Supernatural cities: placing urban identities, memory and cultural crises.

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Supernatural Cities: Placing Urban Identities, Memory, and Cultural Crises

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Introduction

‘A quiet city is a contradiction in terms. It is a thing uncanny, spectral.’

– Max Beerbohm

The city has traditionally been associated with dense, urban, and populated spaces sitting in contrast to their rural counterparts (Redfield 1953). They possess qualities and characteristics, shaped by their demographics, physical environment, technological and socio-cultural influences, that set them apart from country-dwellings (Marcotullio and Solecki 2013). Others have argued that it is the ‘measures of interaction’ that define cities and contribute to their identity as a ‘functional metropolitan community’ (Frey and Zimmer, 2001: 30). While the definition of cities is contested, particularly as global and technological forces shape how cities evolve, are seen and lived in (Marcotullio and Solecki 2013), there has been a historical resistance to accept urban centres as ‘supernatural places’. This traditional rejection of supernatural possibilities is a likely consequence of the assertion that modernity witnessed a decline in magical thinking. Max Weber, a twentieth century sociologist, argued for the

disenchantment of modernity caused by an alleged shift towards more rational institutions, processes, and modes of thought (Bell 2012). Constructed as its polarity, the countryside and hinterlands to cities have long been perceived as harbouring a mysterious, otherworldly, or eerie character (Inglis and Holmes 2003; Ironside and Reid 2024). However, Karl Bell (2019) considers how the supernatural is deeply entangled in issues of modernity and 'the model, rational, enlightened city coexists with its dark, unexplainable counterpart' (Garcia 2021: 24; Bell 2019). Despite Weber's thesis, cities have and continue to be uncanny spaces: the unexplained and otherworldly felt when wandering through its darkened streets, watching us through the windows of its buildings, and are one of many, obscured in the crowds.

This special issue builds upon a body of scholarship already developed from the Supernatural Cities project led by Karl Bell at the University of Portsmouth and his edited collection of essays, Supernatural Cities: Enchantment, Anxiety and Spectrality, published in 2019. The articles and creative pieces in this issue present and examine a series of case studies of material and fictional cities, exploring the symbiotic relationship between the supernatural and the city. The aim of the issue is threefold: first, to identify how the supernatural becomes entangled in a city's identity, its storytelling, and its materiality; second, to showcase examples of how a city is consumed, toured and/or performed as a supernatural space; third, to explore how and why supernatural cities are constructed in response to social and cultural trauma. The issue's interdisciplinary and global perspectives demand a flexible definition of the supernatural. Émile Durkheim's definition is simple yet effective: the supernatural refers to 'all sorts of things which surpass the limits of our knowledge; the supernatural is the world of the mysterious, of the unknowable, of the un-understandable' (qtd in Waskul and Eaton 2018: 7). This definition can embody all manifestations of the supernatural, be they popular figures such as ghosts, vampires, and witches, to more subtle forms that arise in those moments of the un-understandable. The breadth of this special issue, in both its geography and supernatural subject, provides a survey of varying and intersecting methodologies to researching supernatural cities.

The Supernatural and the City

In cities, the supernatural may exist as creatures or figures in urban folklore, in cultural production such as books, games, and film, or manifest in the subtle, spatial, and emotional feeling(s) towards an environment (Pile 2005). The diverse ways in which the supernatural

populates and thrives in urban centres across the globe derives from the underpinning subjectivity of material cities. As James Donald suggests, 'the everyday reality of the city is always a space already constituted and structured by symbolic mechanisms' (1999: 8). In the city, the material and immaterial collide and often collapse. Cities are what Edward Soja terms "Thirdspace", a theoretical paradigm that acknowledges the collapse between the material city and its representation(s) in mental and/or cognitive forms (Soja 1996). It is a space of the 'real and imagined' (Soja 1996: 56). Supernatural cities fall into this spatial designation as compilations of urban imaginaries that are projected onto, and practised in, material environments (Edwards-Boon 2023). For Jeannie Thomas Banks, supernatural places are these everyday, third spaces 'that lean heavily towards the weird' (2015: 20). Cultural production, no matter the medium, serves as the cartographer; it outlines the topographies, borders and boundaries of these cities. With this subjective map, supernatural cities can materialise as imaginative spaces or can become palpable in the material world.

The supernatural's deeply rooted presence in popular urban imaginaries is partly indebted to the rise of the literary Gothic in the eighteenth century which codified the supernatural, thus transforming 'folkloric "realities"' to the literary imagination (Bell 2012: 5). However, eighteen-century Gothic fiction often perpetuated a distinction between modern, rational spaces and those distant landscapes saturated with superstition and irrational regimes. The Victorian Gothic revival of the 1840s entrenched the supernatural to the urban environment (Warwick 2007). The transition from crumbling castles to gaslit streets did not simply transplant earlier plots into a new place but revised and reshaped Gothic narratives to suit its new location. Urban Gothic, Robert Mighall articulates, is 'not just Gothic in the city, it is a Gothic *of* the city. Its terrors derive from situations peculiar to, and firmly located within, the urban experience' (2003: 30). In the Euro-American tradition, the literary supernatural has historically been a response to the often-insidious afflictions and ills of modernity. Industrialization and urbanization were central drivers in the Gothicization of cities, places transformed by monstrous economic exploitation, industry, and isolation (Wasson 2020). Yet, if as Mighall notes, the Gothic is '*of* the city', each supernatural city is informed by its peculiar urban experience (30). This stance aligns with Robert Luckhurst's insistence that a generalized approach renders critics blind to its generative loci. In other words, the ghosts of California would be different to ones elsewhere in the world (Luckhurst 2002). Even in the wake of globalisation and multidirectional, transnational exchange, it is crucial to recognise that the supernatural commonly associated with the literary Gothic have their own counterparts already

existing in other cultures, informed by their particular histories and belief systems (Byron 2013). As such, research on supernatural cities invites Glennis Byron's 'globalgothic' lens. Doing so decentres the Western framework that can often guide how we decode the supernatural in place. Like a traveller to any new city, readers must be open to being immersed in cultural difference and embrace multiple ways of thinking and seeing the supernatural world.

As many of the articles in this issue explore, the temporal layering of cities as places of habitation, labour and leisure over time creates fertile ground for the supernatural to exist. The compression and layering of history in urban spaces creates what scholars have referred to as 'spectro-geographies' (Pile 2005; Maddern and Adey 2008) in which an absent-presence is observed. In spectral geographies, memories, materials, and landscapes may haunt certain places (McCormack 2010), and be particularly pertinent in those sites of difficult or dissonant heritage (Hanks 2016; Weston et al. 2019). The landscape as haunted palimpsest is often described as 'the spirit of place'. For Ruth Heholt:

Places are always marked by what has gone before, by the people who populated and shaped the environment in many different ways, by the weather of millennia, by the habitations and actions of the non-human. Layers of memory and action are embedded in the landscape alongside of layering of the earth's history in stone. (2016: 2)

Cities, as physical imprints on the landscape, are too part of this ongoing palimpsest, and provide their own layers, both material and immaterial to place. Cities are equally prone to haunting and supernatural occupation, sometimes even more so because they are manufactured places, directly forged and moulded by a particular culture's actions and memories. As Avery Gordon notes, haunting alters our 'experience in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future' (2008: xvi). It is a reminder of what remains alive and present, that which we can no longer pretend or assume is contained, repressed or obscured from view (Gordon 2008). Ghosts are not the only supernatural entities used to signify and communicate the tensions and energies embedded in time and space. The supernatural collective that occupies these urban spaces, in its diverse forms, bodies and origins, enable us to see beyond the surface. A supernatural presence indicates a rupture, a collapse, a disruption, a forced change of perspective (an experience captured in Gustavo Garcia Vaca's short story and Dutta's examination of Calcutta between the urban and sub-urban). It marks where the layers of the palimpsest no longer remain compressed and distinctive, but ooze and mix at surface level and below. It forces us to remember that which has been hidden by time, intentionally or otherwise,

or our desires and fears about what has yet to come. However, the supernatural can also speak to and alter how we create new layers by influencing our actions and how we remember. In sum, the supernatural as an imaginative form of cultural expression provides us with a revised awareness of place and offers new vantage points to understand and reconcile our realities of the past, present, and possible futures.

Experiencing and Consuming the Supernatural City

As many of the contributions in this issue explore and affirm, the supernatural may change, or be changed by, the urban environment. This symbiotic relationship manifests in the physical layout of spaces (as James Thurgill explores in Tokyo) as well as the social and cultural experience of cities (as Alison Habens, Linda Kopitz, Hannah Stewart and Philip Stone, and Dempsey address). As such, the supernatural informs placemaking both in terms of the top-down development and promotion of cities and the bottom-up, organic emergence of a city's identity (Lew 2017). Placemaking is defined by Alan Lew as 'how a culture group imprints its values, perceptions, memories, and traditions on a landscape and gives meaning to geographic space' (2017: 449). For some places this meaning may be embedded in a supernatural sensibility, seen in the cultural traditions (such as the practices informed by the Lunar and Solar calendars in Hong Kong, discussed in this issue by Amy Lee) and stories and legends that evolve from interaction between people, place and uncanny possibilities (see Debarun Sarkar's paper). Certainly, these interactions can be deployed by both top-down and bottom-up methods of placemaking. Often, supernatural cities are forged through deliberate curations of the placemaking project as expressed in Michael Bielawa's guide to ghost walks. The boundaries and borders are carved out through the repeated footsteps of visitors, locally and from afar, through scripted itineraries. The supernatural potential of places has been capitalised upon for the diversification and marketing of destinations (Davies 2007; Houran et al. 2020). The multifaceted social function of the supernatural enables a robust and intersecting range of tourism itineraries to memorialise, establish and secure certain identities of place. Transylvania (Light 2007), Salem (Gencarella 2007) and Roswell (Meehan 2008) all offer case study examples of how the supernatural has informed the (re)branding of destinations to attract tourists seeking an encounter with the extraordinary.

Using the supernatural for strategic development can present significant opportunities driving economic development, especially in the tourism, events, and hospitality industries

(Houran et al. 2020). For cities like Roswell, interest in the UFO incident of 1947 led to a re-development of the city's identity and experiential offering – including the establishment of the UFO festival in 1997 which attracted 47,000 visitors and still attracts considerable tourism to this day (Meehan 2008; see www.ufofestival.com). Furthermore, as Glen Gentry and Derek Alderman explore in their study of ghost walks, the stories and legends presented during tours provide an opportunity for cities to enliven everyday spaces (that may otherwise go unnoticed) (2015). The supernatural does not necessarily require the investment and infrastructure that other economic development demands, and as such, presents a unique (and cost effective) opportunity for cities to diversify into tourism (Davies 2007; Houran et al. 2020). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the title of 'Most Haunted' city has become an annual competitive accolade for certain destinations (Ironside 2018).

Beyond economic benefit, studies have also recognised the role of supernatural storytelling—in particular, ghost stories—in the presentation and negotiation of (sometimes difficult) history in an engaging way (Hanks 2011; Ironside 2018). Ghost stories are predominantly situated around the dark heritage of a place (Holloway 2010; Ironside 2023; Miles 2015), and as such provide an opportunity to glance at the 'dirty laundry of a city's history' (Gentry and Alderman 2015: 54). However, it is important to remain critical of difficult histories represented and marketed for mass consumption. Memory and history are complex, interconnected socio-cultural networks, compiled of multiple narrative strands, fragments, perspectives and absences. While several papers in this issue explore supernatural placemaking in cities in terms of its heritage value and public engagement with a particular past, they also expose potential challenges. The reimagining of locations through supernatural placemaking has the potential to fragment and alter historic and personal narratives leading to inauthentic representations and the framing of urban (or rural) environments which are at odds with the local communities' sense of place (Goldstein, Grider and Thomas 2007; Light 2007; Virloget 2023). As Duncan Light explores in relation to Translyvannia, these contested narratives can lead to a conflict between identity versus economy (2007).

This special issue provides varied methodologies to probe the relationship between supernatural cities and the heritage and tourism industries. Supernatural tourism, such as ghost walks, is often approached through two key critical paradigms: dark tourism—alternatively defined as thanatourism—or Gothic tourism. In dark tourism, the explorations of 'death, suffering and the seemingly macabre' form part of the leisure experience (Stone 2006: 146). However, as Gavin Weston et al. (2019) and Rachael Ironside (2023) argue, ghost tourism

offers a different experience to traditional dark tourism. The focus on entertainment in ghost walks and the 'nip and bite' of playfulness through which ghost stories are performed reduces the seriousness and tension of the darker histories being explored (Thompson 2010: 82). Alternatively, as supernatural tourism is often inspired by the supernatural imagination scripted popular culture, it can fall under the category of Gothic tourism. For Emma McEvoy, it is the act of visiting a site presented through the Gothic mode, for the purposes of leisure, and/or 'tourism that is intimately connected with Gothic narrative, its associated tropes, discourses and conventions' (2016: 3, 5). Whereas Duncan Light et al. suggests Gothic tourism is a niche subvariant of both literary tourism and dark tourism (2020), to do so could oversimplify and undermine the breadth of Gothic tourism. Rather than a subvariant, it is, as the Gothic mode has been historically, a hybrid form. Catherine Spooner upholds this stance, arguing 'dark' does not always adequately summarise the multivalences of the Gothic 'because it does not engage with the literary [and other popular culture] models which script tourist encounters' with a particular place (2017: 166). McEvoy directly addresses the distinction in her foundational work, suggesting that although they can encompass some of Philip Stone's examples, Gothic tourism extends beyond 'Dark Fun Factories'. She emphasises that its content cannot be contained within a spectrum exclusively concerned with death and disaster (McEvoy 2016). So, while it may overlap with other tourism forms and practices, has a particularized range of influences on individual and collective relationships and experiences of place. Gothic tourism also has a complicated but intriguing relationship to heritage and placemaking, as it readily encourages the collapse between material realities and imaginative possibilities. In other words, it is rooted in fictionalization, and its affect can differ from other forms of tourism (McEvoy 2020).

Supernatural cities can be immersive, affective and embodied. Ghostly narratives are grounded in spectral possibilities where the potential for encountering the extraordinary is encouraged (Carruthers and Krisjanous 2014). They are not simply a cognitive association between the monstrous and a particular place but something that can be *felt* or directly experienced. For example, ghosts present an opportunity for visitors to learn about and contemplate the history of a place while also engaging in the enchanting possibility that they may encounter the spectral for themselves (Hanks 2011). Haunted places have been closely connected to enchanted spaces which, as Julian Holloway observes, facilitate affective and embodied experience (2006). The material and immaterial environment of haunted spaces—the history, landscape, folklore, lighting, smell, sounds—can engender 'situational-

enchantment' (Drinkwater et al. 2022: 204; Houran et al. 2022: 216) as well as a range of other psychological and spiritual experiences (Houran et al. 2022; Ironside 2023). Enchanted sites, the active embodiment of thirdspace, is a direct experience of the collapse and the endless renegotiations of the material and the immaterial, the imaginative and the real.

Although studies to date have primarily considered supernatural experience within particular haunted sites (such as buildings), there is fruitful potential to expand the scope to urban space as a whole; the temporal and spatial attributes of cities lend themselves to the experiential possibilities of the supernatural in its multitude of forms. For instance, several studies observe feelings of enchantment during urban ghost walks (Aracil 2023; Holloway 2010; Ironside 2018). In response to this area of scholarly research, this issue exemplifies how the material and immaterial environment of the city imbues urban space with magical, weird, eerie, strange, or uncanny potential. Dublin is experienced as 'authentically supernatural' because of its physical and cultural ties to the Gothic. As Aoife Dempsey reflects it is the 'cathedrals, castles, towers, narrow alleyways' alongside ties to a literary and haunted heritage that render Dublin a supernatural place. James Thurgill also considers the interspatiality of Tokyo experienced through its affective social, historical, and spiritual layers, arguing that the supernatural is woven into the very fabric of the city. Further, Debarun Sarkar documents, in New Town, West Bengal, how the supernatural ruptures the everyday lived experience of the city as the eerie and the weird emerge in people's interaction with the material and immaterial environment.

Contemplation, Crisis and Hypermodernity in the Supernatural City

However, as Michele Hanks explores, ghosts may not only engage people with the past but 'like many forms of heritage, reveal more about the social world that produces them' (2016: 16). That is because, as Jeffrey Jermone Cohen argues, monsters are pure culture (1996). Cities are heterotopic spaces where the 'hustle and bustle' of urban living generates a constant flow of interaction between people and space, past and present, and in which, multiple fragmented meanings emerge. As Carruthers and Krisjanous observe, these heterotopic spaces are primed for engagement with the supernatural, however, they also present opportunities to use the supernatural as a lens to consider contemporary issues (2014). As Karl Bell states, '[the] supernatural imaginary […] articulates real-world urban social and political issues' (Bell 2019: 2). Like Alison Habens articulates in her discussion on the 'Portsmyth' digital app, engagement

with supernatural storytelling, layered upon the geographical, historical and temporal dimensions of Portsmouth presents opportunities for contemplation on wider social and environmental concerns. Likewise, Sarah Edwards and Natalie Wall explore the supernatural city as a lens in literary fiction to consider wider socio-political debates. Supernatural cities often emerge as critique of places fraught with deep-seated trauma, violence and injustice that continues to impact everyday life. Each interrogating supernatural cities in different geographical locations—Mexico, Iraq, the United States— Koby Hansen, Diganta Roy and Jay Arns provide compelling analyses on the role of the supernatural to articulate and express the often unspeakable and ongoing violence impacting communities in the present. In her paper, Linda Kopitz also reflects on the portrayal of female vulnerability and violence in the 2018 Turkish Vampire television series, *Yaşamayanlar*, and what this means for the image of Istanbul as an urban space. As such, the supernatural may present opportunities to engage communities in wider social, political and environmental concerns (Hunter and Ironside 2023), and in the context of cities, contemplate these in relation to the urban environment.

As several of the papers in this issue explore, the supernatural is not bound by historical narratives. Rather, it may manifest in the changing landscape of cities, physically and socially. While industrialization and urbanization may have driven the early gothicization of cities (Wasson 2020), evolving technology has perpetuated an 'urban technogothic' (as Wall discusses). As such, how people experience and imagine cities has changed. New media technologies such as video games offer players the chance to embody interactive and immersive cityscapes. In Andrea Andiloro's paper, the virtual environment of the *Grand Theft Auto* video game immerses players in a hypermodern form of legend-tripping in the fictional city of San Andreas. Jeannie Banks Thomas considers hypermodern folklore to be inherently linked to technological developments in which folk, popular, consumer and digital cultures collide (2015). For fictional cities like San Andreas, 'myth-hunting' presents opportunities for continued engagement and exploration of the virtual landscape in search of 'possible' (albeit not guaranteed) supernatural encounters – a 'hook' capitalised on by creators, *Rockstar*. Akin to their material counterparts, virtual supernatural cities are crucial to memory and place identity. As Haley Laurila explores in their article on the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* game set in the Zone, in Chornobyl, these landscapes serve as what Alison Landsberg terms 'prosthetic memory'—memories that are not produced by lived experience, but are mass produced and codified by culture (Landsberg 2004). Prosthetic memories can be crucial tools to create strong emotional connections to the past, which can inspire real political change. Emerging technology has also

engendered opportunities for real cities; digital apps (such as Portsmyth, discussed by Habens) offer new ways to present and tell supernatural stories (Ironside and Massie 2020), or may even facilitate supernatural experiences (Tucker 2017). Alternatively, digital platforms such as YouTube, provide the opportunity for virtual tourism of real, material places through a supernatural lens (Edwards-Boon 2023)

While technology offers transformative potential, the rapid development and commercialisation of new technologies may also instigate an inherent anxiety as the material and immaterial collapse in the increasingly interwoven spaces of physical-digital cities. In Natalie Wall's paper, the comparison between Amazon Smart Cities and Jeff VanderMeer's novels address these concerns, arguing that the fictional depiction of corporate colonisation and extreme developments in technology read in VandarMeer's novels share similarities with Smart City propositions. As Wall considers, progress towards Big Data, AI and surveillance culture, and the augmentation of human and technology, implies an unknowable, potentially dangerous, future in which cities themselves become 'intelligent', even 'sentient' (Coley 2021). At the extreme end, Marc DiMauro's examination of the fictional San Junipero, portrays a city that exists in its own body of consciousness, a place in which technology enables the dead to co-exist and commune with the living in a simulated reality. San Junipero is presented as utopian in vision and yet the existence of a technological afterlife raises considerable ethical and moral debate (Ironside and Leith 2024; Savin-Baden 2019). It is in this technological uncertainty and what it means for the human condition that supernatural cities emerge.

Charting Supernatural Cities: Our Case Study Urban Centres

The articles and creative works in this Special Issue contribute to and expand our understanding of supernatural cities and the issues examined in the introduction. Each focused on a specific urban centre, when arranged together their geographical scope charts for us a map of real and imagined supernatural cities. While, certainly, this Special Issue offers important scholarly contributions, it evokes a form of 'armchair travel'. Through the various meditations and interrogations, readers can imaginatively embark on our urban supernatural itinerary and tour the select supernatural cities around the world.

Some of the articles in this Special Issue explore real cities and their supernatural qualities directly. Aoife Mary Dempsey investigates the evolution of the Bram Stoker Festival in the city of Dublin, Ireland. Through examination of the festivals' evolution,

Dempsey demonstrates how Dublin has been reimagined as a haunted city for promotional and tourist purposes. Hannah Stewart and Philip Stone also explore a city-wide event through the lens of Haunted Happenings in Salem, Massachusetts, USA. Drawing on key conceptual issues including collective memory, semiotics, social identity and Foucalt's 'heteroropology' they argue that Salem is a city where material realities and (re)imagined supernatural spaces collide to co-create a dark tourism place. In Portsmouth, UK, Alison Habens explores the critical and creative process behind *Portsmyth*, a supernatural story telling an alternative version of the coastal UK city. The article considers postmodern theories of space and place, positing a third space where the novel narrative is produced, reflecting on the possible benefits of in-situ digital engagement with a supernatural city. Travelling to New Town, West Bengal in India, Debarun Sarkar ruminates on the relationship between the immaterial and material, arguing that the supernatural can be traced in the imaginations, articulations and relationalities of city and not just in its traditional ghosts. James Thurgill adopts a literary geographical approach to further explore the interspatial relationship of supernatural cities in Tokyo, Japan. Thurgill (per)forms an analytic 'legend-trip' of the Japanese metropolis, exposing the ways in which place, narrative, and folklore amalgamate to produce a city with supernatural qualities. Amy Lee, in her creative non-fiction piece, narrates the duality of Hong Kong in Lunar and Solar calendars, where the supernatural is embedded in the city's story. Michael Bielawa in his guide to ghost walks, offers insights into cities are transformed into supernatural spaces through tourism itineraries and storytelling techniques.

Cities in Mexico, Iraq, the United States, Turkey, Ukraine, and India are explored through the lens of fiction. Koby Hansen draws on Augusto Mora's graphic novel, *Los fantasmas de mi ciudad (The Ghosts of My City)*, to consider how the unseen victims of violence in contemporary Mexico are recognised, and their narratives reclaimed, through the graphic novels (re)interpretation. Hansen explores how haunting functions in the reconciliation of past and present trauma and violence in Mexico City. Jay S. Arns explores haunting and generational trauma sutured to the Cabrini-Green housing project in Chicago, USA, in Nia DaCosta's *Candyman* (2021). Drawing on Séan Travers' concept of 'polynarration', Arns exposes the importance the importance of space and place to the Candyman legend and accompanying violence. The paper focuses on the trope of inversion in DaCosta's film to (re)examine the role of Candyman within the Black community. The power granted by supernatural storytelling connects across other papers in this issue. Through a close reading of the novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Diganta Roy also contemplates how the

supernatural interacts with the memory of Baghdad and blends into the cultural and political history of the city in the period after the US invasion of Iraq. Roy argues that the supernatural is not merely a product of fantasy but an alternative method of recreating the history of a city riddled with the politics of violence. In Istanbul, Turkey, Linda Kopitz examines the first-ever Turkish vampire series *Yaşamayanlar [Immortals]* (2018), to argue that Istanbul is re-imagined as a supernatural city through the entanglement of modernity, connectivity and change, depicted in the television series. Hayley Laurila also explores the reimagining of Pripyat, Ukraine, through a supernatural lens. Drawing on the video game series *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*, Laurila argues that players become virtual tourists of a grim nuclear future which draws upon popular culture narratives of Chornobyl's supernatural mythos. Read through a Gothic lens, Anuja Dutta's article examines nineteenth-century Calcutta (Kolkata), India, through Tagore's '*Monihara*' ['The Lost Jewels', 1898]. Dutta attempts to push the boundaries and borders of the core and peripheries of the urban Gothic and examines the drive to narrate to seek coherence and meaning. The collapse of boundaries is at the core of Gustavo Garcia Vaca's short fiction, *Aldebaran*, where London is transformed into the real-and-imagined.

Finally, for some of the cities in this issue their existence, while often inspired by real cities, are imagined places. Andrea Andiloro examines myth-hunting in the *Grand Theft Auto (GTA)* videogames series drawing upon the fictional city of San Andreas to explore how players are invited to take part in a from hypermodern folklore by searching for hidden supernatural easter eggs in the game. Marc DiMauro analyses the fictional city of San Junipero, featured in the television series, *Black Mirror*. Comparing it to versions of Hades presented by both Aristophanes in The Frogs and Homer's Odyssey, Di Mauro argues that San Junipero is a supernatural, rather than sacred space. Sarah Edwards' critical reading of China Miéville's *The City and the City*, explores how urban fantasy introduces supernatural elements into mundane urban environments. By considering urban fantasy literature as armchair travelling Edwards argues that the reader is invited to explore contemporary real world spatial practices, socio-political discourses and, that this more broadly, contributes to the re-enchantment of a contemporary metropolis. In Natalie Wall's article, Amazon's proposed Smart Cities are compared with Jeff Vandermeer's fictional supernatural cities. Wall explores when and how the city starts to be reconfigured as a supernatural space through aggressive corporate colonisation and technological augmentation.

Conclusions and Reflections: The Supernatural City Now and Beyond

This issue highlights the different ways that the supernatural becomes entangled in a city's identity. Some cities experience what might be considered a process of 'supernaturalization' through the production of events, products and services that capitalise upon historic and emergent folklore and legends. The material and socio-cultural environment of a place—such as Dublin, Salem and Portsmouth discussed here—facilitate the production of authentic experiences in which the supernatural is layered on top of a rich, cultural history. In these examples, the process by which a city becomes supernatural is often top-down with destination marketing organisations and local government agencies investing in the potential for economic growth brought about by their promotion as a supernatural destination. However, supernatural cities do not only emerge through strategic purpose. As many of the articles in this issue consider, the supernatural emerges in modern cities through the imagining, and re-imagining, of urban space. It is not essential for supernatural cities to have traditional ghosts or mysterious traditions to deem them uncanny. Rather, the supernatural may be experienced by the people that live, visit, and imagine urban spaces, in subtle forms, as feelings, disruptions and disturbances, within the material and immaterial environment. As Alex Bevan might suggest, these are fluid spaces. Those who visit these spaces, *in situ* or through their imagination, 'are encouraged to embrace the endless and open experiential possibilities' (2023: 9).

How a city is consumed, toured and/or performed as a supernatural space is a complex and ongoing process. For some cities, consumption is facilitated by the commercialisation of supernatural stories and experiences through the production of walking tours, festivals, and wider activities. Their *in situ* nature invites consumers to see cities in a different way, to 'look behind the veil' and, in some cases, to experience the urban supernatural for themselves. In other cities, the supernatural is not commercially produced, yet is still experienced through the physical and social environment, manifesting in local traditions, the design of urban spaces and community belief systems. In these 'real' cities, the supernatural changes the way people feel, see and sense urban space. To borrow from Nick Sousanis, the supernatural offers a new vantage point to attune to 'different ways of seeing' and thus expands 'our world to reveal unanticipated depths, crinkly spaces awaiting exploration' (2015: 44). However, many of the supernatural cities explored in this special issue are accessed solely through our consumption of popular culture and media. Scholarship to date has established the strong interconnection between the literary Gothic, travel, and the creation of urban imaginaries. This issue builds on

this discourse to other popular culture mediums—film, television, gaming, and internet— to identify how these technologies invite remediated engagement with the supernatural in cities. This special issue is concerned with both in person and armchair practices of supernatural urban space to illuminate the seemingly endless possibilities to (re)imagine and disrupt our understanding of place, identity and history. Certainly, supernatural cities provide a useful tool for creative practice, reflection and critical thinking to explore contemporary and future hopes and anxieties.

Through this issue it becomes clear that despite a city's existence as real or imagined, the supernatural is an exposing form. The hidden narratives of cities, their troubling pasts, and contemporary anxieties, often masked by modernised, gentrified streets are revealed and confronted. The creative potential of supernatural storytelling engenders new, engaging ways of telling these narratives. It also presents opportunities for critical reflection on emerging trends in the political, cultural, and technological landscape. Supernatural cities are, therefore, responsive to change and often emerge because of social and cultural trauma. Their narratives are deeply embedded in the difficult heritage of a place and the social anxieties for the future. Cultures around the globe have been casting their deepest fears 'into the monstrous mould' (Stasiewicz-Bieńkowska and Graham, 2013: ix). This is due to the nature of monsters. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes, our cultural fascination with monsters—or the supernatural more broadly—derives from 'a fixation that is born of the twin desire to name that which is difficult to apprehend and to domesticate (and therefore disempower) that which it threatens' (1996: vii). As we discover in this issue, the supernatural resides in the traumatic spaces of cities and the memories (and imaginations) of their inhabitants. The supernatural lurk in these spaces, providing us a way to confront and mediate our trauma. The supernatural become a stark reminder of the flawed concept of modernity and the impossibilities of its narrative of 'progress'. The supernatural is a methodology to expose previous shadows while simultaneously imagining new monstrous realities in the evolving metropolis.

The heterogenous collection of scholarly, creative and practice-based contributions to this special issue produces a twofold result: first, it is a forceful reminder of interdisciplinarity of research on supernatural cities; second, each contributor becomes an active agent in the creation and sustainability of supernatural urban imaginaries. The authors of the creative works— Garcia Vaca's short story and Lee's creative—framed through the fictional camera lens or the autobiographical 'I', use language to immerse their reader into their respective supernatural cities. Through both anecdote and professional advice, Bielawa offers guidelines

on how to generate and perform a supernatural city, *in situ*. Even the conventional scholarly papers play a crucial role. With the supernatural city at the core of the discussions, readers are left with a knowledge of various supernatural connections around the globe. In essence, articles in this issue offer various forms of storytelling. As an intangible, imagined cityscape, knowledge dissemination is the key to their continued cultural value, practice, and existence. However, while bringing together this special issue has highlighted the considerable scope and breadth of scholarship on supernatural cities, it also exposes noticeable gaps. Specifically, we acknowledge that certain geographical regions are not represented in this collection including many areas within the Global South. As such, a full cross-cultural context is not represented. Additionally, most of the articles represented in this issue approach supernatural cities from a methodological perspective grounded in qualitative research or critical reading. They also primarily adopt a case study approach. There is, therefore, scope for further comparative and quantitative research that may widen our perspective and provide insight into the scale and impact of supernatural cities around the world. It is crucial that work on supernatural cities do not only view supernatural places in isolation but explore how they fit within larger global networks. The supernatural is seemingly ubiquitous, and so we encourage future writers, thinkers, and artists to explore its untapped potential, and locate the spaces they occupy. Supernatural cities are spaces in a continuous process of making, unmaking, and remaking, and thus invite new research, new methodologies, and interpretations.

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