

## RESEARCH PAPER

# Spectral Anatomies: Heritage, Hauntology and the 'Ghosts' of Varosha

Colin Sterling\*

This paper unravels the idea of the 'ghost town' - and more specifically the deserted district of Varosha, Famagusta - as it relates to heritage, questioning the discursive dynamics and affective potential of what can seem a trite and therefore hollow phrase. Drawing on apposite theories of hauntology (Derrida 1993) and the ghosts of place (Bell 1997) I argue that there is a dense back-and-forth between two distinct positions in this term, both of which play into wider heritage processes. The first understands the ghost town as an empty if uniquely atmospheric space, ripe for development or 'dark tourism' (Lennon and Foley 2000). Heritage is implicated here in the protection and promotion of sites which may be perceived as 'ruin porn' - by turns melancholy and exhilarating but fundamentally removed from contemporary life. The second position unsettles this reading by focusing on the complexities of the very word 'ghost', here understood as 'the sense of the presence of those who are not physically there' (Bell 1997: 813). From this perspective, common heritage practices (including collecting, exhibiting, and narrating) might be seen as an attempt to psychologically re-inhabit vacant places, a process which takes on extra significance around the highly politicised context of Varosha. Through fieldwork, archival research and intertextual and visual analysis I track the description of Varosha as a ghost town across journalism, contemporary art and diasporic discourse, in the process anatomising this spectral designation to reconceptualise its wider relevance to heritage.

## Preamble

In the autumn of 1878 the photographer John Thomson toured Cyprus, documenting the island at the onset of British colonial control so as to 'afford a source of comparison in after years, when, under the influence of British rule, the place has risen from its ruins' (Thomson 1879: vi). This ambition is played out most powerfully in Thomson's depiction of Famagusta, which he evocatively describes as 'a city of the dead, in which the traveller is surprised to encounter a living tenant' (ibid: 45). His images reiterate this desolation, with landscapes and architectural studies highlighting the ruinous and largely unoccupied status of the town. Lone figures are occasionally featured, if only to provide a scale against which the ruins might be measured, or as an orientalisising adjunct to the scene (**Figure 1**).

Famagusta was once the richest city in the Mediterranean, a major commercial port which had known Byzantine, Lusignan, Genoese and Venetian rule before falling to Ottoman forces in 1571 (see Walsh et al 2012). The Ottomans left the town to ruin, with just a few hundred Turkish inhabitants occupying the land within the impressive fortified city walls. Expelled from their

homes, the Christian population of Famagusta established two villages a short distance away: these became known as Varosha - Turkish for suburb or outskirts.

Tellingly, when photographing the landscapes, architecture and people of Cyprus, Thomson chose not to document the 'rich orchards' and 'refreshing tokens of vitality' (1879: 47) around Varosha, signs of prosperity which would go against the prevailing narrative of British imperial salvation. Successive colonial administrators would however recognise the importance of dealing with Famagusta and Varosha as a single entity, with the relative affluence of the latter often deployed to alleviate the conditions of the former. This in turn coincided with the enacting of heritage protection for the 'Old Town', although here it should be noted that the British were interested 'not in preserving Famagusta as some sort of outdoor museum per se, but in revitalising the urban landscape as a working, strategically important and culturally significant possession in the Eastern Mediterranean' (Walsh 2010: 251).

While both Famagusta and Varosha witnessed significant development under British rule, gradually merging into a single conurbation, it was not until Cypriot independence in 1960 and the subsequent growth in package tourism that major high-rise hotels emerged along the extensive sandy beaches of the town. As Weisman notes, when Turkey launched a military offensive in 1974 that

\* University College London, United Kingdom  
c.sterling@ucl.ac.uk



**Figure 1:** John Thomson, 1878. Ruins of Famagusta. Wellcome Library, London. Copyrighted work available under Creative Commons Attribution only licence CC BY 2.0.

resulted in the partition of the island, much of Varosha was barely two years old (2007: 91). It was during this conflict that the Greek-Cypriot population of Varosha fled the town at short notice, believing that an aerial bombardment by the Turkish air force was imminent. Shops, restaurants, schools, holiday apartments, homes, cinemas, municipal buildings, and, of course, hotels were hurriedly vacated by residents who assumed they would be able to return in the not-too-distant future. Instead, the Turkish military annexed the area, hastily erecting a perimeter fence of barbed-wire, disused oil cans and corrugated iron which endures to this day. Employing a turn of phrase that would come to dominate conceptualisations of Varosha, the Swedish journalist Jan-Olof Bengtsson reported as early as 1977 that 'the asphalt on the roads has cracked in the warm sun and along the sidewalks bushes are growing [...] the breakfast tables are still set, the laundry still hanging and the lamps still burning. *Varosha is a ghost town*' (Bengtsson 1977, my emphasis).

Recent years have seen significant work by scholars and practitioners of heritage eager to protect and conserve Famagusta's medieval architecture (see WMF 2008; GHF 2010; Walsh 2010; Walsh, Edbury and Coureas eds. 2012). Recognising that the future of this site is intimately bound to the political machinations surrounding the return of Varosha to its former inhabitants, this paper confronts those later ruins which cast a metaphorical shadow over the whole town. In particular, I unpack the labelling of Varosha as a 'ghost town', critically examining

the discursive genealogies and affective qualities of a characterisation which, I would argue, has important ramifications for heritage. By tracking the use of the term across reportage, contemporary art, diasporic discourse and travel literature, I aim to draw out the complexities of what can at first seem a self-evident and therefore somewhat trite phrase. It is my contention that a more nuanced understanding of the subtle gradations which colour the emergence and applications of such a term will benefit not just our immediate comprehension of this highly politicised site, but the labels of heritage more generally.

At its core then, this paper asks what the implications of highlighting the 'ghostliness' of a place might be, anatomising this spectral designation to grasp both the discursive constructions and 'more-than-representational' (Lorimer 2005) affects of a term that operates within and across a variety of heritage-related agendas. In this respect the following research is closely aligned (conceptually, geographically and methodologically) with the work of Navaro-Yashin, who has persuasively argued that an ethnographic approach may help us overcome false boundaries between the linguistic and the affective (2009: 17). With specific reference to Northern Cyprus, Navaro-Yashin suggests that,

...an environment of ruins discharges an affect of melancholy. At the same time, those who inhabit this space of ruins feel melancholic: they put the ruins into discourse, symbolize them, interpret

them, politicize them, understand them, project their subjective conflicts onto them, remember them, try to forget them, historicise them, and so on (ibid: 14–15).

The ruins of Varosha resonate with these concerns. As Navaro-Yashin has elsewhere argued, ‘there is no construct that runs ahead of a material realisation’ (2012: 15). The undeniable physical circumstances of Varosha are thus understood to act in concert with the discursive constructions which encircle and animate the site. There is a dialectical relationship here between the affective materiality of the object and what Navaro-Yashin calls the ‘fantasy element’ (ibid); an imaginative movement which emerges from and feeds back into the tangible entity (in this case the decaying urban space of Varosha). Crucially, Navaro-Yashin goes on to relate this dense back-and-forth between the material and the ‘make-believe’ to the world of the spectre: ‘The ghosts that linger in a territory exert a force against the grain of the make-believe [...] phantoms, in the shape of the built and natural environments, survive and challenge the agencies geared to phantasmatically transform a territory’ (ibid). Building on this conceptualisation, the present research focuses on a number of interconnected domains that give shape to the fantastical. These include the topography of Varosha itself, written and visual representations of the site, and material strategies of ‘heritagisation’ (museum building, collecting practices, exhibitions, etc.). It is worth noting that this approach differs from Navaro-Yashin’s in important ways. Most notably, I am interested not just in the object as ghost, but also in the continued ‘haunting’ of the physical spaces of Varosha by the exiled residents of the town, an incorporeal return that explicitly seeks to undo any de-politicised spectrality in the very term ‘ghost town’.

### A Ghostly Heritage

The label ‘ghost town’ has been applied to diverse sites across the globe, from the French colonial settlement of Bokor Hill Station in Cambodia to the Ukrainian town of Pripjat, famously abandoned as a result of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. The term appears to have emerged in the United States around the 1870s (contemporaneous with Thomson’s documentation of Famagusta), initially used as an evocative phrase to describe the abandoned mining towns dotting the American West. While the multiplicity of spaces now labeled ghost town resists any catch-all definition, these locations do share common characteristics; most obviously abandonment, emptiness, decay, ruin, neglect and the resurgence of ‘nature’ over the built environment. Such sites also come into existence for a host of reasons: economic shifts, migration, war, natural disasters. Their presence may be read negatively, as a sign of social hubris or socio-cultural decline, but they may also become important settings for subversive or creative activity. As an example, Edensor, with a particular focus on the ruins of the industrial revolution, has suggested that these empty locales ‘perform a physical remembering of that which has vanished, [gesturing] towards the present and the future as temporal frames which can be read as both dystopian

and utopian’ (2005a: 15). It might be argued that the ghost towns of the world thus perform an uncanny service, shadowing and quietly mocking the incessant movement and supposed progress of modernity.

In his influential study, Edensor goes on to describe industrial ruins as a ‘sort of anti-heritage’ (ibid: 139). While the wider notion of the ghost town may likewise seem at odds with a conventional characterisation of heritage as sanitised and inherently celebratory, I would argue that there are crucial points of convergence (and divergence) which demonstrate the value of examining the ghost town trope through the lens of critical heritage (and vice-versa). Most notably, the idea of the ghost town resonates with a traditional abstraction of heritage as something or someplace divorced from the present: a separate space in which we might be able to convene with past-worlds no longer available to us. At the same time of course this suggestion raises thoughts of the dead, the absent and their continued ‘haunting’ of our lives. Already then, even at the most basic analysis, the immediate connotations of the ghost town open onto two distinct yet interrelated positions: (1) The past and the present are disjointed and the latter is only accessible through specific spaces or things no longer vital to life; (2) the past may commingle with the present in unexpected ways, with certain places and objects emphasising a powerful if shadow-like co-existence. Intrinsically unsettling in its evocation of the spectre, the idea of the ghost town fluctuates between these two poles.

A number of authors have drawn on the symbolic or metaphorical connotations of ghosts to help explain diverse social and cultural phenomena (Derrida 1993; Bell 1997; Edensor 2005b; Davis 2005). Derrida’s influential concept of hauntology is of particular relevance here. First introduced in *Spectres of Marx* (1993), hauntology ‘supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive’ (Davis 2005: 373). This tension between hauntology and ontology has implications for the apparent stability of the ghost town designation. ‘Spectrality’, argues Jameson, ‘does not involve the conviction that ghosts exist’ (1999: 39). Instead it simply recognises that ‘the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us’ (ibid). In other words, our concepts, labels and ontologies are not so fixed as they might appear, and potent lines of inquiry might be opened up around those shadows and phantoms which ‘haunt’ and destabilise their construction. Crucially - and as Navaro-Yashin has recognised (2012: 16) - this unravelling of the ontological through the spectral has repercussions beyond those immediate contexts where the ‘ghost’ is already at the forefront of any conceptualisation. While the present paper interrogates a highly particularised material and discursive environment in which the spectral is given prominence, I would maintain that the broader ontological certainties underpinning heritage would benefit from a more generalised hauntological critique. In this sense Varosha should be understood as ‘exemplary’: a case study which is ‘defined by a disjunctive self-inclusion:



a belonging to itself that is simultaneously an extendibility to everything else with which it might be connected' (Massumi 2002: 17–18). The phantasmatic details of the current study might thus reverberate across other ghostly places and sites of memory.

My turn to hauntology is further related to Hacking's delineation of historical ontology (2002), a philosophical enterprise that attempts to *get inside* the essence of things and concepts to better understand their shifting trajectories. Hacking argues that a key ingredient of such processes is dynamic nominalism, i.e. 'how practices of naming interact with the things that we name' (ibid: 2). To fully grasp the dialectical interactions between what exists, what comes into being, and the labels and conceptualisations we apply to these entities demands an historical approach, interrogating the dynamics of naming (e.g. when and where the label ghost town arises) and the subsequent uses of that name (e.g. how the idea of the ghost town circulates and gives rise to new worlds). This of course leads us towards a consideration of why things *matter*, not just what and how they *mean* (Miller 1998; see also Edwards 2012). If hauntology (and the related analyses of historical ontology) offers a particularly apposite framework for unpacking the emergence of the ghost town as an idea, then how are we to approach those personal and social resonances that project onto and emanate from such sites, creating and sustaining their affectivity? I would argue that the very evocation of the spectre which lingers on the surface of the ghost town trope provides a valuable opportunity for examining these processes.

For Bell, the 'ghosts of place' - that is, '*the sense of the presence of those who are not physically there*' (1997: 813, emphasis in original) - are simultaneously obvious fabrications and uniquely powerful conduits for the 'social aliveness' (ibid: 815) of a locality:

A crucial aspect of how we experience the person is our sense that the person has an animating spirit, a ghost, within. We also experience objects and places as having ghosts. We do so because we experience objects and places socially; we experience them as we do people. Through ghosts, we re-encounter the aura of social life in the aura of place. (ibid: 821)

While the label 'ghost town' immediately raises thoughts of emptiness and abandonment, the obvious subtext of the phrase draws out a continued habitation of the site by those we know to have left. These absent figures may be long dead, or they may have simply moved on, out of choice or against their will. As Bell notes, the ghosts we find in places may even include our own ghost, 'the ghost or ghosts of our own past lives' (ibid: 823). These may linger in our childhood homes, in our schools, or in former places of work. A crucial question therefore emerges around the double tension of encountering (whether directly or in mediated form) a site we once inhabited which is now part of a so-called 'ghost town', as the exiled communities of Varosha are forced to do. Does the generalising movement of the ghost town

begin to unravel under the weight of these highly specific encounters, or do the uses and connotations of the label delimit a more personal engagement? This tension animates the present paper.

Here we also approach the core problematic of the ghost town ascription. With any term, there is a danger that meanings can become fixed, that the inherent fluidity of interpretation can be 'locked down' to exclude certain values and alternative ways of thinking. This possibility seems especially acute when the terminology in question emphasises the pastness or - more worryingly - the *deadness* of a locality, thing or person. As Papadakis has argued with specific reference to divisions across Cyprus, the idea of the 'dead zone' risks opening a 'semantic chasm' which disallows the 'possibility of common ground' (2006: 68). I would suggest that such designations also provoke a disengagement between the affectivity of the object and the affected subject, an abyssal space where the object is suspended and potentially isolated from lived experience, emotional attachments and long-term memory formation. The fundamental issue at stake here therefore centres around the extent to which the dynamic nominalism of a term such as 'ghost town' in effect 're-kills' the material entity to which it refers, draining the potency of place through the stifling weight of a clichéd characterisation. Again, the lens of critical heritage may offer a useful analytical framework to anatomise these processes more fully.

It is worth noting for example that Bell explicitly relates his conceptualisation of the ghosts of place to the emergence of heritage. The search for spirits, he argues, is a counterweight to the prevailing forces of the market, which have 'vigorously pursued the new, the mechanical, the universal' (ibid: 830). The popularity of historic sites is thus understood as an act of resistance against the 'loss of sentimental and social connections to places' (ibid). Of course, heritage itself may be caught up in processes of commodification, and when poorly managed (in more than just a commercial sense) this may result in a distinct lack of ghostly resonance. In a similar vein, many 'ghost towns' (including Craco in Italy, Oradour-sur-Glane in France, Pozos de Mineral in Mexico) have become popular tourist destinations, a shift which may radically alter the meaning and use of a site. As my research demonstrates, the potential musealisation implied by such processes is of great concern if the 'ghost town' in question remains a political and distinctly affective site for disempowered groups and individuals.

A final general point before returning to the specifics of Varosha: In many cases, an interest in modern abandoned spaces has been greatly influenced by their photographic documentation (see for example a recent article in *The Guardian* which asked: 'Why do images of abandoned Japanese island Hashima haunt us?' (O'Hagan 2014)). This has led to the emergence of so called 'ruin porn'; a compound that emphasises the potential over-aestheticisation, exploitation and sensationalism of what can be dark or painful localities, an idea with clear resonances across 'dark tourism' (Lennon and Foley 2000). The example of Detroit is regularly cited here (Hell 2011; Binelli 2012;

Ryzewski 2013; Vultee 2013), and while the continued habitation of this city prevents it from being described as a 'ghost town' *per se*, important lessons can be drawn from the hostile reactions meted out to such work as Yves Marchand and Roman Meffre's *The Ruins of Detroit* (2010). Crucially, as Vultee asks, 'Is it ruin porn when it is viewed, or only when it is viewed without an appropriate sense of outrage?' (2013: 144).

A quick search of the popular photo-sharing site Flickr lets slip a multitude of images documenting the ruinous state of present-day Varosha. It would be too simplistic to suggest that all of these pictures fall into the category of 'ruin porn', but there remains a question mark over the ethical implications of such image-making. While my interest in the ghost town trope takes photography as a core methodological and analytical thread, it is vital to recognise that I look beyond those images which uncritically depict the site today in the following research, focusing instead on subversive representations, critical redeploys and vernacular practices of photographic collection. This approach complements a broadly ethnographic and intertextual enquiry that encompasses interviews, observations and archival research, augmented by my own photographic practice. As Hell has argued, recent discussions of heritage and modern ruins 'leave nostalgic ruin-gazing behind', reflecting instead on 'the aesthetics of ruins as ways of imagining and representing new beginnings' (2011: 231). The present paper contributes to this ongoing shift.

### The Ghosts of Varosha

In his unsettling book *The World Without Us* (2007), author and journalist Alan Weisman turns to Varosha as a case study in what can happen to the built environment when human beings are no longer around. His account begins with the recollections of Allan Cavinder, a British electrical engineer who, in 1976, was tasked with servicing the air-conditioning of a hotel on the fringes of Varosha that was to be re-opened as the Palm Beach (ibid: 91–95). Cavinder required spare parts, and so made an arrangement with Turkish troops to enter nearby fenced off areas and 'quietly cannibalise whatever he needed from the other vacant hotels' (ibid: 94). Over six months later, the silence of the town would weigh heavy:

The wind sighing through open windows became a whine. The cooing of pigeons grew deafening. The sheer absence of human voices bounding off walls was unnerving [...] He seldom saw any guards. He understood why they would avoid entering such a tomb. (ibid: 95)

As he goes on to discuss the advanced stages of decay now in evidence throughout Varosha, Weisman's sober account avoids romanticising the site. Nature had reclaimed many areas, trees had grown through houses, limestone had crumbled, and 'hunks of wall [had] dropped to reveal empty rooms, their furniture long ago spirited away' (ibid: 96). More than anything, Weisman's study is an architectural critique of those imperfect building

materials and techniques whose apparent permanence masks a vulnerability we would do well to remember (a striking materialisation of the fragile stabilities drawn out through hauntology): 'As the fleeting materials of modern construction decompose, the world will retrace our steps back to the Stone Age as it gradually erodes away all memory of us' (ibid: 100). Such terminology also draws out the subjective nature of the ghosts we project onto place, spectres that cannot exist of their own accord and surface or disappear with the oscillations of memory. Under the present conditions of exile, absence and continued division, this affectivity is likely to draw out the 'haunted' nature of Varosha. As Weisman suggests, the barbed wire fence encircling the town, now 'uniformly rusted', has 'nothing left to protect but ghosts' (2007: 96).

This, at least, is the preferred narrative. It therefore comes as something of a surprise to discover that, beyond the haphazard fences and guard towers surrounding Varosha, a significant military presence inhabits much of the 'ghost town', with personnel occupying several hotels and a portion of the beach made available for the recreational use of soldiers. This population is both transient and enduring: a 40 year occupation (as of 2014) which consists mainly of young Turkish men stationed in Cyprus for short periods as part of their compulsory military service. At one level then, the ghost town motif may in fact risk obscuring the very real political conflict that continues to divide Cyprus, a situation perhaps better drawn out through a focus on the people who *do inhabit* parts of the town today, rather than those absent presences we are prone to read into empty and ruinous buildings. Here we begin to understand in a very material way the de-politicising effects of the ghostly ascription; a discursive scenario that, somewhat paradoxically, drifts toward the stability of the ontological over the fluctuations of the hauntological.

Various strategies have sought to unsettle the solidity of this conceptualisation. In 2011 the exhibition *Suspended Spaces: Famagusta* opened at Maison de la Culture d'Amiens in France. Around thirty international artists were involved in the project, conceived as the first in a series of creative interventions addressing border areas and buffer zones across Europe. As I have already hinted, the idea of suspension echoes the core problematic of the 'ghost town' as intrinsically isolated, inaccessible and of the past. It should be noted from the outset however that rather than reinforcing such a position, the labelling of a 'suspended space' was here put forward as a provocation - an incitement to imagine new futures for a place widely perceived as 'out of sync' both temporally (with the present) and physically (with the surrounding landscape).

For the French artists and architects Berger and Berger this meant directly confronting the idea of the ghost town. In a work simply titled *Ghost Towns*, they map and list, with a brief description, locations around the world which, for one reason or another, are no longer populated. In this way Varosha becomes just one example in a lengthy inventory of broadly similar spaces. The towns are categorised by the cause of their desertion (geopolitical,

natural, economic, social, environmental), with historical and visual detail flattened to allow crude correlations to emerge. While ostensibly a way to situate the specifics of Famagusta within a global trend identified by the exhibition curators, this (re)framing might also be interpreted as a perversion of the listing processes associated with bodies such as UNESCO, a system which has been criticised for producing 'metacultural artefacts' that focus on 'universal' comparative value over local actions and outcomes (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 56). Furthermore, through cataloguing and taxonomy the very notion of the 'ghost town' is opened up to critical enquiry in much the same way heritage has been in recent years: as part of a western construct and mythology (Anon 2011: 264; see also Butler 2006). Here then the spectral designation seems liable to drain the affective force of Varosha within a generalising classificatory apparatus, an indication perhaps of the problems that emerge in the application of a nomenclature which is easily translatable and therefore risks subsuming any particularities.

More visceral and directly responsive to the 'singular' (Massumi 2002: 14) context of Varosha is the work of Lia Lapithi and Marcel Dinahet. In 2009 Lapithi followed the streets bordering the 'ghost town' whilst hidden in the boot of a car, covertly photographing the barrier and buildings beyond. The resulting digital images were stitched together into a single 34 metre collage documenting around eight kilometres of the perimeter. Entitled *Defining Silence*, Lapithi's work emphasises the corporeal experience of encountering Varosha today: the physical obstruction and oppressive affectivity of the fence and the pervasive fear of being caught taking pictures. In a similar vein Dinahet discreetly recorded the site by placing a small camera within a diver's box and sending his equipment into the Mediterranean to adopt 'the viewpoint of a marine creature' (Anon 2011: 274). Such rebellious practices explicitly reference and undercut the militaristic banning of photography in and around Varosha. Moreover, unlike the stillness and totalising melancholy of ruin porn photography, here there is a welcome emphasis on movement and fragmentation, with an unsettling nervous energy flowing from the site itself through the embodied experiences of artistic production and image viewing. Following the general theme of this paper, such visualisations might even be considered hauntological in their representation of place, a valuable counterweight to any prevailing narratives which risk 'freezing' conceptualisations of the 'ghost town'.

Commenting on the work in *Suspended Spaces*, Coblenz argues that Varosha is an 'anti-monument' which has become a place of memory 'in spite of itself' (2011: 15). Certainly, the cordoning off of the town was never intended to create a visceral site of memory: Varosha was simply a bargaining chip, with Turkey believing that such a valuable resort would make for useful leverage when negotiations for a permanent reconciliation began (Weisman 2007: 93). The failure of any such talks has left Varosha standing as an inadvertent symbol of division, a reading drawn out through the persistent use of photographs depicting the chain link fence in any

news item on the subject. Wary of the lack of potency conveyed through such symbols, Coblenz (following Benjamin) suggests that Famagusta and other 'ghost places' should instead be seen as 'allegories [...] less melancholic, more biting and caustic' (2011: 164). While this critical re-framing of the ghost town trope broadly corresponds to the hauntological stance advocated in this paper, we need to recognise, I think, the limitations of a purely 'artistic' intervention or interpretation. Much of the work featured in *Suspended Spaces* opens up the fluid and fragmentary nature of the site in question, but this avenue of inquiry is taken no further. There is, for example, a distinct lack of any sustained engagement with the exiled communities who long to return to Varosha. Turning to these very real 'ghosts of place' may provide a potent lens through which to comprehend the spectre as an especially affective yet ephemeral expression of the power of ruins.

The collecting of photographic images and other historic material acts as a focal point of memorialisation and political action for many of the exiled residents of Varosha. Groups such as the *Famagusta Association of Great Britain* (FAGB) collate - on their own website and more fluidly via Facebook - films, paintings, stories and objects to help narrate a social history of the town. This utilisation of common heritage praxis revolves primarily around quotidian aspects of the past, with school photographs and postcards of the seafront before 1974 dominating the visual discourse of the FAGB's online presence. Of particular interest here is the way in which the Association seeks to 're-inhabit' Varosha via such photography: to reanimate the town as a living entity even while the physical infrastructure of the locality falls to ruin. In line with a hauntological approach to the 'ghost town', such images might thus be said to 'hover between life and death, presence and absence [...] making established certainties vacillate' (Davis 2005: 376).

The overarching purpose behind collecting and publicising photographs in this way is to show what was, and therefore what has been lost. Even when the images used are not loaded with the saccharine sentimentality of the postcard, they must be viewed in this affirmative way. The most routine photographic records thus become entangled in the construction of an idealised past. They are set to work in opposition to present circumstances, transformed into uniquely affecting diasporic artefacts intended to breathe life back into the empty streets of Varosha. As one respondent informed me, photographs allow the exiled community to 'walk the streets every night', an imaginative projection which explicitly undoes any suggestion that Varosha is merely an abandoned 'ghost town'. Indeed, the political haunting of the site demonstrates that the language of abandonment is wholly unsatisfactory here, for Varosha is kept vital to present lives in a host of ways:

'I think it's true to say that by collecting [...] whatever you find, pictures or other stuff [...] you keep together with people with the same passion of returning, we have the same roots, we share the same experiences,

so I think that's a kind of therapeutic way of dealing with the loss, because it is a bereavement.'

'...and if someone has discovered another one, a picture you haven't seen before, you get really excited. But then after - the crumbling of the buildings - is painful to see.'

This last remark draws our attention to the parallel photographic collection amassed by the FAGB, consisting of images which document the dilapidated state of Varosha since 1974. Although brought together as a separate 'set' on the official FAGB website, these photographs are clearly meant to be viewed in dialogue with the pre-1974 images. They establish a dichotomy between 'then' and 'now' which, as Samuel realised, plays an important role in the emergence of heritage discourse: 'Instead of the past being a prelude to the present it was an alternative to it, a reverse image of the way we live' (1994: 322). There is no doubt a political imperative at work here, with the diaspora community openly defying a ban on photography to document and publicise the present state of Varosha. A more complicated reading is also possible however, one which resonates with and subverts the very notion of the 'ghost town'.

On the FAGB website exiled residents are invited to submit their memories of Famagusta via an online questionnaire. At one point respondents are asked: 'How did you feel when you found yourself on your home soil as a visitor in a museum; See but don't touch?' Such provocative language gestures towards an existential fear that Varosha can now only be seen as an object of the past, a *museal* artefact 'to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which [is] in the process of dying' (Adorno 1981: 175). This fear of neutralisation is borne out through comments made when discussing tourism to Famagusta today:

'There is one hotel, now called Palm Beach [...] and it's true that people do stay in the hotel, and you do have tourists staying, and sunbathing on the beach, and behind them there is a backdrop of all these ruined hotels. I don't know how, I just think they are people with no brain cells, because they don't question this and feel happy to be there. I don't understand.'

By constantly reminding audiences that Varosha was - *and could still be* - a living space, the Association seeks to re-occupy and revitalise the town through photography and other discursive strategies. This haunting looks to complicate any simplistic perception of the site as dead and inert, highlighting both the lived experiences of the past and the traumatic realities of the present. Such practices explicitly question those antagonistic processes - most notably tourism - through which the intense affectivity of Varosha is somehow ignored or marginalised. Tellingly, the very label 'ghost town' is perceived as one such tactic of ignorance.

The touristic experience of Varosha is, however, more complicated than this justifiably unsympathetic

perception would suggest. For visitors staying at the Palm Beach Hotel for example the reality of the 'ghost town' is unavoidable, with the outskirts of Varosha visible from almost every room and public area of the resort. In more-than-representational terms, this regularly photographed vista takes on a dominant and oppressive physicality in the lived experience of the location, a place where ruination shadows five star luxury. While it remains impossible to generalise on the affective appreciation of the 'ghost town' in this context, the question nevertheless remains: What does it mean to sunbathe in the immediate presence of such a site (**Figure 2**)?

From one perspective, it is easy to understand how tourist literature might predispose visitors to a certain engagement with Varosha, downplaying the traumatic experiences of exiled inhabitants and foregrounding a melancholy and de-politicised gaze (see Urry 2002). One prominent brochure for example suggests a walking tour of Famagusta:

Continuing you reach the edge of Varosha, what was once a famous cosmopolitan destination for travellers and movie stars alike but is now a ghost town. The glamour and luxury have been replaced with decay and a sad crumbling effect, buildings slowly being reclaimed by nature. Sitting on the outskirts to Varosha you get a vision of a place that was once bustling with the fashionable and wealthy but is now frozen in time. (Direct Traveller 2013: 79)

We are here encouraged to see and contemplate Varosha as we might the ruins of antiquity. The 'ghost town' is 'crumbling' and 'frozen' - a spectacle of abandonment with no clear connection to the present circumstances of the island. This consolidation of Varosha into the tourist itineraries of Northern Cyprus is further borne out through suggested day trips. Alongside excursions to Bellapais, Salamis, St. Hilarion Castle and a donkey sanctuary can be found 'Ghost Town, Varosha' (**Figure 3**). Contextualising the site in this way seems simultaneously to blunt and exoticise the meaning and affectivity of Varosha. What might otherwise appear as an unsightly and unwelcome backdrop to the five star accommodation of the Palm Beach Hotel is made into a compelling, if sombre, curiosity - a recent historical 'sight' to complement those other natural and cultural attractions which make up the touristic heritage of the island. The ghost town label here becomes little more than a selling point, a marketable experience and point of interest that helps distinguish *things worth seeing*.

The desire amongst travel agencies to make this space less raw and affective is perhaps unsurprising. The issue of Varosha - which, during conversation, my guide unprompted referred to as 'the ghost town' - is clearly a significant problem for the tourist industry in this part of the island. Vast stretches of beach are inaccessible and roads end abruptly at wire fences. The continued military presence meanwhile is hardly conducive to a relaxing holiday experience. While Northern Cyprus as a whole lacks





**Figure 2:** Deckchairs in the shadow of Varosha's ruinous hotels. Photograph authors own.

the (over)developed destinations of the South, keeping many of the problems currently afflicting areas such as Agia Napa at bay (e.g. teenage drunkenness, drugs, prostitution, etc.), there is a noticeable lack of amenities or facilities for the overseas visitor in Famagusta. The global industry that so regularly goes hand in hand with heritage, whether supportive or otherwise, is therefore tempered by socio-political and geographical division, with no factor more divisive than Varosha. This has the strange effect of making Famagusta, one of the world's foremost tourist destinations of the post-war years, seem almost undiscovered.

As Waterton and Watson have recently argued (2014), to fully register and understand the affectivity and emotional resonances of a site the study of heritage tourism must take into account the embodied experience of interacting with landscapes *and* their representations. The artistic interventions, tourist strategies and diasporic discourse I have discussed so far all embrace notions of the 'ghost town' that fracture the meaning and connotations of the term as it relates to Varosha. Some are more fixed and unyielding than others, but there is no ontological certainty to this spectral designation, only a hauntological fluidity that allows for multiple and even contradictory readings to emerge. While affect is commonly held to be non-discursive (Guattari 1996: 159), I would argue that the fragmented linguistic representations encompassed by the phrase 'ghost town' in fact have an affective force of their own. The naming of the site might thus be seen as both a 'body' and a 'becoming'

(Deleuze in Navaro-Yashin 2009: 12) that moves through and across other bodies, including artists, tourists and exiles. Crucially, we must therefore recognise that the clichéd label 'ghost town' masks *and makes possible* a multiplicity of conceptions about Varosha. As Gregg and Seigworth suggest, considerations of affect are particularly useful in opening up 'a vibrant incoherence' around 'zones of cliché and convention' (2010: 9). This becomes even more apparent when we turn to the immediate environment of Varosha itself, to those 'moments of subjective and emergent meaning making' (Waterton and Watson 2014: 119) that encircle, animate and exude from the 'ghost town'.

Most tourist or visitor encounters with Varosha occur along the small section of beach still open to the public near to the aforementioned Palm Beach Hotel. Here it is possible to venture close to the perimeter fence, which tails off into the sea at a popular fishing spot. Sunbathers are a common sight in this location, but it is also possible to observe a steady stream of tour groups specifically visiting this stretch of coast to view the 'ghost town'. A guard tower stands over the border at this point, and anyone caught photographing the fence or buildings beyond will be met with the sharp blow of a whistle. Slowly meandering along the beach, these tour groups are therefore prohibited from carrying out one of the most commonplace touristic practices (photography), and are instead forced to stop and contemplate the ruinous vista. Some will of course furtively turn their cameras towards Varosha, often in a panoramic digital sweep





**Figure 3:** Tourist literature promoting the 'Ghost Town'. Photograph authors own.

which feigns to record the Mediterranean before coming to rest on the 'ghost town'. Indeed, the hotels here are commonly documented in photographic collections that look to imitate popular ruin porn imagery (black and white, high contrast, an emphasis on decay, abandonment and the textures of place, etc.). Undoubtedly atmospheric, such photography in fact draws out the inconsistencies between affect as experienced and the visual representation of affective spaces and things. Most notably, a focus on the built 'sights' encountered denies the wider landscape of engagement, including sea, sky, sand and - crucially - people. This popular space where the complexities of the 'ghost town' might be brought to the fore is thus routinely translated into an all too simplistic and uncritical reiteration of the de-politicised melancholy of Varosha. True, such photographs will never speak to the full sensorial affectivity of place, but their production and dissemination is (perhaps unwittingly) caught up in wider processes which seek to undermine the still living 'ghosts' of Varosha by focusing on the desolation of the site today.

A more purposefully affecting experience of Varosha can be found in Deryneia, a short drive across the border dividing 'free' and 'occupied' Cyprus. Here, two sites

provide a useful contrast of the 'official' and 'unofficial' (Harrison 2013) heritage approaches to the 'ghost town' by Greek-Cypriot communities.

The Famagusta Municipality Cultural Centre in Deryneia opened in 1998, a neo-classical structure housing meeting rooms, exhibitions, a large assembly hall and - crucially - a viewing platform which looks out onto Varosha. Rooms are decorated with photographs and paintings documenting Famagusta before and after 1974. On one floor, a large interactive map details all the buildings of Varosha, with visitors able to 'light up' hotels, public offices, shops and other remembered sites. The centre hosts school groups and official meetings, with a large selection of literature on the destruction of cultural heritage in Northern Cyprus and leaflets explaining the recent history and current political context of the island. Visitors are also invited to watch a short documentary on these issues, entitled 'Famagusta: The Hostage Ghost City of Europe'.

This same video is also shown at the Famagusta View Point, a small family run museum, cafe and viewing platform a short walk from the Cultural Centre (**Figure 4**). The main focus here (apart from a similar outlook onto Varosha) is a room decorated with antique furniture and





**Figure 4:** Famagusta View Point Museum. Photograph authors own.

paraphernalia, with walls covered in laminated newspaper cuttings, photographs, posters, letters and political leaflets. This evocative little space - raw, haphazard and dusty - demonstrates the affective power of unofficial heritage expressions, although this is not to suggest that the narrative followed differs in any considerable way from the main Cultural Centre. Indeed, both locations draw on a familiar repertoire of images and texts to document and publicise the current circumstances of Varosha. As with the more geographically removed work of the FAGB, much of this involves re-inhabiting the site through photographs and stories, highlighting the continued presence of the 'ghosts' so very near to the 'ghost town'.

The foremost reason for visiting either of these locations is, of course, to observe Varosha from their respective viewing platforms. Large binoculars or telescopes are provided for this activity, a practice which seems inadvertently to militarise the viewer, casting the tourist as spy and voyeur. The bodily and optical contortions required to focus on specific scenes within the lenses of these devices causes a deeper attentiveness. Here the visual is undeniably predominant in one's experience of the 'ghost town', but this ocular engagement is distinctly embodied and affecting: surveying the landscape becomes a form of possession or occupation, another method of remote habitation. Undertaken from another locality, such a distanced viewing may well be open to criticism as the enactment of an exoticising or neo-colonial gaze (see Alloula 1986). In this environment, however, one is invited to comprehend the spectacle as part of a larger strategy of

self-exhibition, with the 'ghosts' of Varosha encouraging and contextualising the 'gaze' within a wider narrative of anti-colonialism.

In an attempt to capture and translate this experience, I began photographing Varosha *through* the binoculars available at the Deryneia Cultural Centre (Figures 5, 6 and 7). This creates strange effects. The dark circular frame focuses the gaze but prohibits the materialisation of detail. Signs of ruination for example are not obvious, and so we half-expect to see people occupying the buildings. Where 'ruin porn' may emphasise the beauty of abandoned spaces and thus encourage new forms of exploration and heritage experience, these photographs underline a different mode of the auratic, which, after all, Benjamin originally described as 'the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be' (1999 [1936]: 222). These images thus attempt to convey some of the affective force of a non-corporal engagement with a locality that is geographically close yet physically inaccessible. In line with recent scholarly approaches to the aesthetics of ruins, such photography looks to overcome the nostalgic gaze and reflect instead on contexts of violence, war, and imperial conquest (Hell 2011: 231). To over-aestheticise the ruins of Varosha in a way that perhaps romanticises the idea of the 'ghost town' would, I argue, perform a disservice to those individuals forced into exile. Emphasising the detached proximity of these absent presences instead draws out their tenacious connection to the past *and* present of the place. As Maleuvre has observed, ruins stage the past as distant, they are 'unapproachability



**Figure 5:** Varosha viewed through binoculars on the roof of the Famagusta Municipality Cultural Centre. Photograph authors own.

made into a monument' (1999: 61). When this remoteness is also materially enforced, there is a risk of the monumental collapsing into the *museal*, into a dead space. Conceptualising of Varosha as a 'ghost town' always veers close to this possibility.

This tension between distance and closeness is also made manifest at the Deryneia viewpoints in more direct ways. The physical inaccessibility of Varosha does not dilute its psychological rawness, a position which draws out the haunted and *haunting* - in terms of unsettling - nature of the site. Both the administrators of the official Cultural Centre and the family operating Famagusta View Point are exiles of Varosha, living just a few hundred metres from their former homes. These 'ghosts' linger in painful proximity to the spaces they once corporeally inhabited. Moreover, the material, visual and discursive strategies employed at both sites draw on a familiar heritage inflected language of roots, soil and homeland to articulate their connection to place, even while their status as viewing points perhaps encourages a detached touristic gaze. Common heritage practices of collection, display and historical education are thus transformed into something radically political, constantly reminding visitors of the absent people who should form the focus of their observation.

How successful is this strategy? During fieldwork in the autumn of 2013 I joined a small group of British tourists at the Famagusta View Point Museum. As we stood on the crude viewing platform and took turns to survey

the landscape beyond through an assorted collection of binoculars and telescopes, it soon became clear that the political context of present day Varosha was largely irrelevant to this particular experience of the site. The vista was simply a curiosity, a way of observing without entering the spaces of Northern Cyprus. This did, however, spark discussion amongst the group about a relative who had been trapped at Nicosia airport at the outbreak of conflict in 1974. The emotional resonance of the 'ghost town' was thus translated to the domain of personal and familial memory, an avoidance perhaps of the complex material realities of the present site/sight in favour of a nostalgic anecdote. Of course, not all visitors will respond in such a fashion, and it is telling that for the staff I spoke to at both viewpoint locations there remained a sense of duty to the act of observation, an overriding conviction that there must exist a space to view, remember, and - crucially - *think* about Varosha. (See Sontag (2003: 103) for a compelling argument on the critical need for such spaces in contemporary life.) As one administrator at the Deryneia Cultural Centre informed me, 'while the individual pain of exile may lessen over time, a collective pain remains'.

Discussing the context of Northern Cyprus more generally, Navaro-Yashin (2009) has suggested that the metaphor of the ruin be employed to better understand the complexity of affects engendered through 'abject' remains. This argument instigates 'another kind of orientation' (ibid: 14) that might be located in the spaces





**Figure 6:** Varosha through binoculars. Photograph authors own.



**Figure 7:** Varosha through binoculars. Photograph authors own.

between Deleuze and Guattari's delineation of 'roots' and 'rhizomes' (2004 [1980]):

We said that the root is vertical whereas the rhizome is horizontal. The ruin, however, [...] is both and neither. A ruin is rhizomatic in the sense that it grows in uncontrollable and unforeseen ways [...] But a ruin is also about roots, because it is sited as a 'trace' of a historical event, it is remembered, it is kept, lamented, and cherished in the memory of those who left it behind, it is sited and noticed by those who uncannily live in it or in its vicinity, it leaves marks in the unconscious. (Navaro-Yashin 2009: 14)

The casting of Varosha as 'ghost town' draws out and articulates many of these concerns. Cut loose from their physical enclosure through diverse visual and discursive tactics, the meaning of the ruins is liable to fracture endlessly; to become, in other words, rhizomatic. The fact that so many characterisations - whether artistic, journalistic or touristic - fall back on the ghost town trope is therefore highly telling. There is a peculiar safety to the term, a welcome dose of the uncanny and a physical rootedness that supposedly reflects the reality of the site. Such invocations of the 'ghost town' emphasise abandonment, decay, emptiness and melancholic reflection. They call to mind symbols and monuments rather than biting and caustic allegories, to borrow from Coblenz (2011). At the same time, the ruins of Varosha are constantly 'repopulated' through practices which seek to highlight the absent, those whose roots remain firmly bound to the specifics of a place they can no longer inhabit. This mode of politicised haunting - a powerful evocation of Bell's *ghosts of place* (1997) - embraces the efforts of distant exiled communities and former inhabitants living and working in painful contiguity with the town. The hauntological approach advocated throughout this paper is nowhere more acutely felt than in the grounded practices of memorialisation employed by groups and individuals for whom Varosha remains, emphatically, home.

### Final Remarks

What can be done with Varosha today? Perhaps unsurprisingly, this vastly complicated question will remain unanswered within the scope of the present paper. One proposal put forward at a Lobby for Cyprus event held at Portcullis House, Westminster, in May 2012 suggested that Varosha be listed by UNESCO as a 'site of negative memory' - a sign of the growing recognition that heritagisation might act as a powerful political gesture. More substantial has been the recent drive to create an entirely new 'eco-city' on the site. Led by filmmaker Vasia Markides (whose family originate from Famagusta), this project seeks to radically transform Varosha (and Famagusta as a whole) into a new eco-friendly city and model for urban development across the world. Tellingly, Markides falls back on the ghost town label when describing her own first encounter with Varosha: 'It felt like some sort of post-apocalyptic nightmare

[...] You're seeing nature take over. Prickly pear bushes have overrun the entire six square kilometres. There are trees that have sprouted through living rooms. It's a ghost town' (Interview in Hooper and Venema 2014). This impression is ratified and complicated by Ceren Boğaç, a Turkish-Cypriot who grew up in a house overlooking Varosha and is now involved in the eco-city project:

'It was just like living next-door to ghosts [...] The houses had flower pots, curtains, but no one was living there - it was a space which had been left suddenly [...] One day I found, in a box, the personal belongings of other people, like photo albums and journals [...] I asked my grandmother: "Who does this belong to?" She said: "It belongs to the real owners of this house." And that was the first time I realised that we don't own the house that we are living in' (Interviewed in Hooper and Venema 2014).

Through the eco-city project, the idea of ghosts is thus manifest in both the psychological impact of the site and its characterisation as a locality ripe for development. The ghost town label acts as a provocation to build something new, taking on - as I suggested earlier - its own discursive affectivity. This is placed in direct opposition to the potentiality of the 'eco-city', a future oriented depiction that aims to generate an imagined and emergent entity around which novel ideas of the location might crystallise. Following a successful bi-communal meeting in January 2014, it remains to be seen whether this or related initiatives can overcome the physical, political and psychological barriers blocking any return to or development of Varosha. Particularly compelling, however, has been the remarkable leverage that the juxtaposition of the terms 'ghost town' and 'eco-city' has already achieved, as evidenced by the widespread publicity and impact surrounding the launch of the project (e.g. Hooper and Venema 2014). Indeed, I would suggest that it is precisely the explicit contradistinction of 'ghost town' and 'eco-city' in the strategic *naming* of the project that goes some way to explaining the potent force of such re-imaginings.

This research has engaged with many 'ghosts' of Varosha. My fundamental aim has been to destabilise any simplistic connotations of the ghost town label by anatomising its emergence and use, in the process advocating a hauntological approach to our analysis of the names we give to the places and the things of heritage more generally. Ongoing attempts to psychologically re-inhabit Varosha by exiled Greek-Cypriot communities have provided an empirical basis from which to examine the continued 'haunting' of the site by communities and individuals living at various removes from the physical environment of the town. Moreover, the material realities of Varosha have been shown to disturb the very term 'ghost town' as deployed by the tourist industry of Northern Cyprus, although the complex layers of affect, melancholy, exoticism and banalisation encircling the site

at the subjective level of the individual encounter require further interrogation.

Finally, it is worth reiterating the manifold interactions between visual representations, discursive strategies and affective encounters drawn out through this research. Varosha as *ghost town* is spoken about, written about, visualised through photography and other media, transformed through artistic critique and made 'real' through touristic experience. The idiom itself thus makes possible its own affective 'bloom spaces' (Gregg and Seigworth 2010), fractured axes around which new interpretations might transcend cliché and convention. In the lingering shadow of the ghost town label, it is only by resisting any characterisation which emphasises fixity and frozenness that Varosha might avoid becoming a latter day city of the dead.

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