



Academic Event Report

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Event: Haunted Futures Conference 2025: “Haunted Technologies”

Venue: University College of Cork

Dates: 12th to 14th of November 2025

The Haunted Futures conference was held at the Department of Film and Screen Media, University College Cork, from 12–14 November 2025. Organised by Dr Ellen Scally and Dr Rachel Gough (University College Cork), the event returned for its third year to continue its exploration of haunting as a powerful site for radical social transformation. This three-day hybrid conference was organised into ten different panels, typically comprising three or four papers, and included creative showcases, film screenings and experimental exercises. A third of this year’s delegates were facilitated in remote presentation of their research. Drawing on Jacques Derrida’s theory of hauntology in *Spectres of Marx* (1993), this conference invited delegates to consider the ways in which hauntings disrupt hegemonic relationships with time. Hauntings are interpreted as imaginative pathways for alternative futures within the capitalocene, that can serve to amplify the voices of marginalised and exploited identities—both human and more-than-human. Alongside their core conceptual focus of haunting as a radical staging ground for social change, this year the organisers invited papers that specifically considered the theme “Haunted Technologies”. This thematic focus encouraged reflection on the ethical, ecological, political and aesthetic dimensions of technologies both contemporary and defunct.

Day One

The first panel of the day had four speakers and was chaired by Dr Rachel Gough. The presentations in this panel foregrounded the persistence of the past in shaping contemporary imaginaries, emphasising reflection on environmental, cultural and technological residues. Damien O’Connell’s (Technological University of the Shannon) ‘Living Ruins: Haunted

Technologies of Labour and Leisure at Óstán Rinn Rua’ examined haunted technologies of labour and leisure at the now defunct hotel, Óstán Rinn Rua. Maz Jardon (University of Amsterdam) traced atmospheric pollution and eco-histories of collapse and disaster in Centralia, Pennsylvania. Beth Doyle (University College Dublin) explored melancholy and feminist agency in the poetry of Blanaid Salkeld. Nina Milonet (University of Lille) interrogated fossil fuel ghosts in the work of James Joyce.

The second panel had three speakers and was chaired by Alfie Howard (University of Leeds). This panel considered sensory and digital hauntings. Marta Snoch’s (Jagiellonian University Poland) work on scented hauntologies highlighted nostalgia and olfactory memory in online fragrance communities. Aditi Joshi (Jamia Millia Islamia) explored asexual futurities in Sayaka Murata’s work but focused in particular on Murata’s novel *Earthlings*. Professor Russell Williams (The American University of Paris) examined immersive fandom in contemporary investigation narratives, presenting an engaging analysis of the series *Hellier*.

The third panel, with three speakers, was chaired by Kane Geary O’Keeffe (University College Cork). This panel focused on gendered hauntings. Eleanor Thorpe’s (University for the Creative Arts) paper ‘Supernatural Technologies of the Possessed Slasher: Aiding Transition and Reproduction in *Chucky* and *Ash vs Evil Dead*’, analysed how the films *Chucky* and *Ash vs Evil Dead* mobilise spectral embodiment to negotiate gender transition and reproduction. Victoria Santamaría Ibor (University of Zaragoza) explored the haunting of the digital double in the film *Cam* (2022), tracing how sex work, viscerality and excess, unsettle boundaries between flesh and image. Joining online, Sam Dubois (Birmingham City University) discussed transgender embodiment in Steven Soderbergh’s *Presence* (2025), foregrounding the film’s innovative use of visual technologies to trouble the stability of corporeal presence.

The fourth panel of the day was chaired by Dr Rachel Gough and expanded the focus to cinematic archives, civilisational afterlives and spectral industries. The first of the three speakers, Claudia Ferrando Paulo (Universitat Jaume I), presented remotely and explored cinema as a spectral archive, considering how *Cerrar los Ojos* (2023) reconstructs memory and the soul through reanimation, the moving image as a kind of séance. Hanke Kelber (University College Cork) examined the lingering remains of past

civilisations in Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), tracing how ruins and defunct technologies prompt difficult questions about the stability of memory, language and human culture. Closing the panel and presenting remotely, Dr Marie Pierre Burquier (Université Paris Cité) mapped the spectres of contemporary Hollywood, analysing how found-footage films conjure a haunted industry through unstable images, residual media and industrial anxieties.

The final panel involved a creative practice showcase, where Alfie Howard introduced his short story *How the Earth Language Was Made*.

Day One of Haunted Futures 2025 concluded with a ghost tour of Cork City which gave delegates the opportunity to learn about the city's history, in particular its social and commercial history. The event was engaging, fun and informative with some sufficiently spooky moments thrown in for good measure.

Day Two

The second day began with a four-speaker panel exploring hauntings across media, memory and sociopolitical landscapes. This panel was chaired by Dr Max Bledstein (University College Dublin). Angela Byrne (University College Cork) examined YouTube's 'ghost hunters', reflecting on folklore and ethical engagement with Irish asylums. Alfie Howard, reflecting on his own writing, considered speculative folklore as creative practice, imagining haunted landscapes and languages. Joining online, David Ketelby (Independent researcher) revisited the British children's TV series *The Changes* (1975). Dr Lennart Soberon (Independent researcher) traced Brexit-era anxieties in Irish border cinema, exploring the spectral presence of unseen social and political forces.

There were three speakers in panel six, which was chaired by Eleanor May Thorpe. This panel considered the intersection of the architectural and the digital in hauntings. Siobhán Scarlett O'Reilly (University of Brighton) presented a reflective visual diary on liminal photo elicitation interviews. These were conducted during her doctoral research into liminal spaces and backrooms culture. Kane Geary O'Keefe explored haunted architecture in *My House Walk-Through* (2016), his research the mediation of personal and spectral space and collective trauma. Dr Thomas Conner (University of Tulsa), who presented remotely, considered holographic haunting at the

Greenwood Rising museum, investigating how the past interpolates the visitor and implicates the future. Following this was a screening of Dr Lennart Soberon's *Dragon's Teeth* (2024), which won Best Documentary Short at the 2025 Galway Film Fleadh. The film is a hauntological examination of Bessbrook Garrison, Co. Armagh, formerly a significant military zone and a centre for sensitive operations until the British Army's withdrawal in June 2007.

The penultimate panel of day two saw four speakers present their research and was chaired by Kane Geary O' Keeffe. Dr John Kavanagh (Ulster University) analysed masculine entitlement, AI technologies and their intersection with the manosphere. Joining remotely, Federica Palazzi (University of Macerata) presented a study of how female literary ghosts inform the design of a haunted digital game-based environment, which she will design as part of her doctoral research. Paula García-Rodríguez (University of Málaga) presented remotely on gendered haunting in Tracy Fahey's *They Shut Me Up* (2023), and Violet Burns's (Independent researcher) paper, also delivered remotely, considered the exploitation and commodification of the dead female body in Western cultural discourse.

The final panel of day two comprised three papers and was chaired by Dr Ellen Scally. Dr Max Bledstein considered the use of acousmetre and the Ken Burns Effect to examine temporality in the Australian horror film *Lake Mungo* (2008). Presenting online, Dr Weija Zeng (Peking University) explored the spectral logic of the image in contemporary cinema, focusing on doppelgängers, hauntology, and affect. Dr Karen Smith (Independent researcher) closed the session with a paper which examined the role of select Stanley Kubrick films in the shuttering of the Scala Cinema in London. Smith's paper was complimented by the addition of select archive materials which were passed around to delegates during the presentation.

A creative practice showcase featuring Elizabeth Carlisle (BIMM University) closed the second day of the conference. Carlisle presented on her zine *Lycanthropozine of Speculative Wolf Spectres* and discussed zine-making as a practice for articulating the Anthropocene and exploring speculative hauntings through form and process.

Day Three

The opening panel of day three comprised two papers and was chaired by Dr Rachel Gough and focused on the intersections of technology, extractivism, as well as postcolonial and neoliberal hauntings. Dr Jac Lewis (Independent researcher) presented remotely his paper, 'Fashwave to AI: Hauntology and Hegemony of the Late Capitalist Far-Right', which traced how aesthetic and technological forms participate in contemporary political hauntings. Following on from this, Alaz Okudan (University of Galway) examined the spectral logics through which emergent AI technologies reinforce extractivist, exploitative systems while offering some conceptual alternatives.

The final panel was comprised of four remote presentations and was chaired by Dr Ellen Scally. This panel focused on examples of environmental and extractive hauntings. Dr Ana Clara Alves (University of Freiburg) presented a history of the mining industry in Minas Gerais, Brazil, exploring how promises of development leave enduring afterlives of predation and dispossession. Rhys Handley (Royal Holloway University of London) analysed cinematic acts of resurrection in Clio Barnard's *The Arbor* (2010), considering how extraction and necromancy intertwine in representations of social and ecological memory. The day concluded with explorations of the postcolonial and televisual gothic. Aqsa Eram (University of Lucknow) discussed the postcolonial gothic in Vikram Chandra's "*Dharma*" (1994), interrogating how gothic forms articulate legacies of colonial violence. Brontë Shiltz (Manchester Metropolitan University) examined neoliberalism and the televisual gothic in *Ghostwatch* (1992) revealing the ways media hauntings reflect and critique the anxieties of late capitalist television culture.

Conclusions

Participants departed with new perspectives, collaborative possibilities, and renewed commitment to research and practice attentive to the ethical and transformative potential of the spectral. The third annual Haunted Futures Conference offered a dynamic and inclusive forum for exploring the complex interplay of the spectral, the social and the technological. Through its combination of academic panels, creative practice and experiential engagement, delegates noted that the event exemplified the potential of

hauntology as a site for critical reflection and creative engagement. Participants departed with new perspectives, collaborative possibilities, and renewed commitment to research and practice attentive to the ethical and transformative potential of the spectral. Haunted Futures continues to be an engaging and vibrant conference predominantly catered towards postgraduate and early career researchers. Haunted Futures will return in 2026 with funding generously provided by University College Cork's Collective Social Futures Fund.

DR RACHEL GOUGH is a writer, lecturer, and researcher based at University College Cork. She engages in interdisciplinary research on climate and sustainability—at the Sustainability Institute—and lectures on film theory, video game theory, screenwriting and national cinema in the Department of Film and Screen Media. She is the Public Relations Officer for Women in Research Ireland. She is a member of the *Estudios Irlandeses* editorial board and the co-founder of Haunted Futures. Her creative work includes poetry published in *Quarryman* and *One Good Day* as well as short fiction broadcast on BBC Radio 4 and published in *The Waxed Lemon*, *Outpost*, *Bealtaine*, *The National Flash Fiction Anthology*, and *Best Small Fictions*. In 2025, she was awarded first place in the flash fiction category at the Write by the Sea Literary Festival. Dr Gough was awarded the Lord Puttnam Scholarship in 2023. In 2024 she was an awardee of the CACSSS Creative Connections Fund.

DR ELLEN SCALLY recently graduated with a PhD from the Department of Film & Screen Media at University College Cork. She is a former graduate of the MA in Film and Screen Media at UCC. Her PhD project concerns the history of amateur film and cine-culture in Ireland, and research interests include Irish cinema history, amateur film practice, community cinema culture, and the audio-visual archive. Her research was awarded an Irish Research Council Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholar, and from April-June 2025 she was a fellow at the Centre for Advanced Internet Studies in Bochum, Germany. She is a co-convener of the annual Haunted Futures conference at University College Cork.