

*Education as Séance:
Specters, Spirits, and the Expansion of Memory*

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ABSTRACT: In this essay I propose that education be conceived as *séance*: a place where ghosts are summoned in order that we may come to (speaking) terms with them. Against the backdrop of my own summoning of the ghosts haunting my childhood visits to a nearby castle, I draw on the work of Jacques Derrida to provide a theoretical rationale for the importance of spirits and ghosts. The concepts of inheritance and hospitality place a central role in understanding how to come to terms with ghosts. I conclude with a reflection on the summoning of ghosts in education, and the role of the curriculum as medium in this *séance*.

KEYWORDS: Derrida, inheritance, remembrance, specter, curriculum, hauntology.

I know why we bury our dead and mark the place with stone, with the heaviest, most permanent thing we can think of: because the dead are everywhere but the ground. (Michaels, 1996, p. 8)

Memory is the purgative by which we rid ourselves of the present. (Findley, 1990, p. 4)

Haunting Remembrance

Socrates, in his conversation with Meno, famously asserts that learning does not consist in acquiring new knowledge, but rather in recalling the knowledge the soul already possesses.

The soul, then, as being immortal, and having been born again many times, and having seen all things that exist, whether in this world or in the world below, has knowledge of them all; and it is no wonder that she should be able to call to remembrance all that she ever knew about virtue and about everything; for as all nature is akin, and the soul has learned all things, there is no difficulty her

eliciting, or as men say “learning,” out of a single recollection, all the rest, if a man is strenuous and does not faint; for all inquiry and all learning is but recollection. (Plato, trans. 1949, p. 37)

Education is thus conceived as the process of aiding the soul in its process of remembering and recognizing knowledge. Because the human soul, according to Socrates, is immortal and, between worldly incarnations, dwells in the realm of souls and Fates described in “The myth of Er” (*The Republic*), attaining wisdom does not consist in “learning” something new, but rather in uncovering the truths hidden deep in the soul’s memory.

Without adopting the cosmology and metaphysics that underpin Socrates’ conception of learning, I examine in this paper the importance of remembrance and recollection for education. The emphasis in Socrates’ theory of remembrance is on the *individual* soul remembering what it already knows; my emphasis, by contrast, will be on the importance of *collective* memories. Today, the dominant conception of remembrance in education is not about immutable truths but about history as both product and object of interpretation. I approach the question of remembrance not from an idealist perspective of remembering universal truths, nor from the perspective of cognitive science and the insights into the working of memory, but from the poststructuralist perspective of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida.

The perspective on remembrance and recollection offered by the work of Derrida is, first and foremost, *ethical*. Remembrance, for Derrida, is always interpretive and does not seek to re-collect a universal truth, but rather to come to terms with one’s intellectual heritage, the knowledge and values that have been passed down in explicit or implicit ways. This “coming to terms with” (*s’expliquer avec*) is an ethical act based on a recognition of indebtedness to whom and what came before, and responsibility for whom and what will come after. Derrida (1993/1994) turns the question of being into the question of inheritance, and lets the figure of the ghost (*revenant*) emerge as that which comes back from the inherited past to haunt a being in the present that, too often, forgets its indebtedness. Ontology thus becomes *hauntology* (p. 10). Based on this perspective, I add to the many metaphors that already exist for understanding and theorizing education, education as séance, a coming to (speaking) terms with ghosts. This metaphor is explicitly ethical, in the sense that I argue not merely that we can see education as séance, but that we ought to.

My plea for attention to traces from the past is out of step with the modernist, anti-historical attitude of those narrowly focused on economic gain and technological progress. This attitude is exemplified in mottos

such as “Don’t dwell on the past, look ahead to the future!” or “Life is for the living, not for the dead!” Life is indeed – obviously, tautologically – for the living, but an important and necessary trait of the dead is that they were once living, for what has not lived cannot be dead. The false dichotomy between past and future glosses over the fact that a human life does not consume itself, but spills over, exceeds itself, and its excess, its traces, both carry and disrupt the lives of the not-yet-dead. I conceive of education as a coming to terms with the ghosts and specters of the past that are, as Anne Michaels (1996) writes, “everywhere but the ground” (p. 8). They are in our dreams, our language, our ideas, our habits and rituals, our books and paintings. The knocking will not cease until we open the door; the ghosts will not settle down until we receive them.

Before I go on to discuss the spectral traces of my childhood visits to an old castle, let me offer a point of clarification. Education can expand memory in many ways, and include pleasant as well as unpleasant recollections. In everyday language, however, we tend not to speak of ghosts and haunting in a positive way. The folk wisdom about ghosts is that only spirits who have unfinished business and cannot find peace will come back to haunt the living. Ghosts unsettle us, make us feel uncomfortable. That is the sense in which I will discuss ghosts: as those parts of our histories that we – or some of us – would rather not acknowledge and that, when we do, threaten to disrupt the comfort of our everyday assumptions and make our moral hair stand on end.

Haunting the Book Chest

I grew up in the Dutch town of Gorinchem, across the river from Slot Loevestein, a castle originally built for the knight Dirc Loef van Horne in the 14th century. In later centuries the castle was used as a prison for political prisoners and prisoners of war, the most famous of whom was the legal scholar Hugo Grotius. On August 29, 1618, Prince Maurits ordered the capture of (among others) Hugo Grotius and Johan van Oldenbarnevelt because of political and religious differences. Prince Maurits was counter-Remonstrant, a more orthodox stream of Calvinism, while Grotius and Van Oldenbarnevelt sided with the Remonstrants or “*Rekkelijken*” (lit. “those who stretch more”). At the time of their capture, Grotius was attorney for the city of Rotterdam and Van Oldenbarnevelt was national attorney. In May of 1619, Van Oldenbarnevelt was sentenced to death by beheading, and Grotius was sentenced to lifelong imprisonment and loss of his possessions. During his imprisonment in Loevestein, Grotius was frequently sent a heavy chest of books by his

friend and colleague Erpenius. On March 22, 1621, Hugo Grotius escaped from the castle in the book chest, a feat for which today, at least in my home town, he is better known than for his legal scholarship.

I have visited the castle, including the room in which Grotius was imprisoned, on many occasions. As a child, the thickness of the brick castle walls, the enormity of the fireplaces and the boldness of Grotius' escape captured my imagination – but it was not until much later that I realized that Grotius' imprisonment in Loevestein told me something about a history of political and religious conflict and intolerance in The Netherlands. Specters were haunting the story of the daring escape in the book chest.

The 17th century in The Netherlands is known as the Golden Century, because of the wealth merchants accumulated through trade in tea and spices, a wealth that was partially used for the patronage of now world-famous artists such as Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) and Jan Vermeer (1632-1675), and the building of luxury houses with ornamental facades along the Amsterdam canals. For the wealth of Dutch merchants in the Golden Century the establishment of trade posts in the East Indies was crucial. The creation of the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (United East Indian Trade Company) in 1602 was the beginning of three and a half centuries of colonialism in the Dutch Indies (now Indonesia). National Attorney Johan van Oldenbarnevelt was instrumental in establishing the United East Indian Trade Company, and his colleague Grotius wrote legal treatises that were important in international trade (e.g., *Mare liberum*, 1609).

For a long time all the name Hugo Grotius conjured up for me was the story of the book chest, and perhaps the small alley in my home town through which, so the story goes, Hugo Grotius passed during his escape, and which has since been known as Hugo's Gate. Growing up, Hugo Grotius (or, in Dutch "Hugo de Groot") was not a haunted name for me, because I had not yet learned to attend to the ghosts of religious intolerance and colonialism.

Haunting Spirits and Specters

The metaphor of the ghost requires a little more explanation. Derrida (1993/1994) distinguishes between, on the one hand, the spirit (German *Geist*, French *esprit*), and, on the other, the specter or ghost (German *Gespenst*, French *spectre*, *revenant*, or *fantôme*). While specter and ghost are synonyms, their difference with spirit lies in the fact that they appear, make themselves visible or audible, while the spirit does not:

“The apparition form, the phenomenal body of the spirit, that is the definition of the specter. The ghost is the phenomenon of the spirit” (p. 169). The spirit does not appear *as spirit*; as soon as one can speak of an apparition, one is speaking of a specter or ghost. Derrida suggests that “the specter is always animated by a spirit” (p. 3), but the reverse does not apply: not all spirits appear as specters.

Derrida (1993/1994) invokes the image of the specter in *Specters of Marx* to argue that Marxism, of which he himself was critical, is an important part of the inheritance of Western societies, and that no disavowal of that heritage or declaration of the end of history will successfully bury Marxism: it has left traces that must be acknowledged, ghosts that demand being received and addressed. Those who do not acknowledge the heritage of Marxism that infuses contemporary scholarship and culture, who believe Marx’s work is buried safely in the past and has no bearing on the present, let alone the future, do not do justice to the specters of Marx, which will come back to haunt them:

It will always be a fault not to read and reread and discuss Marx – which is to say also a few others – and to go beyond scholarly “reading” or “discussion.” It will be more and more a fault, a failing of theoretical, philosophical, political responsibility. ... One need not be a Marxist or a communist in order to accept this obvious fact. We all live in a world, some would say a culture, that still bears, at an incalculable depth, the mark of this inheritance, whether in a directly visible fashion or not. (pp. 14-15)

Our world or culture bears the mark not only of Marxism but also, and perhaps more deeply, of other ideologies, notably Christianity and colonialism. Echoing Derrida’s phrasing, I would say that one need not be a colonialist or Christian to accept the obvious fact that the world – wherever one is – bears the marks of Christian and colonialist inheritances. Denying the traces of these inheritances in the world today, or trying to bury these traces as deeply as possible, does not stop their influence. Instead, I propose, we should aim to come to (speaking) terms with them.

The difference between the spirit and the specter may seem esoteric, but it has direct bearing on the séance that education may host: in a séance, spirits are summoned, they are asked to appear as specters, or at least to make their presence known as ghosts in some way.

One watches for the signals, the tables that turn, the dishes that move. Is it going to answer? As in the space of a salon during a spiritualist séance, but sometimes that space is what is called the street, one looks out for one’s goods and furniture, attempting to

adjust all of politics to the frightening hypothesis of a visitation.
(Derrida, 1993/1994, pp. 123-124)

The active summoning of spirits in a *séance* implies that the subject is not already haunted. After all, if one is already haunted by ghosts and aware of their presence, there is no need to summon them. As a child I could afford to remain oblivious to the ghosts of Hugo Grotius and of other victims of religious intolerance, and to the ghosts of colonialism, which surely were all around me, because their spectral presence was far enough removed from my privileged life to allow me not to see the tables turn.

In educational contexts students and teachers may be already haunted, or they may not. Those in subject-positions of privilege have often managed to banish the ghosts and to ignore the spirits; those in marginalized subject-positions are more commonly haunted by ghosts. For many middle-class children growing up in North America today, for instance, it is too easy not to be haunted by the ghosts of women's oppression; teachers ask "What about the boys?" as girls outperform boys academically, and students themselves think the specters of sexism and misogyny are merely lingering ghosts to be conjured away. By contrast, the friends and families of the 14 female students murdered at Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique in 1989, and the women – disproportionately women of colour – working as nurse's aids, waitresses and maids, are painfully aware that their lives are haunted by ghosts, *revenants* of women's oppression. Likewise, for many Euro-American and Euro-Canadian students today, it is too easy not to be haunted by the ghosts of the murdered and abused Indigenous peoples driven off their land. By contrast, many Indigenous students grow up in families where these ghosts appear all too often, wreaking havoc in the form of suicide and addiction.

Proposing that education be conceived as *séance* implies that even when there do not seem to be any ghosts, there may still be spirits, and – more likely even – that the specters are there, but students and teachers have not learned to hear or see them. In education conceived as *séance*, spirits and ghosts are not to be conjured away but rather to be conjured up.

Haunting Inheritance

Curriculum, not only history curriculum but curriculum in many subject areas, offers opportunities for learning about the inherited knowledge to which our lives and actions and learning today are, always already, in

response, and about the specters that haunt this inherited knowledge. This approach is at odds – or, as Derrida (1993/1994), following *Hamlet*, might say: “out of joint” (p. 21) – with the modernist orientation to progress which remains dominant in Western education today (e.g., Usher & Edwards, 1994). Education is widely assumed to be a form of preparation for an autonomous life, and preferably one that makes a measurable economic contribution. The presumed autonomy of the (adult) individual, however, has convincingly been called into question not only by Jacques Derrida but also by Emmanuel Levinas (with whose work Derrida’s ethics is closely entwined), and by Judith Butler. Conceiving of oneself as autonomous, independent of others, they contend, is a form of hubris that fails to take into account the fundamental dependence of each human being on the other; this other may be understood as the Other whose ethical demand calls me into subjectivity (Levinas), the other to whose discourse I am subjected to emerge as subject (Butler), or the other who bestows upon me an inheritance that I can never properly receive but to which I must respond (Derrida). Although the three conceptions of otherness are closely entwined, it is the notion of inheritance that I will pursue in more detail here.

Derrida (1993/1994) writes, “One never inherits without coming to terms with [*s’expliquer avec*] some specter, and therefore with more than one specter” (p. 24). If one refuses or neglects to come to terms with, therefore, an inheritance has been bestowed but one cannot, properly speaking, be said to have inherited. I could not be said to have inherited the history of Hugo Grotius, no matter how familiar I was with the physical structure of Slot Loevestein, until I had come to terms with the multiple (religious, colonialist) specters of the history of the escape in the book chest. To understand what it is I have inherited simply by being born in The Netherlands, of parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents who were all born in the Netherlands, I must come to terms with the specters of this ethnic identity, the traces left by the dead in the language I use, the ideas I call mine, the habits I no longer notice, the objects I recognize. And this ethical imperative “I must” becomes stronger even when I consider my Dutch identity as a home from which I venture out into the world to interact with others, and when I consider Derrida’s ethic of hospitality.

The question, of course is, *How* does one come to terms with these specters? Derrida’s (1993/1994) words here pose a problem especially for educators as,

The last one to whom a specter can appear, address itself, or pay attention is a spectator as such. At the theater or at school. The

reasons for this are essential. As theoreticians or witnesses, spectators, observers, and intellectuals, scholars believe that *looking* is sufficient. Therefore, they are not always in the most competent position to do what is necessary: *speak* to the specter. [italics added] (p. 11)

In order to come to terms with the specters of an inheritance, one must not only look at these specters, regard them as would a spectator, but one must engage and address them. "Inheritance," writes Derrida, "is a never a *given*, it is always a task" (1993/1994, p. 67). The task is, first, to acknowledge the inheritance; second, to interrogate it and be interrogated by it. Interrogating an inheritance requires a critical reception or, in Derrida's words, "critical inheritance" (p. 69). Such critique is not a dismissal of the ghosts, but an engagement with them. Enlightenment philosophy, for example, is an inheritance whose specters undeniably trouble contemporary institutions and intellectual life. Instead of ignoring or chasing away these specters, however, we should address them through serious reading and re-reading of Enlightenment texts, and learning to recognize the traces of the Enlightenment in our own words and ideas. When one critiques one's inheritance, one should never fail to acknowledge that one's critique is enabled by one's being an inheritor in the first place. This is precisely why Derrida's critique of Marxism is accompanied by his call to honour Marxist inheritance, and why his inheritance of Marxism involves critical interrogation. Being interrogated by an inheritance means allowing the inheritance to call into question the fundamental assumptions and social categories that make up oneself as subject-inheritor.

Haunting Hospitality

One of Derrida's major contributions to ethics is the elaboration of the concept of hospitality. In its everyday use, the term "hospitality" might suggest a masterful gesture by a host in possession of a home, who can afford to invite a guest, but that is not how Derrida theorizes hospitality. Hospitality is a more humble gesture, a gesture made by a host who knows that she, herself, has been received, and that she is not truly in possession of her home. Hospitality is the ability to receive the stranger who comes knocking at one's door when one least expects it, when one is not prepared, and when one knows the hospitality one can extend will not be good enough.

Absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown,

anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names. (Derrida, 1997/2000, p. 25)

Giving to the absolute, unknown other involves risks, for one does not know whether and how the other will fit into one's home, and how one's home might be changed by the guest's presence. This is precisely the ethical demand of hospitality, a demand that far exceeds the social niceties of everyday hospitality, and calls into question the positional difference between host and guest.

It is thus necessary, beyond all perception, to receive the other while running the risk, a risk that is always troubling, strangely troubling, like the stranger (*unheimlich*), of a hospitality offered to the *guest* as *ghost* or *Geist* or *Gast*. (Derrida, 1997/1999, p. 111)

Hospitality is required for the guest yet to come, and this applies to the flesh-and-blood *arrivant* as well as to the spectral *revenant*. It is worth noting that host, guest, and ghost are all derived from the same Indo-European root *ghosti-s*. Education as séance is education as the practice of *g/hosti-pitality*, the practice of hospitality extended to ghostly guests. In some cultures one of the reasons that the stranger ought to be received as guest is because she or he might be God-sent – sent from the other side of life, from the world of the dead. Derrida (2002) quotes studies of the South-American Tupinamba tribe, where guests are received with tears. This welcoming ritual has been “associated with a cult of the dead, the stranger being hailed like a *revenant*” (p. 359).

The ghost is the guest par excellence: a not-quite-present other who is wholly other. The ghost is a guest for whom no one can be prepared. Even in a séance the arrival of this guest remains unpredictable. Will the table turn? Will the glass move? “The other may come, or he may not. I don't want to programme him, but rather to leave a place for him to come if he comes. It is the ethic of hospitality” (Derrida, 1997/2001, p. 83). In the previous section I noted that in order to come to terms with the specters of an inheritance, one must not only look at them but also address them. Now this injunction can be framed in terms of hospitality as well: when the ghost/guest appears on one's doorstep, it would be inhospitable just to stare at this stranger or, worse, hope that it leaves again quietly. The ghost/guest must be addressed somehow, invited in and engaged by the host, even though the ghost's name may be unknown, and the effects of inviting it in unforeseeable.

Haunting Education

Thinking of education as a social practice that straddles the public and private sphere, and that, as Madeleine Grumet (1988) has expressed so eloquently, “mediates [the] passage between the specificity of intimate relations and the generalities of the public world” (p. 14), the ethical task is to find ways to assist students in navigating this passage well, attentive to the effects of their actions both in intimate relations and the public world. As students continuously move back and forth between private and public worlds, so do the ghosts; specters of past public worlds do not remain confined to the public world but echo in our intimate relations, and, similarly, the ghosts of intimate relations haunt the public world.

“The memories we elude catch up to us, overtake us like a shadow. A truth appears suddenly in the middle of a thought, a hair on a lens” (Michaels, 1996, p. 213). Like a hair on a lens, the apparition of a ghost troubles our vision; it is too close to us to be seen sharply, but too close also to be ignored. Rather than brushing it away as an irritant, educational contexts are places where such spectral “hairs on a lens” can and should be examined: Whose is it? How did it come loose? When did it land on this lens? When, in biology, students learn about basic genetics, this is not only a matter of studying the eye colour of fruit flies, but also about attending to the specters of eugenics. When, in mathematics, students learn to measure and calculate, the specters of phrenology, craniometry, and statistics as political arithmetic haunt their studies. When, in physics, students learn the difference between mass and weight and the mechanics of a scale, the ghosts of weigh houses, where the fates of many women accused of witchcraft were sealed, circle the curriculum. When education is conceived as *séance*, such knowledge is not studied as something safely ensconced in the past, allowing for a sense of moral progress and superiority in the present. On the contrary, the knowledge is spectral precisely because it continues to haunt the present: eugenics rears its head again because new technologies allow for the abortion of fetuses with certain diseases or disabilities; the use of phrenology by the Belgian colonizers of Rwanda has a direct link with the 1994 Rwandan genocide and continued tensions between Hutus and Tutsis today; cultural assumptions about proper and improper weight and other statistical descriptions that have been turned into prescriptions are forcefully present today.

Curriculum texts are full of such “hairs on a lens,” and these offer troubling but rich opportunities for coming to (speaking) terms with the

ghosts of inheritance. Whose absences haunt the curriculum? Whose inheritance is disavowed? The specters may come from elsewhere to trouble education, but education has left quite a trail of specters of its own: from residential schooling for Aboriginal children, to the prohibition on sign language faced by deaf students, to the treatment of gay and lesbian students and teachers, many have been excluded by and through education. Exclusion never fully succeeds, however: it always leaves a trace, and these traces are the ghosts that demand (curricular) hospitality.

My call for education as séance is not a call to dwell in the past. We do not make our home in the past, but we must know how to visit the past, or rather: let the past visit us (if this “we” is in the privileged position not to be visited already). “To remain with the dead is to abandon them” (Michaels, 1996, p. 170). Although a full explication carries beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth mentioning from a psychoanalytic perspective there is good reason to welcome our specters. Just as repressing fundamental desires and emotions will not make those desires and emotions disappear, but only defer their manifestation, repressing and ignoring the specters (*revenants*) will only make them come back. In the case of Marxism, for example, Derrida (1993/1994) observes that “no disavowal has managed to rid itself of all of Marx’s ghosts. Hegemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting” (p. 46). No disavowal of colonialism, sexism, racism, class-contempt, homophobia, and other axes of oppression that have silenced voices, scarred bodies, proscribed subjectivities, and suppressed spirits, will manage to rid itself of the specters that remain.

Ghosts typically require a medium in order to appear. This medium serves as a threshold between absence and presence, a threshold on which the ghost can linger. The medium can be a person but can also be an object, such as the well-known ouija board. In education, the role of the teacher as medium is important, but in what follows I will concentrate on the educational equivalent of the ouija board: the curriculum. The challenge is to create curricula that provide openings for the ghosts to emerge rather than block all access to the spectral world. The typical response to even the first faint appearance of a ghost may be, “Quick, do whatever is needed to keep the cadaver localized, in a safe place, decomposing right where it was inhumed. ... Quick, a vault to which one keeps the keys!” (Derrida, 1993/1994, p. 120). Or, to use Anne Michael’s (1996) words, to “bury [them] and mark the place with stone, with the heaviest, most permanent we can think of” (p. 8), so that the ghosts will fail to return and remind us of our inheritance. But the

revenants always come back. We may not be constituted by original sin, but we certainly are constituted by original inheritance and haunting. We would like nothing more than to keep the ghosts securely locked in their vaults and trapped under their stones. But the spirit animating the ghosts has not expired; it is an absence that will not go away until it is invited in and engaged.

Education as *séance* interrupts the a-historical attitude manifested by many students today, the belief that “that was then, this is now, and can we just get on with things.” What the curriculum can do, for example, is offer a way “to historicize the categories that the present takes to be self-evident realities” (Scott, 2001, p. 285). An awareness of ghosts as traces is necessary for an understanding of the inherited nature of the identity categories – gender, race, class, sexuality, ability – that make possible our social existence. The a-historical notion that we are free to construct our identities the way we want adds insult to the injury suffered by those who occupy identity positions, whose ghosts will not leave them alone.

Conceiving of education as *séance* and curriculum as its medium changes educational practices that have taken shape from a conception of education as the project of producing autonomous and future-oriented individuals. The *séance* introduces a spectral heteronomy, a haunting dependence to which some educational theorists and practitioners, heirs of Levinas and Derrida, have become accustomed, but which will be unsettling for many others. In the duty to extend hospitality to others from the past, to welcome the ghosts, I may be confronted with feelings of inadequacy and frustration. For when is it ever enough? When do I know enough of the past, of the inheritance that I share, of the fragmented and multiple spectral traces in my life, to be able to live ethically in the present? When have I fulfilled the task of inheritance? When have I given the ghosts their due? The answer, predictably, is “never,” but I have to act nevertheless. The feeling of inadequacy and uncertainty, of an indebtedness that can never be fully settled, is the best antidote to the hubris of those who believe that the present owes nothing, and that stones and vaults can keep ghosts at bay.

Education conducted as *séance* broadens memories. It frees students from the confinement of their individual memories and introduces them to the collective memories that they unwittingly share. It makes them remember more, makes them remember persons, objects, and events which they have not personally experienced, but which they have inherited through the land they walk on, the language they speak, the objects they use. In elementary and secondary education, this may mean,

as I have argued elsewhere, that language is not taught merely as transparent medium for effective communication, but as carrying a past of meanings and uses that trouble its apparent clarity and that produce meaning beyond the intentions of any author. Students need to know *both* that “hysterical” is used to mean emotionally out of control, and extremely funny, *and* that it carries a sexist history. They need to know *both* that “denigrating” is used to mean putting down and speaking ill of, *and* that it carries a racist history. And they need to know that these examples are not exceptions, but that in language the ideas and beliefs of the past have become sedimented, flaws and inconsistencies included, and that all language is haunted (Ruitenbergh, 2004, p. 348).

Students today, if they are lucky and live in certain parts of the world, do not experience colonialist oppression and religious strife and intolerance first-hand. But the ghosts of Hugo Grotius and of many other unnamed persons and events are there to remind us that our lives are inseparable from the lives of others, living in other places and at other times, who are not so lucky. The curriculum should treat these spectral reminders not as things *in* the past but as traces *from* the past *in* the present. Inviting and giving place to specters is the curricular ethics of education as séance.

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