

Book Review: Michael Fiddler, Theo Kindynis, Travis Linnemann, *Ghost Criminology: The Afterlife of Crime and Punishment*. New York: New York University Press. 2022. ISBN: 9781479842438 (Paperback). 368 Pages. \$35.00.

Reviewed by Sean Herp¹

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In *Ghost Criminology: The Afterlife of Crime and Punishment* (2022), edited by Michael Fiddler, Theo Kindynis, and Travis Linnemann, a group of distinguished scholars, including themselves, give new meaning to and apply Jacques Derrida's (1994) theory of "hauntology." With hauntings, comes ghosts. There are ghosts everywhere and in everything, occupying the past, present, and future. In their intro, "A (Spirit) Guide," Fiddler and colleagues (2022) hint at how difficult it is *not* to encounter ghosts at every step, which is more and more evident as the pages of their book get turned. This review is that of a police officer and will stress the importance of not necessarily applying hauntology or ghost criminology to work as an officer, but the advantage of understanding it. After all, Fiddler and colleagues (2022, 1) remind us, "[we] must live with our dead."

As a police officer for nearly six years in a large metropolitan area in Texas, I have hunted, witnessed, captured, and internalized (more on that later) my fair share of ghosts. But what constitutes a ghost? Although Fiddler and colleagues (2022) do not provide a definition, as the study is still in its early phases and rather broad, they do mention one word which is often used synonymously: legacy. Derrida's ghost, or *legacy*, as Gabriel Migheli (2022) refers to often in his work, "Specters of specters of Marx: A ghost that was named Derrida," is an example of this. Orrin

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N. C. Wang (2007), in “Ghost Theory,” explains “legacies are as well oftentimes mixed up with ghosts; so much so that, inevitably, a legacy is also what a ghost leaves.” Ghosts are often what linger, either to remind us of our past or to be rediscovered later. Ghosts are not exclusive to people, either. Places have their own ghosts and haunt society either on a local, national, or global scale. Ghosts are the impact a person, place, or thing has on people.

Some examples may be the 9/11 attacks and all the ghosts, or everlasting affects, they have on people, some more than others. Another example is our past selves. The ghost of who we once were may haunt us, impacting decisions or the way in which we live our lives. The saying “history repeats itself” has large underlying ghost tones, seeing as what once was still lingers and continues to haunt us. Even with that, though, Fiddler and colleagues (2022) indicate it is sometimes easier to imagine the future than the past even though the past is already defined. *Ghost Criminology*, in looking at many different aspects of crime and criminology, examines the impact ghosts have.

Following “A (Spirit) Guide,” which is Fiddler and colleagues’ (2022) introduction, is Part I of the book, “Apparitions and the (In)visible.” Eamonn Carrabine takes on Chapter 1, “After the Fact: Spectral Evidence, Cultural Haunting, and Gothic Sensibility” (2022). Carrabine refers to both Derrida and Karl Marx in this chapter, who both have mentioned the idea of specters, which is another word for ghost. There is some irony in Carrabine bringing some of Marx’s work to the present, as nearly two centuries ago, Marx wrote of history repeating itself. Now, here are scholars once again writing of ghosts after any sort of study of ghosts in the social (not paranormal) sense seemed to be lost for some time. These scholars are, in essence, *repeating history*. Gradually in this gap between Marx and now, ghosts were less socially relevant, according to Carrabine (2022), because the influence the dead had on the living started to fade. This can be seen all around as families started to migrate away from each other for bigger and better opportunities across the country, and with doing so, traditions were lost. These traditions have typically been done to honor ghosts.

Trailing Carrabine, Jeff Ferrell (2022) takes on Chapter 2, “Ghost Method.” It is in this chapter, with my years and experience as a police officer, the idea of *hunting ghosts* came to fruition. Ferrell (2022, 67) mentions different types of people such as “undocumented migrants, ex-cons, registered sex offenders, nocturnal graffiti writers, homeless urbanites, [and] freight-hopping gutter punks,” and likens them “less as persons than as apparitions.” This is primarily because these are the types

of people portrayed as criminals in modern media; however, they are often never seen by members of settled civilization. Instead, these people (not an exhaustive list) are the ones lurking in the shadows and attempting to remain undetected. These ghosts, as the book suggests they are, are the ones police officers deal with quite often. If we are not dealing with them, we are looking for them, *hunting* them. The ever-growing distinction between these ghosts and the members of the settled civilization mentioned above attributes to what Ferrell (2022, 69) refers to as “social death.”

Ferrell also relays the importance of absence (2022). As police officers, sometimes trained investigators, it is our job to look for what is missing that may help us break a case. For Ferrell (2022, 71), “absence may be present, but knowing how to notice it, record it, and account for it is another matter.” Ferrell (2022, 76) goes on to quote Armstrong (2010, 247), speaking of “the traces, artifacts, and other resonances that people leave behind act as the focal point of an investigation,” further linking police officers and their relation to ghosts. The last part of note from Ferrell (2022, 79) is the idea of ghosts and living lives of circularity, and the “social margins” they are consigned to. Police officers deal with many of the same people time and again who, often due to the systems in place, regularly find themselves in the same situations again and again.

Michelle Brown (2022), in Chapter 3, “The Specter of White Supremacy: Fugitive Justice and the Dead Body of US Racialized Politics,” brings up the first real issues in the book relating to racial disparities. Brown (2022, 89) quotes scholar Shatema Threadcraft (2017, 553), using her powerful statement “that ‘the body that receives the most attention in contemporary racial politics is a deceased one.’” This is important as a police officer. The ghosts of those who lose their lives to police use of force, whether it be justified or not, have a tremendous voice in today’s day and age. Listening to these ghosts instead of trying to bury them can only help law enforcement for the better, and listening does not mean giving in. As mentioned before, this review does not aim to apply hauntology to police work, merely to understand it. More importantly, to understand the perspectives of the scholars whose names are on these chapters and see how others view the work police officer’s do.

Chapter 4, “From Optograms to X-Rays: How to Conjure a Spectral Criminological Image,” by Michael Fiddler (2022), offers some interesting perspectives on ghosts. From photography and pictures, and

the ghosts they invoke, to X-rays and the notion of seeing one's own death, Fiddler finds ways to make the reader think outside of the box.

Fiddler (2022, 122) refers to the ability of photography to capture the "unseen" or the "unseeable." In making these visible, photography offers "a second sight" (Fiddler 2022, 122). This is important for police officers. Think, for example, of crime scene photos. These photos, viewed sometimes years later, carry the ghosts of victims and suspects alike and allow these ghosts, even the ones of those who have passed on, a voice. Like photos, ghosts can be present in videos. More specifically for Amanda Glasbeek (2022), police body-worn cameras, or the lack thereof. Glasbeek (2022, 364) harps on transparency and brings up navigating "the terrain of visibility and invisibility and the ghosts that haunt their intersections." Unfortunately, for police officers, if citizen interactions are not recorded in today's day and age, the intersection of visibility (what the officer sees) and invisibility (what the public will never see) does not exist. The unseen ghosts tend to haunt a little more than the ones which the full story is not present.

The book then switches gears and moves into Part II, "The Necrotic and (In)corporeal." Taking lead in this part is Daniel Robins (2022) with "(Dis)Posing of 'Toxic Necro-Waste:' Managing Unwanted Ghosts." This chapter focuses on how some ghosts, or even more than that, *monsters*, are handled (Robins 2022). Britain took special considerations for one of their most notorious and heinous killers, Ian Brady. They did not do it for him, though, they did it to protect the public from his ghost, and from leaving any trace of him behind which could potentially haunt his victims, their families, and the rest of society. Robins (2022, 145) took note of how anytime Brady and his corpse became "similar to our own," or "into the realm of human," authorities would attempt to shield the public from this. Related to this, it is important to look and understand what police officers sometimes do. They may shield people from things, but only to save them from the ghosts they would inevitably have to deal with otherwise. In turn, police officers internalize these ghosts and carry this burden for others. Unfortunately, how to deal with ghosts is not offered in this book.

Katherine Biber (2022) presents "Destroyed Records" for Chapter 6. It is not hard to imagine what ghosts' these records might contain, especially when dealing with classified or redacted documents Biber most often refers to (2022). In many cases, entities (government or otherwise) or individuals may be "haunted by the archive," or by the documents they keep (Arnold 2022, 235). They may be haunted by what the records contain, or by the thought of the information getting out and

into the wrong hands. Either way, there are ghosts around every corner. Would it not be easier, then, to just destroy the records? Biber offers some insight and posits, “the ghost issues a demand that we pay attention” or we risk the “danger of [things] being forgotten” (2022, 160). The question then, is what is more haunting: unwanted or forgotten ghosts?

For Chapter 7, Travis Linnemann and Justin Turner (2022) present a rather controversial section titled “Police: The Weird and Eerie.” For police officer’s, this section is as important to read as it would be to refute. Not everyone who police officer’s deal with are going to like them or appreciate and respect what they do. Understanding some of the various perspectives, including among scholars, is crucial in being a well-rounded officer. Linnemann and Turner (2022, 184, 190) refer to police as “horrific” and “trigger-happy cops” in this chapter. Linnemann and Turner (2022, 190) also refer to the job as a police officer and police power as “not just an occupation” and instead, liken it to an identity, implying police are other than human and not just like everyone else, especially when the uniform comes off. This could not be further from the truth.

For some, especially criminals, police officers could fill the role of ghosts. They are the ones who haunt the criminals. For everyone else, though, the idea of a police officer as a ghost does not quite fit. Instead, the police stand between everyone else and the ghosts. This idea would likely go against what Linnemann and Turner (2022) would think, as they so prominently attack the notion of the Thin Blue Line, which asserts police walk the line between criminals and everyone else. Some might argue with this line of thinking and due to my profession as a police officer, believe I am unable to be objective or unbiased; however, Ross and colleagues (2014, 75) contend “being part of the group” does not inherently make them biased.

Chapter 8 by Bill McClanahan (2022) and its title, “Dripping from Head to Toe with Blood: Suffocation, Tentacles, Police, and Capital,” might already invoke feelings of controversy amongst the reader. Although some of the comparisons McClanahan (2022) makes may be valid, the vast majority of them seem to be a stretch. There is no doubt there are issues within not only the United States, but the globe, regarding equality and the treatment of different parts of populations; however, it could be argued many of the issues are larger than the police and they get the brunt of the attention mostly due to their visibility. In the interest of space and to remain within the scope of this review, debates

will be set aside. It is important to reiterate though, even if redundant, the importance of attempting to understand other perspectives.

Taking a different direction, the book then moves on to the final part, Part III, “Dead and Haunted Spaces.” Chairing this last part is Alison Young (2022) with Chapter 9, “The Time of Ghosts: Sites of Violence, Environments of Memory.” Young (2022) primarily speaks of Grenfell Tower and the fire which killed many of the residents who lived there. There were many evident issues with the construction of the tower leaving many residents and other community members feeling like those who lived there mattered less, as this was owned by the city and rented as part of a low-income housing initiative. After the fire, the ghosts which linger continue to have a voice and they have the support of the entire community, including solidarity from people from all over who come to visit. The biggest takeaway from this for police officer’s is the understanding that sites of disasters, which police know all too well, house many ghosts. Recognizing some of these ghosts may help in the aftermath when it comes to not only investigating but helping others (including one another and oneself) heal.

Chapter 10, “Dark Diffractions: A Performative Hauntology of 10 Rillington Place” by Elaine Campbell (2022), continues to evidence the notion that ghosts haunt not only people, but places. Campbell (2022, 267) refers to the infamous John Reginald Halliday Christi, as Robins (2022) did Brady, and explains how “monsterring Christie’s ... otherness ... marks his difference from ‘us.’” This is important in the study of hauntology. It shows how much people do not want to believe some of the thing’s others do, and how they do not want to feel they are capable of the same things. It is hard for them to imagine and therefore, it must not be real. It must be ghostly instead.

Carolyn McKay (2022) gets creative for Chapter 11, “Who’s Been Sleeping in My Bed? Cheap Motel Rooms and Transgression.” In this chapter, McKay (2022) tries to get in touch with ghosts from past crimes at various hotels, further driving the point that ghosts could be anywhere. Every person, every place, has a past. McKay (2022, 283) also mentions how some “traces of crime are hidden or erased,” causing these crime scenes to “fly under the radar.” Although in context, McKay (2022) is speaking of crime scenes that have already been processed, it could very well apply to crime scenes flying under the radar which police have yet to locate. It may be wise for police to follow ghosts if they cannot find things via other means. What exactly that means for them is still up to interpretation.

The final chapter, Chapter 12, brings ethnographic research and ghost criminology together. Theo Kindynis (2022) documents this in “Excavating Ghosts: Urban Exploration as Graffiti Archaeology.” In exploring the graffiti culture, Kindynis (2022, 325) was able to speak with ghosts and learn of ghosts from long ago and he mentions the “haunting tension between past and present.” Graffiti tells a story about the ghosts which have come, left their mark, and moved on. This is something important to the police, but something the police have known for a very long time.

In conclusion, the editors Fiddler, Kindynis, and Linnemann (2022), offer their closing, “Ghost Criminology: A Requiem.” I will do the same and continue the sentiment to attempt to understand the perspective of others. I also urge everyone, especially police officers, to pay attention. Pay attention to ghosts, just like you do every day, and see if looking at them from this different perspective changes anything. The study of ghost criminology has a long way to go, but it is on the right track. Just like Tea Fredriksson (2022, 238), who beat me to reviewing *Ghost Criminology* says, this book “has opened a fascinating door.” Just like her, I am excited to see what follows.

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