

SPECTRAL RE-APPEARANCES AND NEW HORIZONS

Exploring the potentials of hauntological
approaches across disciplines and fields

9.20-9.30

WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE
SEMINAR BY THE ORGANIZERS

9.30-10.15

Emma Kowal, Professor, Deakin
University, Australia

- **"Haunting Biology: Science and Indigeneity in Australia" (online)**

10.15-11.00

Valeria Borsotti, Postdoc, University of
Copenhagen

- **"Digitising the Dead: Institutional Response-ability and the Digital Life of Human Remains"**

11.00-11.15

COFFEE BREAK

11.15-12.00

Alix Varnajot, Postdoc, University of Oulu,
Finland

- **"The Hauntology of Climate Change: Glacier Retreat and Dark Tourism"**

12.00-12.45

LUNCH

12.45-13.15

Carsten Stage, Professor, AU & Ann-
Katrine S. Nielsen, Assistant Professor, AU

- **"Genetic Hauntings: A Hauntological Approach to Illness and Health in the Era of Direct-to-Consumer Genetic Testing"**

13.15-13.45

Claus Toft, Associate Professor, AU &
Rikke Nørgård, Associate Professor, AU

- **"Hopepunk Narratives: Hauntology meets Utopian Studies"**

13.45-14.15

Dorthe Staunæs, Professor, AU

- **"Haunted by the Geopolitical Tensions in my Neck"**

14.15-14.30

COFFEE BREAK

14.30-15.00

Lærke Anbert, PhD Fellow, AU

- **"Buildings and Bones: A Haunted Campus"**

15.00-15.30

Britta Timm Knudsen, Professor, AU

- **"The Colonial Past in the Present: Productive Hauntings and their Affective Impacts"**

15.30-15.45

COFFEE BREAK

15.45-16.30

Meghna Singh, artist and researcher,
Cape Town, South Africa & Alexander
Thygesen, Assistant Professor, AU

- **"Haunting Public Spaces: Hauntology at the Intersections of Art, Architecture, and Activism"**

 **03 October, 2025**

 **Huset Hejmdal, Peter Sabroes Gade 1, 8000 Aarhus C**

Registration: noraksn@cc.au.dk / norcs@au.dk

Registration deadline: 23 September

Organisers: Britta Timm Knudsen, Carsten Stage & Ann-Katrine S. Nielsen

**JOIN US AFTER THE SEMINAR
FOR A RECEPTION WITH WINE
AND SPARKLING
REFRESHMENTS!**

Emma Kowal: Haunting Biology: Science and Indigeneity in Australia

Abstract:

One night in 2009, an Aboriginal poet was haunted by a dead anatomist who cut through her body with a scalpel. In this talk, I relate this story not as a freak event but as a reflection of the general condition of scientific research in postcolonial times. Theories of haunting have proposed that ghosts emerge when a process of burial is unfinished. Through interwoven stories of the collection, storage and use of bones and blood of Indigenous Australians, I explore how twentieth century scientific biological collections and their vital legacies are variously haunted.

Bio:

Emma Kowal is Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Co-Convenor of the Science and Society Network at Deakin University, Australia, and Past President of the Society for Social Studies of Science (4S). She is a cultural and medical anthropologist who previously worked as a medical doctor and public health researcher in Indigenous health. Her research lies at the intersection of anthropology, science and technology studies (STS), and Indigenous studies. Her books include *Trapped in the Gap: Doing Good in Indigenous Australia*, the collection *Cryopolitics: Frozen Life in a Melting World*, and *Haunting Biology: Science and Indigeneity in Australia* (Duke UP 2023).

Valeria Borsotti: Digitising the Dead: Institutional response-ability and the digital life of human remains

Abstract:

Stored in museums and university collections worldwide by the thousands, human remains are complex categories, blurring binary juxtapositions of object/subject, human/non-human. This contribution examines the intricacies of creating and maintaining digital records of human remains, and is based on an empirical study featuring 23 semi-structured interviews with professionals working in 14 museums and legacy anatomical collections worldwide, and 1 software company specialized in collection management systems for museums. By using the lens of hauntology, I explore the layered temporalities and ethical ambiguities implied in data work with human remains. I show how data workers address 'data hauntings' with a set of macro and micro-strategies. Based on the findings I discuss the sociotechnical arrangements necessary to support equitable data work with human remains.

Bio:

Valeria Borsotti is a Postdoc at the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, UCPH, with a mixed background in Computer Science (PhD) and Anthropology (MS). Her work focuses on how scientific institutions engage with issues of equity and accessibility, with an emphasis on their socio-technical practices. She is currently investigating the ethical issues and hauntings emerging in data work with historical human remains.

Her previous work has explored equity & organizational accountability in tech institutions; accessibility and neuroinclusivity, and issues of access in public digital systems.

Alix Varnajot: The hauntology of climate change: glacier retreat and dark tourism

Abstract:

This presentation examines the concept of hauntology through an environmental lens, with a focus on melting ice. In recent decades, glaciers have become emblematic symbols of climate change. As they thaw and retreat, they leave behind “haunted” landscapes that can foster the growth of dark tourism practices. In this sense, glaciers may be understood as geographical specters: on one hand, they conceptually contribute to emerging traumascapes, while on the other, they carry tangible societal and economic implications for downstream communities.

Bio:

Alix Varnajot is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Oulu, Finland, affiliated with the Geography Research Unit. Alix holds a PhD in Human Geography. His work explores how tourism intersects with climate change, social and environmental vulnerabilities in the Anthropocene. Alix focuses particularly on the socio-environmental dimensions of tourism in fragile and remote regions, including the Arctic and Antarctic, where he investigates phenomena such as glacier funerals and traumascapes, icebreaker cruises, climate change adaptation, dark tourism, and last chance tourism.

Carsten Stage & Ann-Katrine S. Nielsen: Genetic hauntings. A hauntological approach to illness and health in the era of direct-to-consumer genetic testing

Abstract:

In this presentation we investigate the vigour and analytical originality of the concept of hauntology when it comes to understanding health-related experiences and encounters with health technologies, specifically, direct-to-consumer genetic tests. Coining the concept of ‘health hauntology’ as a particular type of theoretical and analytical framework that takes an interest in the complex entanglements of bodies, temporalities, and ethics, we focus on how new DIY biotechnologies transform fundamental understandings of illness and health.

Bios:

Carsten Stage, PhD, is Professor of Culture and Media at the School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University, Denmark. His research deals with digital health, illness narratives, vulnerability, and affect. Selected monographs include *Quantified Storytelling* (with Georgakopoulou and Iversen, Palgrave, 2020), *The Language of Illness and Death on Social Media* (with Hougaard, Emerald, 2018), *Networked Cancer* (Palgrave, 2017), and *Global Media, Biopolitics, and Affect* (with Knudsen, Routledge, 2015). He is currently the PI of the research project *Genetic Hauntings* (IRDF 2023-2026) on the experiences and narratives linked to direct-to-consumer genetic testing.

Ann-Katrine S. Nielsen, PhD, is an assistant professor at School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University. Her research interests are genetic imaginaries, hauntology, and narratives of illness and risk. She is currently part of the IRFD-funded research project *Genetic Hauntings*. Pre-patient illness narratives in the era of direct-to-consumer genetic testing (2023-2026). She has previously worked on veteran narratives and war and culture studies within a hauntological framework.

Claus Toft-Nielsen & Rikke Toft Nørgård: Hopepunk narratives: hauntology meets utopian studies

Abstract:

The presentation develops a framework that combines hauntology and utopian studies through the lens of hopepunk. Hauntology highlights the persistence of unresolved pasts and lost futures, while utopian studies offer a method of social critique and future-oriented imagination. Hopepunk binds these perspectives by foregrounding radical optimism, collective resilience, and solidarity as forces of transformation. Together, they form a conceptual approach to hope that challenges grimdark pessimism and reclaims imagination as a site of resistance and social renewal.

Bios:

Claus Toft-Nielsen is an associate professor at Scandinavian Studies, School of Communication and Culture, AU. His research is grounded in digital media and digital media culture through various intersecting areas, such as popular culture, game studies, gender studies, and fan studies.

Rikke Toft Nørgård is an associate professor at Danish School of Education, Aarhus University where she is also steering group member of Center for Higher Education Futures (CHEF). She has worked with hopepunk, future studies, speculative design, and utopia as method in relation to education, technology, arts, and the humanities, areas she has also published and led research projects within.

Dorthe Staunæs: Haunted by the geopolitical tensions in my neck

Abstract:

We are in the midst of a ‘great unsettling’—a time where instability grows more tangible, insecurity more palpable, and inequities more glaring. This unsettling makes itself felt in the textures of academic everyday life and in individual researcher-subjects’ bodies. For instance when academics are trying to unsettle existing knowledge production, curriculum and pedagogies to open up for decolonial assertiveness, diversity and social and planetary justice, while also being countered by rising nationalisms, populisms, the mainstreaming of far-right ideologies as well as anti-woke anti gender sentiments. Taking its point of departure in autobiography, memory work, interview and field observations in Denmark and Kalaallit Nunaat from the project Affective Investments in STEM at Danish Universities, this talk discuss how the concept of hauntology (Derrida, Barad) and the idiom of ‘the elephant in the room’ (Hvenegård-Lassen & Staunæs) may (not) be analytical fruitful when exploring the terrain of academic unsettlement as the complex intraplay between affective embodiment, everyday diversity work and historical and colonial constraints and unsettlements.

Bio:

Dorthe Staunæs is professor in social psychology at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University. She has written extensively on affects, diversity pedagogies, human becoming and education, lately she has co-edited the mammut-antology Performative Vendinger. Introduktion til Nyere Feministisk teori.

Lærke Anbert: Buildings and Bones: A haunted campus

Abstract:

Student activists across the globe are calling for a reckoning with (past) injustices connected to their universities. At UC Berkeley, students are increasingly drawing attention to the settler colonial past of the university. Building on five months of fieldwork among student activists from 2020 to 2022, and inspired by a theoretical framework of hauntology, I show how (past) injustices are called forth and call upon activist students to dismantle structures of inequality on campus and beyond. Particularly students draw attention to continued colonial legacies embedded in the building names on campus, and the large collection of human remains kept in the anthropological museum on campus.

I argue that activist students understand current inequalities as directly connected to past atrocities and that this understanding of history positions the students as implicated. Being implicated entails discomfort but also opens possibilities for action.

Bio:

Lærke Cecilie Anbert is a PhD fellow in Educational Anthropology, Aarhus University. She holds an MSc in anthropology from the University of Copenhagen and an MSc in Gender Studies from London School of Economics and Political Science. In her PhD work she explores social justice student activism in the United States with a focus on epistemological debates, contentions over historical narratives and political uses of language.

Britta Timm Knudsen: The colonial past in the present: productive hauntings and their affective impacts

Abstract:

In this presentation, I examine different shapes of haunting in decolonial practices and how these generate various affective reactions in audiences and participants. How do artists, curators and heritage activists use haunting as heritage practice to awaken audiences to colonial traces and familiarize them with decolonial initiatives in contemporary societies? Are ghosts capable of setting new directions for our feelings for the past. No more nostalgic yearnings only demands for historical justice for the future (Knudsen 2018, Sterling 2021). The presentation will look at the moods, intensities and forms of affects in the reactions to the ghostly live re-actualizations of past atrocities, injustices and structural inequalities – from discomfort, over forced implication to ambiguous laughter.

Bio:

Britta Timm Knudsen is professor at Aarhus University. Her research focuses on difficult heritage, affect and media. Amongst her recent publications are the books *Decolonizing Colonial Heritage. New Agendas, Actors and Practices in and Beyond Europe* (2022), and *Kulturarvens kraft. Introduktion til kritiske kulturarvsstudier* (2025) and the articles *Digital Media revitalizing colonial heritage: the George Floyd video translocalised in Denmark* (2023) and *Fun for real! Dismantling the “cool colonizer” through the decolonial politics of memes from Kalaallit Nunaat* (2025).

Meghna Singh & Alexander Ulrich Thygesen: Haunting public spaces. Hauntology at the intersections of art, architecture, and activism

Abstract:

In this session Singh and Thygesen, both working with the intersections of art, research, and activism, will shortly present their recent work and unfold hauntological perspectives in a conversation chaired by Ann-Katrine S. Nielsen. Meghan Singh will present her work, *The Founders Pillars*, a site-responsive Augmented Reality experience that transforms the neoclassical columns of MIT and the New York Stock Exchange into haunted memorials. Alexander Ulrich Thygesen will focus on a guerrilla gardening intervention in Santiago de Chile and present the concept of the organic monument.

Bios:

Meghna Singh is Cape Town based artist and researcher working at the intersection of art and technology. Working with video, installation and XR, blurring boundaries between documentary and fiction, she creates immersive environments highlighting issues of 'humanism'. Her interest lies in creating site responsive installations that activate spaces while highlighting colonial and capitalist legacies in public spaces. She's a fellow at the MIT Open Documentary Lab, a National Geographic explorer and was a postdoctoral researcher at Aarhus University. She's the founder of the Nordic AR & Public Space Collective supported by the Nordic Culture Fund & the Nordic Culture Point.

Alexander Ulrich Thygesen is an assistant professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies at Aarhus University, Denmark. His recent research focuses on the interconnections between memory and activism during the 2019 Chilean mass mobilisation and the constitutional process it sparked. He has a particular interest in activists' aesthetic reconfiguration of urban spaces and how these practices relate to political subjectivation in moments of unrest. He is currently developing a research project that explores grassroots resistance to progressive memory politics in Spain and the Southern Cone from a comparative perspective.