barthes (*Camera Lucida*) – is, after all, expressive of a superstition that is as characteristically European as it is commonly ascribed to a ‘primitive’ belief in the migration of souls. Alongside the ghostly, what becomes manifest in the documentary testimony of an historical appeal to the ‘fetish’, when cited not only in the relation between scientific curation and popular imagination, but in the framing of an artefact as its simulacrum? Collected and conserved in European museums, what is the power, or the potential, of images of traditional African art, transmitted or transformed today through the almost universal medium of photography, including these museums’ own websites (or, indeed, their mobile apps) with their exhibition ‘trailers’ (as distinct from curatorial essay-films)? Here one might reflect on what of these art works’ (or assemblages’) own technologies of visibility is reproduced or repressed by their different conditions (or sites) of exhibition. With respect to the ‘fetish’, is there something specific to foregrounding the photographic by the use of stills rather than moving images, not least in an essayistic appeal to reflection?

Concerning the essay-film, such questions address the possible relations between words and images that might be realised by the viewer in the temporality of the image – of what it makes imaginable – through that of its voiced narration, in an appeal to reflection after the film has ‘finished’. The question of what lasts – not least, in its repeatability – when it is ‘finished’ also offers an echo of the relation between documentation (a catalogue or a review) and the exhibition itself. One might wonder, then, whether the site of the exhibition is sublated into the fabled ‘ethnographic present’ of its becoming writing, in whichever medium that occurs; or whether it is, indeed, addressed as something past – that, nonetheless, returns to haunt the present in its continuing possibility.

Having made the film (which can now be serially revisited), questions can be essayed that would not have been possible in simply writing up a review of the exhibition. Beyond the fundamental issue of what one could swear to have seen, one might wonder about the ‘credibility’ of the film’s version of passing through the exhibition as a communication with its ghosts. Perhaps the thought-figure of reflections, glimpsed on the surface of glass vitrines, fleetingly capturing the time and space of the visit, is no more than a play on words. But there remains the issue of how to register the sense that things might resist speaking for themselves, as much as their being spoken for. How might an essay engage with the resistance of objects to having theoretical perspectives ‘applied’ to them, as if they were already ‘examples’ of what they are not? With respect to the reflections already cited from Rabinow and Lévi-Strauss, Leiris and Pels, what to make of an ethnographic (or art historical) site of an apparently impossible reflexivity, where the viewer does not otherwise see him or herself from the place of the viewed, other than in becoming the very subject of the research in question?[[42]](#endnote-42)

Indeed, it is precisely *this* question of research that serves as a metaphor for the paradigm of the ethnographic project: to see oneself from another’s point of view (as the object of the other’s anthropology[[43]](#endnote-43)) – translated by ‘modern’ technologies of dissemblance and resemblance, as here between the sites of exhibition and photographic testimony. With respect to what one might swear to have seen, Demos’ words offer the appearance of exteriorising a monologue internal to the film’s images, conjuring a relation to thought as that Other by which we are addressed when questioning ourselves as to the conditions of making sense of experience.

To return to reflecting on the mark of temporality in such research (both anthropological and artistic), Paul Rabinow writes:

The question is whether or not digital techniques, technology, and practice are transforming the concept of the image in essential ways... making the historicity of photographic technology more and more evident, more and more visible… The historical disassembling of technique, technology, and practice produces a marking of their historicity and opens a space for new concepts and practice to emerge.[[44]](#endnote-44)

In this space of emergence, how might one address phantoms in ‘the European representation of African art’ – as a site of hauntological research? In contrast to the living, who need light to create the opacity (and the ambivalence) of their testimony to the visible, ghosts have no need to swear that they ‘saw this’. In the interplay between site and sight, both Berardi and Rabinow evoke the digital conditions of ‘new concepts and practices’, of luminences without bodies (reflections or shadows). But, between art and anthropology, what becomes of research if there is no question of the difference between here and there, now and then, self and Other? Might we then be condemned to offer, ‘in mimick sounds, and accounts not her own’ (Ovid[[45]](#endnote-45)), only the echo of Narcissus’ questions in scrying the art (or phantom) of reflection in anthropology?

{Insert here the “Fetish 2” photo. Caption: “Photograph of *European Ghosts* exhibition, ‘Fetish 2’ (29.12.2016).”}

1. Jacques Derrida, “The Deaths of Roland Barthes,” trans. Pacale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, in *Psyche*, Vol.1, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007 [1981]), 272. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Michel Leiris, *Brisées*, trans. Lydia Davies (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1989), 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. “European Ghosts,” accessed February 5, 2017. <http://www.muzee.be/en/muzee/t204300/european-ghosts-the-representation-of-art-from-africa-in-the-twentieth-century>. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Donna Haraway, *Modest­­\_Witness@Second\_Millennium* (London: Routledge, 1997), 37. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. In Roger Parry’s entry for Dee’s ‘scrying mirror’, or ‘shew-stone’, in the catalogue book for the exhibition *Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing* curated by Brian Dillon for Hayward Touring, we read (amongst other things) that: ‘The black mirror… [was] reputedly used by [Dee] in his practice of “scrying” – whereby he would predict the future by looking into the glass and reflective surface for symbols or the “ghosts” of people.’ (Roger Parry, “John Dee”, in *Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing* [London: Hayward Publishing, 2013], 102.) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Franco Berrardi, “Engineering Self,” *e-flux* (2016): n.p., accessed February 5, 2017.

<http://www.e-flux.com/architecture/superhumanity/66877/engineering-self/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. See the British Museum website, accessed February 5, 2017. <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3340529&partId=1&searchText=obsidian+mirror&page=1>. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Phillip van den Bossche and Koenraad Dedobbeleer, *European Ghosts: Visitor Guide* (Ostend: Kunstmuseum aan zee, 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. *Phantom Europe: 1. Return to the Postcolony* (<https://vimeo.com/181043313>); *2. Living with Ghosts* (<https://vimeo.com/181630585>). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Donna Haraway, *Modest­­\_Witness@Second\_Millennium* (London: Routledge, 1997), 37. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Michael Taussig, *I Swear I Saw This* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology 2*, trans. Monique Layton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 36. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. For a summary of discussion of the historical construction of a ‘tourist gaze’ through the ‘photographic eye’ (as an object of research, rather than its subject), see (for example) Carol Crawshaw and John Urry, “Tourism and the Photographic Eye,” in *Touring Cultures*, ed. Chris Rojek and John Urry (London: Routledge, 1997). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Needless to say, my film is ‘amateur’ in the particular sense of being made with no budget – in contrast to such epics as, for example, Alexander Sokurov’s recent *Francofonia* (2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Johannes Fabian, *Anthropology with an Attitude* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 157. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Francis Huxley, *Affable Savages* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963 [1956]), 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Paul Rabinow, *Marking Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007 [1997]), xiv-xv. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. George Stocking, *The Ethnographer’s Magic* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992 [1983]), 12-16. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. As Schneider and Wright observe in their introduction: ‘The role of experiment is still relegated to a historical pantheon of established “maverick” anthropologists (such as Michel Leiris, Gregory Bateson, and Jean Rouch), rather than an actively encouraged and valued facet of anthropological training… Recent proposals have called for anthropologists to focus on the performative aspects of artefacts, and on the agency of images and artworks, but these have been applied to the cultures that anthropologists study, and not to anthropology’s own visual practices.’ (Arnd Schneider and Chris Wright, introduction to *Contemporary Art and Anthropology*, ed. Arnd Schneider and Chris Wright [Oxford: Berg, 2007], 4 & 5.) [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Michael Lynch, “Against Reflexivity as an Academic Virtue and Source of Privileged Knowledge,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 17(3) (2000): 47. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Peter Pels, “After Objectivity,” *HAU* 4(1) (2014): 212. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. RCAM website, accessed February 5, 2017. <http://www.africamuseum.be/popupmuseum/popup>. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. The portmanteau of the ‘Belgian-Congo’ (also part of the Tervuren museum’s name until Congo’s independence in 1960, when it was changed to ‘Central Africa’) condenses a truth that continually needs spelling out (as here by the Congolese historian Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem): ‘In a way, Belgium would be a creation of the Congo as [much as] this latter would become Belgium’s creation’ (cited in Allen Roberts, *A Dance of Assassins: Performing Early Colonial Hegemony in the Congo* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013], 24). In another aspect of its twentieth century history, Ostend was heavily bombed during WWII. This leads Volker Weidermann to make the haunting observation that, with respect to the pre-war city: ‘Ostend no longer exists. There’s another city today, a new one with the same name.’ (Volker Weidermann, *Summer Before the Dark*, trans. Carol Janeway [London: Pushkin Press, 2016], 163). [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2006 [1998]), 165. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Michel Leiris, *Miroir de l’Afrique* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996). [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 165. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Joseph Epoka Mwantuali, *Michel Leiris et le Négro-Africain* (Ivry-sur-Seine: Nouvelles du Sud, 1999), 210. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Donna Haraway, *Modest­­\_Witness@Second\_Millennium* (London: Routledge, 1997), 37. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. T.J. Demos, *Return to the Postcolony* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. T.J. Demos, *Return to the Postcolony* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 17. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. André Bazin, “On Chris Marker”(1958), trans. Dave Kehr, accessed February 5, 2017.

<http://chrismarker.org/category/essay-form/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. André Labarthe quoted in Christa Blümlinger, “Reading Between the Images,” trans. John Rayner, in *Documentary Across Disciplines*, ed. Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg (Berlin: HKW and Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2016), 175. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Brian Dillon, *Objects in this Mirror* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 359. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Aby Warburg quoted in Ernst Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: an Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 303. Gombrich glosses his translation of Warburg’s note in terms, precisely, of its resistance to translation: ‘[Warburg] tried to condense his philosophy of impulse and of the dual meaning of “grasping”, as seizing an object and seizing a thought in a “concept”, into a sentence that plays on the meaning of *greifen* (“grasping”) and the German word for the mythical griffon (*Vogel Greif*).’ [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993). [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Donna Haraway, *Modest­­\_Witness@Second\_Millennium* (London: Routledge, 1997), 33. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Michel Leiris quoted in Denis Hollier, “The Use-Value of the Impossible,” trans. Liesl Ollman, *October* 60 (1992): 10. Leiris’ concerns with ethnographic exhibition in the 1930s have come full circle in the example of the Musée du Quai Branly, to cite only James Clifford, “Quai Branly in Process,” *October* 210 (2007) and Nélia Dias, “Double Erasures,” *Social Anthropology/ Anthropologie Sociale* 16(3) (2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Georges Didi-Huberman, *L’Album de l’art à l’époque du ‘Musée imaginaire’* (Paris: Éditions Hazan, 2013). [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. This is also explored in another essay-film, with narration by Foucault accompanying images from a temporary exhibition at the Quai Branly: <https://vimeo.com/177274641> [French]; <https://vimeo.com/178221335> [English]. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Marc Augé, *A Sense for the Other*, trans. Amy Jacobs (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Paul Rabinow, *Marking Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 121. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Book III), trans. Samuel Garth, John Dryden, *et al*., accessed February 5, 2017. <http://classics.mit.edu/Ovid/metam.3.third.html>. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)