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# GHOST-RIGHTING: THE SPECTRAL ETHICS AND HAUNTED SPOUSES OF RICHARD LINKLATER'S *BEFORE* TRILOGY

Lilia Kilburn

## I. Death, Love's Amber

"All plots tend to move deathward," wrote Don DeLillo.<sup>1</sup> Others have sliced his statement more thinly, noting that this narrative death drive quickens in love stories, where death is often "what passion has yearned after from the beginning."<sup>2</sup> Across the Western canon's fossil record, death is love's amber, a preservative that, like its chemical contemporaries, suspends in time that which tends to degrade in life. In film, like the camera itself, a deceased or distant lover is "freed from the contingencies of space and time but then discreetly confin[es] [her]self to codified patterns."<sup>3</sup> If lovers do not die, it is enough for the narrative to prove that they would die should they remain together—a collusion between threat and memory that begets famous romances collapsed into memorializing mantras: "We'll always have Paris."

This paper is concerned with the disruption of established patterning of love and death—disruption executed by the figure of the ghost. Modeling this disruption is a tripartite love story, Richard Linklater's *Before* trilogy—1995's *Before Sunrise*, 2004's *Before Sunset*, and 2012's *Before Midnight*—that invites ghosts in. *Before* begins with death's suggestion, but it is not wrapped up neatly in death's shroud (nor can it really be said to wrap up). Jesse, a Texan crisscrossing Europe on a Eurail pass, and Céline, a Parisian returning from a visit to her grandmother in Prague, meet on the train because Céline fears blotting-out by plane crash:

I can't help it. I can't help it. I know the statistics say, na-na-na, it's safer . . . When I'm in a plane, I can see it. I can see the explosion. I can see me falling through the clouds, and I'm so scared of those few seconds of consciousness before you're going to die . . . when you know for sure.

In response, Jesse tells Céline a story about seeing his great-grandmother's ghost through the prismatic mist of a garden hose.<sup>4</sup> For Jesse's parents, this was cause for a lecture about the finality of death; as Bliss Cua Lim keenly writes: "The ghost always presents a problem, not merely because it might provoke disbelief, but because it is only admissible insofar as it can be domesticated by a modern concept of time."<sup>5</sup> Jesse's failure to be domesticated makes him a temporal insubordinate. His parents guard their modern concept of time, while Jesse lives alert to the exception: "I was just glad that I saw that," he says. "I mean, I've never seen anything like that since. . . . It just kind of let me know how ambiguous everything was, you know, even death." Orrin Wang explains that ghosts neither assert the "hypostasis of physical reality" nor the "reality of the non-physical—of Spirit [*Geist*]."<sup>6</sup> Rather, in their power to spook and startle, to hair-raise and raise hell, they impress upon us that "[g]hosts are as real as everything else; everything else is real as a ghost"; as Jesse puts it, "How ambiguous everything [is]." Jesse's ghost story intervenes in Céline's fear, directing her own narrative away from death.

The scene is draped in the trappings of a standard-issue, star-crossed love story, trappings present to be thrown off. *Before Sunrise*'s opening sonic cues comprise the overture from Purcell's story of Dido and Aeneas, who stand alongside Romeo and Juliet and Tristan and Isolde in the ranks of doomed lovers. As the film's opening credits, showing train tracks running in reverse, suggest, *Before* reverses the typical deathward movement of a love story's plot—a reversal similarly anticipated by the film's start at Vienna's Westbahnhof station, termed a dead-end station because it generates no outgoing routes.<sup>7</sup> Linklater redirects narrative traffic (as Jesse does for Céline) to flag and refashion a representational order in which conclusory love is the only acceptable outcome, qua typical cinematic portrayals of death or, alternately, marriage.<sup>8</sup>

Jesse asks Céline if she believes in ghosts and spirits, and she alleges, "If you don't believe in any kind of magic, or mystery, you're basically as good as dead."<sup>9</sup> This is Linklater's wager: without ghosts, *Before* would be "as good as dead," only as good as the love stories that leave their characters stranded in or beyond the grave. Jesse shares this belief. In anticipation of future haunting, he asks Céline to get off the train in Vienna with him: "If I don't ask you this, it's going to haunt me the rest of my life." It is a turning point not only relationally but formally, for here the camera shifts from shot reverse shot to Steadicam two shots—a technique from which it then deviates only rarely in the trilogy.<sup>10</sup> But if those two shots signal the start of something between Jesse and Céline, their literal center—the space between the pair—also signifies the trilogy's abiding concern with the separation within togetherness, akin to the classic image of a vase shaped by two faces in profile, toggling between figure and ground.<sup>11</sup>

This opening exchange, countering Céline's fear of death's finality with Jesse's ghost story about death's indeterminacy, sets Linklater's stage. Ghostliness is a schematic, helping to diagram Linklater's dialogue and compose his shots. Ghosts also mortar up the bricks of the trilogy's ethical edifice. Introducing ghosts into their shared experience, and later *becoming* ghosts through mimicry, enables Céline and Jesse to palliate the passage of time—to cope with Céline's initial fear of death and with the other fears and other deaths that plague them both going forward. In so doing, Linklater's trilogy is not only ghost-written (relying formally on ghosts) and ghost-ridden (relying narratively on a preponderance of them) but a staging ground for ghost-*righting*, an active, relational spectral ethics, carrying forward the project begun by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx*. The same ontological uncertainty (or hauntological, in Derrida's term) that characterizes a ghost sighting ("Did it really happen that way?") comes to mark their ghost-righting, where the question rather becomes "Would our lives happen that way? Could they?"<sup>12</sup>

At the limit of each of *Before's* films, commencing the dialogue, is a question. By nature, ghosts are also creatures of limits and questions: If death (de) limits human life, ghosts limn that limit, illuminating that which is left unresolved in a single lifespan and thrusting it into "the heart of the living present," in Derrida's phrase.<sup>13</sup> For Derrida, raised specters foment political consciousness by creating the conditions of possibility for raising key questions:

Without *this non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who *are not there*, of those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living*, what sense would there be to ask the question, "where?" "where tomorrow?" "whither?"<sup>14</sup>

This paper takes seriously the "heart" in Derrida's "living present," asking how the spectral moments and structuring inquiries of *Before* bear on its form of love.

## 2. Ghosts Who Give Up / Given-Up Ghosts

That ghosts might find, in Linklater's films, hospitable places to rest is, like the specters themselves, not immediately apparent. Yet squint and see: the heart of Linklater's living present is a throng of the neither living nor the precisely present, one which accretes over the course of three films and comes

to surpass the initial meet cute. Ghosts come first: they catalyze Céline and Jesse's love. (The trilogy's titles speak to this positionality as well: to be before something is to come first, temporally or spatially.) And ghosts last: Céline and Jesse remain together, as *Midnight* will attest, for the same reason.

In spite of the willingness of critics to laud Linklater's trilogy and his oeuvre's temporalities (returned to in time), popular and academic reviews overlook Linklater's ghosts.<sup>15</sup> That his ghosts get looked *past* is perhaps fitting, since, strictly speaking, Linklater offers the viewer little to look *at* where ghosts are concerned. His formal decision to render ghosts aurally and gesturally, rather than to give them bodies for spectating, loosens the historical braiding between mediums, visual media, and questions of vision.<sup>16</sup> Tom Gunning writes that from the early days of spirit photography images of phantoms provided windows onto "a clash of different representations of bodies . . . the one familiarly solid and positioned, the other somehow filtered by the process of transmission into a virtual body, weightless or permeable."<sup>17</sup> Through the particularities of ghost bodies, Gunning describes, we came to ask questions about the perceptual limits of our own: "How d[oes one] know it was a ghost? What does a ghost look like?"<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, notes Susan Bruce, recent ghost films, notably *The Others* (2001) and *The Sixth Sense* (1999), play on the assumed dichotomy between stable self and ghostly other, exploiting "the depth of our expectation that ghosts should be 'other' to us" by presenting ghosts who fail to apprehend themselves as such.<sup>19</sup>

Elsewhere, the divide between our (popularly understood to be) discrete bodies and selves and the (still often discrete, still often bounded, even if transparent or invisible) bodies and selves of ghosts becomes a matter of agency: How, as actors, do ghosts bear on other actors? Gothic ghosts, for example, tend to interrupt the agency of human bodies (are even scandalously invited to do so: in a tome that haunted the mores of the time, Heathcliff begs Catherine to absolve him of agency: "I know that ghosts have wandered on earth. Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad!").<sup>20</sup> Today's ghosts are often figures of foreclosed agency: Katherine Fowkes identifies a strong strain of masochism in a collection of Hollywood ghost films, 1990's *Ghost* at their center, where specters relish "delay and repetition."<sup>21</sup> When ghostlife either overtakes the work of the living or, alternately, forces multiple takes, Derrida's vision of ghosts enabling ethical work for living agents struggles to find form.

In breaking with the trope of embodied alterity, Linklater's ghosts both defy classification and offer a way forward. Because Linklater's traces of the past are not given full selves but rather channeled through Jesse and Céline, they do not meet the inclusion criteria for the extant survey volumes

of ghosts in cinema, where a ghost must be “a bona fide character” or “the continuation of personality after death” (the latter sounding less stringent but producing similar classificatory outcomes in practice).<sup>22</sup> The point is not merely that Linklater’s ghosts get overlooked, but that the reason they go unseen is both part of their design and their central provocation. Linklater prods us to think of ghosts in *Before* not as “characters” or “personalities” but as unable to be decoupled from Jesse and Céline’s practice—what I here call ghost-righting, in the vein of Derrida’s spectral ethics.

In *Before*, where the medium for spectrality is Céline and Jesse, the viewer sees a spate of possibilities for communing with the past, from pathos to spats. In this way, Céline and Jesse’s lived ghosting, which falls quickly out of accounts of ghosts in cinema, lands atop a choice perch amidst the theoretical architecture of ghostlife built up in recent years. Bruce, followed by a similar call from Jane Hyun Chi Park, and preceded in this by Nancy Holland’s feminist analysis of *Specters of Marx*, avails herself of the enigma that begins *Specters* (“*je voudrais apprendre à vivre enfin*,” Derrida writes, “I want [to learn or to teach] to live at last”) in concluding that we must learn to live with ghosts.<sup>23</sup> For Lim, the potential of such learning is especially transformative: “a radicalized accountability to those who are no longer with us, a solidarity with specters made possible by remembering.”<sup>24</sup> Articulating well with the aforementioned critique of the ways in which death and marriage freeze narrative time (what is produced but “the complacency of a homogeneous, empty time” by films that end as such?), Lim’s analysis underscores that Linklater offers an alternative: the reinscription of “solidarity with specters” in the life of a couple, the application of “radicalized accountability” through remembrance to the ways in which we are ourselves no longer present to ourselves and each other.<sup>25</sup> That the real-time quality of *Before*’s unfolding present keeps us decidedly in the current moment—but that present and past commingle therein—provides a granular, phenomenological look at life with ghosts. In this way Linklater’s ghosts and all they put right produce precisely the learning-to-live that others call for, a solidarity through remembrance that is itself worth remembering and attending to.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. “Every Love Story Is A Ghost Story”

I was ready to get off the train with him after talking to him a short while. He was so sweet, I couldn’t help it. We were in the lounge car, and he began to talk about him, as a little boy, seeing his great-grandmother’s ghost. I think that’s when I fell for him.

Speaking as if to a close confidant, Céline recounts that initial meeting between her past self and Jesse, whose past self in turn had recalled his own past self and a meeting with another passed self—his great-grandmother’s ghost. The booth in which Céline sits is not a confessional but an upholstered restaurant booth in Vienna’s Café Sperl, and the person to whom she confesses is Jesse himself, whose fingers are curled in the mold of a telephone, listening, and whose phrases curl upward in imitation of a friend of Céline’s.

Jesse and Céline’s affair is only a day into its life, which will come to span eighteen years between *Sunrise* and *Midnight*, but already the pair is conjuring ghosts. Céline’s articulation of ardor depends on a ghostly configuration of speech, which gathers absent friends as imaginary sounding boards for the lovers and enables a tentative, tender cathexis. Jesse, who told the ghost story that catalyzed Céline’s affection, reveals his own ghostly inclinations in this same spectral phone call, as he explains why he made his way to Vienna in the aftermath of a breakup in Madrid: “I didn’t want to see anybody I knew. I just wanted to be a ghost.” In short, many layers of absence compose the moment in which Jesse and Céline, in a traditional romantic narrative, would purportedly be most present to each other: the moment they confess their mutual affection. And this confession does not headily whisk absence into presence: rather, they anticipate their impending absence from each other and insist on the importance of that absence, on not calling or writing or taking photographs.



Figure 1. A spectral telephone call in *Before Sunrise* (1995).

Barthes writes, "There is always, in the discourse upon love, a person whom one addresses, though this person may have shifted to the condition of a phantom or a creature still to come."<sup>27</sup> This is a statement about absence—about the phantoms on which we fixate when our loved ones are not present. But it need not be read as necessitating physical distance—after all, this is the same Barthes who has just told us that, while gazing on his loved one's sleeping body, "it is obvious that I am then in the process of fetishizing a corpse."<sup>28</sup> Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse* is riddled with apparitions, themselves riddlers who implore us to conceive of love differently. Like his passage on "The Ghost Ship," by which "the love which is over and done with passes into another world like a ship into space, lights no longer winking . . . the other never disappears when and how we expect," Barthes wants to take from us the maudlin ways in which we are accustomed to seeing love as presence.<sup>29</sup> We hear Barthes in a phrase David Foster Wallace took, decades later, to repeating: "Every love story is a ghost story."<sup>30</sup> And we hear him, too, in the way Jesse and Céline speak to each other as the absent-presences of their friends back home. If a Lacanian metaphor for subject-formation is that of the "potter . . . who creates the vase with his hand around . . . emptiness . . . created it . . . starting with a hole" (which itself recalls Rubin's aforementioned vase, carved from the breath between proximate faces, and the many shots of sculpture that punctuate the trilogy), Linklater pursues filmmaking in a similar vein, finding absences and voids unavoidable and generative.<sup>31</sup>

The question with which *Sunrise* begins—"Kannst Du sie bald auswendig?" (Can you tell me what's so interesting?)—is itself unintelligible to Céline and Jesse, and marks their unsteadiness in the world.<sup>32</sup> Jesse's ghost story moves Céline's contemplation of precarity away from a place of pure fear. The film's first *mise en abyme*—authorizing the film to speak from beyond itself as it does for its characters—renders the characters' anxieties about unstable selfhood in lucid, comic terms. Stepping off the train in Vienna, the city as unrecognizable to them as they are to each other, Céline and Jesse approach two men for advice. These interlocutors reveal themselves to be jesters of a sort, who invite them to a play, entitled "Bring Me the Horns of Wilmington's Cow." The men explain: "It's a play about a cow, and an Indian searching for it. There are also in it politicians, Mexicans . . . Russians, Communists." Jesse asks the intuitive question: "So you have a real cow onstage?" We learn that it is an actor in a cow costume, playing a deranged cow: "She's acting a bit strange, like a dog. If someone throws a stick, she fetches it, and brings it back. And she can



smoke, with her hooves.” Wilmington’s cow, Linklater’s lovers, even Schrödinger’s cat (another Vienna native)—all are caught between lost and found, life and death.<sup>33</sup> This suspension can be a source of pleasure, as when Céline spectates Seurat’s *La voie ferrée* (The Railroad), at once a specter of the train on which they arrived and of that foundational moment of cinema, the Lumière brothers’ 50-second 1896 film of a train pulling into La Ciotat station: “I love the way the people seem to be dissolving into the background. . . . His human figures are always so transitory. . . . Transitory?” Jesse: “Yeah. Transitory” and of foreboding, as in a palm-reader’s mildly menacing imperative: “Don’t forget, you are stardust!”

Shortly before they part, Céline sits with her head in Jesse’s lap on the edge of a fountain. Jesse mimics Dylan Thomas reading Auden: “The years shall run like rabbits.” Céline cocks her head, and Jesse throatily intones, “O let not Time deceive you / You cannot conquer Time / And Time will have His fancy, tomorrow or today.” Linklater makes Jesse, as he walked out that evening, a mimic who marvels at monumentality, at how quickly time runs.<sup>34</sup> This scene takes place on an outdoor terrace of the Albertina Museum, the only scene to revisit the site of an earlier one, as if in the eye of Time’s storm. Céline closes her eyes, savoring the trilogy’s only visible moment of return. If in the restaurant booth one of the two characters was always speaking as somebody else, here only Auden speaks.

*Sunset*, too, begins with a question: “Do you consider the book to be autobiographical?” For Jesse, recollections have assembled into *This Time*, a novel based on their encounter (from which he is reading, in the company of literary ghosts, at Shakespeare & Company.) Céline, whom he has not seen in nine years, waits in the crowd. A ghost bears the burden of their tentativeness: Céline’s grandmother, whose funeral was on the very day Céline and Jesse had planned a reunion, thusly botched. Céline’s anticipation of annihilation, as expressed in *Sunrise*, was realized in her grandmother’s death instead, with a suddenness (and a subject) that recalls Duane Michals’s photo series *Death Comes to the Old Lady*.<sup>35</sup> In Michals’s dramatization of waiting for death, he demonstrates the hubris



Figure 2. Death Comes to the Old Lady (1969). Photographs by Duane Michals. (Continued)

of believing we can conquer the shock of that final frame; absence here is at once banalized, anticipated, and deeply intrusive. Similarly, if Jesse counseled Céline, in *Sunrise*, to be untroubled by the thought of her own absence in death, *Sunset* reveals a Jesse deeply troubled by her absence in separation.

By vesting the ghostly in the grandmotherly rather than in the maternal, Linklater avoids Freud and steers us toward Proust. In *In Search of Lost Time*, the narrator watches his grandmother expire and observes: "Life in withdrawing from her had taken with it the disillusionments of life. . . . On that funeral couch, death, like a sculptor . . . had laid her in the form of a young maiden."<sup>36</sup> In her failure to appear, Céline (and, causally, her grandmother) paves the way for Jesse to remember her "in the form of a young maiden"—idealized remembrance so typical of truncated love. Linklater underscores the perils of this remembrance. For them both, Céline's failure to appear multiplied the "disillusionments of life"; *Sunset*'s ghosts reflect this. Jesse tells Céline that before his wedding he thought of her constantly: "I mean, even on my way there . . . I'm staring out the window, and I think I see you folding up an umbrella and walking into a deli on the corner of 13th and Broadway"—two blocks from where she had, unbeknownst to him, lived. Later, he reveals his dreams: that he's standing on a train platform and sees Celine pass ("And you go by, and you go by, and you go by, and you go by").

Jesse is a haunted man. Ghosts at once come too close (how could Céline have lived in his neighborhood?) and fly by.<sup>37</sup> Beginning with his great-grandmother, ghosts puncture his present; they multiply disillusionment because Jesse compares his life to an alternate present that is imagined and dreamt and even glimpsed.<sup>38</sup> The campiness of Wilmington's cow and the palmreader's proclamation, the viewer's sense that "indeed there will be time," take the edge off Céline and Jesse's fears about inconsequentiality in *Sunrise*; in *Sunset* these fears are urgent.<sup>39</sup> Jesse tells Céline, "I've had sex less than . . . 10 times in the last 4 years . . . I feel like if somebody were to touch me I would dissolve into molecules." He has become the pointillism of his own casual perusal of Seurat in *Sunrise*, the stardust about which their palmreader warned.



Figure 2. (Continued)

In coping with his disappointment through writing, he compounds Céline's: "I was fine until you wrote that fucking book! It stirred shit up." When they enter Céline's apartment and glimpse a photo of her grandmother embracing her as a child, this boiling-over returns to a simmer. We hear Nina Simone's voice in the background—"Now that you're here, I know where I'm going"—and Céline doubles it, slipping into Simone's persona. She reflects, "She was so funny in concert. She would be right in the middle of a song and then, you know, stop and walk from the piano all the way to the edge of the stage. Like, really slowly." Like Simone moving to the edge of the stage, Céline begins to imitate her, pouting her lips and shifting her hips as she walks. "And she'd start talking to someone in the audience. Oh, yeah, baby." She points, as if to a spectral audience superimposed onto Jesse. "Ooh! I love you too." Céline's expression of love to Jesse—routed by another speaker and delivered to an absent audience, framed as an answer to a question never asked ("Ooh! I love you too"), heightened by her slow-as-nine-years crossing of the space—captures desire's contortions of anticipation and risk. And when Céline-as-Nina turns and tells Jesse, "Baby, you are gonna miss . . . that . . . plane," he rubs his wedding ring and says, "I know."

Nine years later, in *Before Midnight*, Céline and Jesse are living together in Paris and on vacation in Greece. This film's opening question—"So you got everything?"—can be read as Jesse's simple expression of concern to his son, Hank, as they scramble through the airport, but also as the expression of broader scrambling ("so," what happens when we "g[e]t everything" we want?) The doubling of Nina Simone's voice has given rise to Céline and Jesse's young doubles, the twins, Ella and Nina; the mimicry-as-exception of the first two films, reserved for pivotal moments, has come to be supplanted by a polyphony of daily ventriloquisms. There are the family's domestic personas, the General (Céline), Captains Ella and Nina, and the demoted Private Clean-Up (Jesse; "missing in action all these years"), which they assume, in the grocery, in a sort of functionalist theater; there are Jesse and Céline's erotic-ironic alter egos, some Southern European ("I don't know where I'm from, but I'm very hairy") and a breathy naif ("I like stories with a meaning behind them, like a really beautiful love story"), respectively. Unlike the earlier films' specters, who enter and exit rapidly, these recur, engaging in the day-to-day affective bailing-out necessary to keep Jesse and Céline's foundering relationship afloat.

*Midnight* is the bleakest of the three films, and it strains self-consciously against our expectation that it will contain something redemptive. The

figures of this strain are the ghosts of other films, who manifest not only in the everyday mimics aforementioned or in Céline's fixation with the melodramatic *The Other Side of Midnight* (1977) but in moments Céline and Jesse hope to steal for themselves. On their final night in Greece, they undress and embrace. The music swells, tropily, then reveals itself to be an interrupting ringtone, itself a trope. If Jesse and Céline's relationship coalesced in an intimate, spectral phone call, here the phone is an emblem of their wavering connection. Tension begins on the drive home from the airport, when Hank calls Céline from his gate and she doesn't hand the phone over to Jesse. The call, cut short, is a cruel miniature of Jesse's feeling that he never has enough time with Hank, who lives with Jesse's ex-wife in Chicago. Jesse wants to move to the States, and Céline is apoplectic, feeling that she has already sacrificed so much to raise their daughters while Jesse found success as a writer. Concerns about finitude and loss are easily overcome in *Sunrise*, but here they press in, and if Jesse bears the brunt of unhappiness in *Sunset*, here it is Céline.

At dinner, among the other guests, lovers are too close or very far, out of time or mired in it. Their coupled Greek friends, Stefanos and Ariadne, joke about their dual urge to "colonize" each other; their host matter-of-factly states of his deceased wife, "We were never one person, always two." For as long as Linklater's narrative has resisted the dichotomization of absence and togetherness, for as long as Jesse and Céline have resisted the standard narrative process of lovers' entombment, the prospect begins to seem tempting. Jesse takes Céline aside and tells her that his grandmother has just died; his grandparents wanted their ashes intermingled. Céline recalls a film she saw as a teenager (likely Rossellini's *Voyage to Italy* [1954], though she does not name it), an intermingling in ash: "I remember a couple walking through the ruins of Pompeii, looking at the bodies . . . I remember the bodies, still lovingly holding each other. I don't know why, sometimes I have this image in my mind when, you know, we're asleep and you hold me." She reflects, "At that age you romanticize the idea of dying with the person you love." Jesse cocks his head: "You want to die with me?" Céline: "Maybe, if it were, you know, our first night together, then, a long time ago. But now, no. I'd like to live!" This will to live renders Jesse and Céline's love story more complex than a standard tale, wrapped up by death or marriage. If Barthes asks whether it is better "to last or to burn," Céline seeks neither complete absorption in her relationship nor its annihilation, but something less resolute—something she calls living.<sup>40</sup> She tells Jesse that he can never write about her again, that she is not sure she loves him anymore. She storms out.

## 4. A Lover's History and the Holy Moment

Jesse tries a complex gambit. Finding Céline on a nearby balcony, he sits and rummages in his pocket. He explains, "I was just with your 82-year-old self who gave me a letter to read to you." As he begins reading from a napkin's crenellated (and, notably, blank) surface, Céline is dubious—"I would never write this—it's too flowery"—but eventually falls silent. He, as she, tells her:

I am sending you this young man. Yes, young—and he will be your escort. God knows he has had many problems and has struggled his whole life connecting and being present even with those he loves the most. And for that he is deeply sorry—but you are his only hope. Céline, my advice to you is this: you are entering the best years of your life. Looking back from where I sit now these middle years are only a little bit more difficult than when you were 12 and Mathieu and Vanessa danced all night to the Bee Gees' "How Deep Is Your Love." Céline, you will be fine. Your girls will grow up to become examples and icons of feminism.

This ventriloquism, this future proffered as promissory note, is a way for Jesse to voice care for the progression of Céline's life—and it doesn't entirely work. Céline wants affirmation of what she's actually said: "Did you hear what I said to you back in the room? Did you hear me?" It is only when Jesse crumples his prop of the blank napkin and they look at each other wordlessly for some time that the tension breaks. "Wow, you're *so* smart," she says in the breathy voice of her alter ego, signaling détente. "Space-time. . . ?" "Continuum," Jesse answers, and in doing so sets the stage for the trilogy's final statement by Céline, a tapestry of tenses that speaks, like Jesse and Auden did, to the running-by (but not running-out) of their years: "It must have been one hell of a night we're about to have."

In another line that tenses grammatical tense, Chakrabarty explains the power of the historian: "The historian has the capacity to put [others' thoughts and memories] back into a time we are all supposed to have shared . . . contrary to however [past individuals] may have . . . structured their memories."<sup>41</sup> Here, Jesse acts as an ad hoc historian. Is he merely following up *Sunrise's* temporal insubordination with subordination, assigning Céline's anger a place in (and thus producing) the "continuum" they are supposed to share? This reading is less satisfactory when we remember Céline's own structure of memory: in each film Céline

has told Jesse that she feels like an old woman remembering her life. In the (rotoscopically) animated coda that appears in Linklater's *Waking Life* (2001), Céline becomes (gesturally) animated on this point: "I still feel that way sometimes. . . . Like my waking life is her memories." In *Before Sunrise*'s closing sequence, an elderly woman carefully crosses the park where the remnants of Céline's and Jesse's night together (wine bottle, two glasses) lie. A building in the distance is drenched in sunlight, but the park is not yet illuminated. The woman pauses momentarily at the site of the tryst. Just after she leaves the frame, we see her shadow fall on the lovers' debris.





Figures 3, 4, and 5. *The ghost of a picnic in Before Sunrise (1995).*

Jesse has his own concerns about historiography (as Derrida tells us, “Everyone reads, acts, writes with *his or her* ghosts, even when one goes after the ghosts of the other.”)<sup>42</sup> In *Midnight* he describes the sadness he felt when reading a letter he himself wrote at twenty to his future self at forty (“Dear Jesse,” it began, “I hope you’re not divorced”). He is aware of the general danger of self-historical narratives to alienate us from ourselves, and of Céline’s particular worries about being married to a writer (“If you want to know exactly what it’s like to have sex with me, read away,” she says).

Jesse frankly notes his own difficulty “being present even with those he loves the most,” and he politely absents himself from the text: while reading, he pauses, feigning ignorance of what he is creating, like he is not the message’s author but only its conduit; indeed, he is ghost-writing for Céline a narrative of which she is the originator. A white flag, the napkin offers kinship: a blank page and a blank horizon. He channels her history without, in the words of Stefanos and Ariadne or of Chakrabarty, “colonizing” it—as an intersubjective venture that can be overwritten by Céline herself at any time.

When ghosts rupture time, as with Hamlet who exclaimed, “The time is out of joint!” upon seeing his father’s ghost, the canonical reaction to the sense that things are not progressing linearly is fright. Either that or they provoke what Barthes called a “vertigo of time defeated,” which is, as Lim explains, “an uncanny and conflicted sense of temporality generated by old photographs of people once alive, but who are now ‘alive’ only in the photos . . . we feel, with a pang, that the dead have yet to die.”<sup>43</sup> *Before’s* friendly ghosts, affect aliens to the ghosting space, offer rather the

feeling that what is dead may yet live: the vertigo of time repeated and the vertigo of standing on the brink of the present. The jubilation of Céline and Jesse's ghosts who jounce time recalls Benjamin's now-time (*jetztzeit*), the "emphatic renewal" of a consciousness that sees the possibilities inherent in every moment.<sup>44</sup>

### 5. A Spectral Ethics of (Spoken) Questioning?

Let us go back to the start: in *Sunrise*, it is the first line of a fight between strangers that brings Jesse and Céline together, a question ("*Kannst Du sie bald auswendig?*") which prompts Jesse to utter his first words to Céline ("Do you have any idea what they were arguing about?") In *Sunset*, it is a reporter asking Jesse, "Do you consider the book to be autobiographical?" In *Midnight*, it is a father's worry in the thrum of the airport, Jesse to Hank: "So you got everything?" First Jesse and Céline are surrounded by unintelligible questions; then they hear them; now they are doing the asking.

Each of these introductory questions depends on the ghosts of the previous films and traces in turn back to that first ghostly referent: "*Kannst Du sie bald auswendig?*" Ghosts as the basis for asking questions; questions as the basis for ghosts: Derrida's spectral ethics invokes the same relationship. "[W]ithout this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who *are not there*," he asks, "what sense would there be to ask the question, 'where?' 'where tomorrow?' 'whither?'"<sup>45</sup> In Derrida the emphasis is on righting *for* ghosts, for the oppressed of the past, whereas in Linklater the emphasis falls on righting *through* ghosts, on using ghosts to counter a feeling held by those still living that their present has not dignified their past. His is a strong pursuit of Derrida's own imperative (spoken in the interview that begins *Specters*) that we must speak with ghosts: "It is necessary to speak *of the* ghost, indeed *to the* ghost and *with* it."<sup>46</sup> And speaking *is* key: while Derrida denounced an overemphasis on speech over writing, Linklater is clear-eyed in recounting how writing hurts Céline as it advances Jesse. Yet if Linklater wants to reclaim speech and highlight some of the exclusions of writing, he does so without yielding entirely to the metaphysics of presence that Derrida critiques. Instead, he shows the formal and affective value of speech that comes from presence that is partial, absent, run off the screen by time.

Across the landscape of romantic films, the human imperative to both ask and answer is herded in the direction of standard objectives. Questions like "Will you marry me?" displace all others, whereas in Linklater it is



this question—supposedly the *telos* of all romance—that gets displaced, for Jesse and Céline never seek to marry. In Linklater, questions may go asked, answered, unanswered, and unasked all at once, a layering caked-on by spectrality. Jesse and Céline speak in a restaurant booth, as if to different interlocutors. Jesse speaks as (Dylan Thomas speaking as) Auden; Céline closes her eyes. Céline speaks as Nina Simone; Jesse misses his flight. Céline threatens to take flight; Jesse implores her, as her, to stay. In these moments of ghostly mimicry, the film's frenetic verbal layer is thrown askew.



Figures 6 and 7. *A holy moment in Waking Life (2001).*

In *Waking Life* (2001), the filmmaker Caveh Zahedi and the poet David Jewell share a similar moment of silence. Zahedi is relating Bazin's sense that film creates the conditions under which we can see the "holiness of existence."<sup>47</sup> His hands shape a frame, and "the holy moment" transpires: the two men transform into cloud formations, holding their gaze. As Steven Shaviro describes it, "Action is suspended. Dogs bark in the background. Everything is stripped away, except for perception and feeling. Time stops, or better, its duration is not sullied or filled by anything besides the very event of duration itself."<sup>48</sup> Consonance, here, with how Raymond Bellour described the blurred final image in Michals' *Death Comes to the Old Lady*: "Blur brings out a shudder . . . something between mobile and immobile, and offers up the perception of visible time—in other words, duration."<sup>49</sup> The "intensity and the precariousness of the holy moment" and its encounter with duration is what Linklater's narratives work up to; his chatter is machinery whose clattering progresses toward the holy moment at which it can rest.<sup>50</sup>

Barthes is again instructive; if "each partner of a scene dreams of having the last word," then speaking as someone else, as Céline and Jesse do time and again, or even as the other person, as Jesse does in the film's final scene, avoids this fixity.<sup>51</sup> It makes room for the wordlessness that Barthes so values, citing Sappho: "For when I glance at you even an instant, I can no longer utter a word."<sup>52</sup> Akira Lippit has written of a dialogue in which Derrida mused that one phenomenon that novels preclude but films enable is the simultaneous utterance of "I love you." Writing just after Derrida's death, Lippit wonders whether the thinker would agree that love, in these moments, is "negated, muted, reduced to silence by a deafening sonic confusion."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Derrida championed silence, which "plays the irreducible role of that that bears and haunts language," from the outset.<sup>54</sup>

Linklater likewise envisions a world in which the gaze supplants the "I do," Austen and Hollywood's archetypal speech-act. Jesse describes a Quaker wedding he attended: "What they do is the couple comes in and they kneel down in front of the whole congregation, and they just stare at each other, and nobody says a word . . . after an hour or so of just staring at each other, they're married." When Jesse and Céline stand wordless in a listening booth in *Sunrise*, they avoid eye contact to defer an intensity they cannot yet bear. In *Midnight*, Jesse's final act of mimicry does its best to fix up their relationship without fixing it down—a holy moment that is also a holey moment, "full of gaps and full of lights, filled with absences and over-nourishing signs."<sup>55</sup> *Before* has been described as "an orgy of talk," but if the trilogy flirts with prolixity, it is the wordlessness of the holy moment (wholly the moment in that wordlessness), and the mimicry that protects it, to which it is really married.<sup>56</sup>

## 6. An Answer in an Attempt

There is a cemetery in Vienna to which Céline brings Jesse. As they enter, they note a rabbit (which, recall, Time runs like) crossing their path, prompting remembrance from Céline. She gestures at a grave: “This is the one I remember. . . . She was only thirteen when she died. That meant something to me. I was around that age when I first saw this. Now, I’m ten years older, and she’s still thirteen, I guess.” Later, in a church—similar to one she visited, notably, with her grandmother—Céline whispers, “Even though I reject most of the religious things, I can’t help but feeling for all those people that come here . . . looking for some kind of answer.”

The metonymic relationship of graveyard and church to cinema is undeniable—all are places one goes to think of other lives, lives which remain suspended while ours progress. We watch Jesse and Céline’s relationship progress through the triptych; we return to haunt their younger selves, like Céline returns to the grave of the anonymous thirteen-year-old girl. We watch Céline looking for answers about those who are looking for answers, and realize we are staring down a mirrored corridor of ghosts. Linklater’s talent is not in delivering or dangling answers (nor strictly denying them), but in inducing us to sit with questions in a world where things continually, to cite Jesse’s earlier statement, “go by, and . . . go by, and . . . go by, and . . . go by.”

One painful question the film makes us sit with, and does not presume to resolve, is this: How does one decide who can be let “go by”? It comes early in *Midnight*, as Céline reflects on a childhood cat who, year after year, had a litter of two kittens. In reality, her father had annually asphyxiated several others in “a plastic bag with a bunch of ether.” Learning of this at thirty, she asked him how he chose: “Did you take the fluffiest, the cutest? He just started to cry.” The moment underscores the foreclosures contained within the choices *Before* depicts: Jesse’s, to leave his wife and Hank; Céline’s, to leave her work as an activist for Jesse and their children, and earlier to leave her photojournalist boyfriend, who in turn was always taking leave of her, and of the people in the conflict zones he covered, so as to assume his post behind the lens. In a standard ghosting narrative, these are precisely the figures who would be killed off so as to be revived and resolved; here, they are occasionally agonized over but mostly given wide berth. As constitutive lack and structural lack butt heads throughout the narrative, ghosts appear: not to foist guilt nor to paper it over, but to demonstrate what it might mean to do ethical work in the “living present.”

We might say that Linklater encourages in his characters a trait central to his own approach: “extravagant patience,” a succinct encapsulation of

his *modus operandi* I borrow from Jean-Claude Lebensztejn's description of Derrida.<sup>57</sup> Just like his earliest photographic forebears, whose long time exposures produced ghostly figures, Linklater relies on time, running along like film, train tracks, and rabbits alike, to expose ghosts. This is the aspect of Linklater's style that has received the most attention: his capacity to capture broad swaths of the human lifespan without makeup or special effects. (In so doing, he also captures changes in film technology, like the rotoscoping discussed by Shaviro and Manojlovic in *Waking Life*.)<sup>58</sup> The change wrought by time positions *Before* in contrast to Linklater's opus *Boyhood*, in which the shock of time's inexorable march comes more from the speed at which we watch it elapse than, as in *Before*, that which time warps and takes from us, and that which, in appealing to time, it may offer back.

It is not only that Céline and Jesse must, in *Sunset*, contend with the ways they have become ghosts to each other after their nine-year absence; or in *Midnight*, contend with the ways they have become ghosts to themselves; *Sunrise*, beginning with Céline's ardent affection for Jesse's ghost story, makes clear they have been wrestling with ghosts from the outset. Without ghosts, Linklater's time signature would fall into flatness, stretching the running time, an expanse across which what is at stake to Céline and Jesse is barely perceptible. Ghosts press upon the viewer the weight of the lovers' time together and of their time apart, and offer the levity and renewal of mimicry. In short, Linklater's vaunted temporality depends on his neglected ghosts and the diverse functions they serve.

*Spatio-temporality* manifests differently across his oeuvre: *Before*'s national dislocation is hardly the dislocation of *Waking Life*, where we are taken out of Euclidean space entirely.<sup>59</sup> Nor is it *Boyhood*'s marveling at the colossal crags of Texas's Big Bend National Park, at the alien in the familiar. Yet whatever the setting, "the exterior spectacle helps intimate grandeur unfold," as Bachelard has put it, because exterior, spectacular time begets intimate specters and the grandeur of the silent, holy moment.<sup>60</sup> Maja Manojlovic finds evidence that *Waking Life* evinces a Deleuzian perspective on life, life as teeming and immanent, "carrying with it the events or singularities that are merely actualized in subjects and objects."<sup>61</sup> What she would call *Waking Life*'s "aesthetics of the in-between" inform *Before* as well, which also draws power from the "between-times, between moments" within and between the films. Indeed, in a between-time (just before the ghostly telephone call) and a between-place (a silent alleyway), Céline reflects:

I believe if there's any kind of God it wouldn't be in any of us, not you or me but just this little space in between. If there's any kind of magic in this world, it must be in the

attempt of understanding someone, sharing something. I know, it's almost impossible to succeed, but . . . who cares, really? The answer must be in the attempt.

In *Before*, individual lives are hardly mere actualizations; in-betweenness here interfaces with a keen alertness to individual lifespans, and to the anxieties life's finitude and limitations and boundaries provoke. As in *Death Comes to the Old Lady*, we have a stake in the blur that obliterates the final frame because we have witnessed those frames that came before, and because we have witnessed later frames of Céline and Jesse trying to keep earlier frames alive. At the same time, if Linklater only attended to individual lifespans and not to their overflow, we would not have his ghosts, which see Céline and Jesse reaching out to absent others and absent selves, making a presence for them in their lives and words. In this way, Linklater has something to tell us about *living* with ghosts.

## 7. Learning To Live With Ghosts

Jane Chi Hyun Park is one of the writers who urgently seeks ways to live with ghosts. Time and again, she says, ghosts aid us in reflecting “on the ways in which identities are fragmented, multiple, contradictory and in the process of ‘becoming’” and impress upon us that “time is neither linear nor homogenous.”<sup>62</sup> “Yet the modern world in which most of us live,” she protests, “requires us to present the fiction of a coherent self in homogenous time.”<sup>63</sup> This generates her question: “How then can these [ghost] stories be used to develop pragmatic political, ontological or epistemological strategies for managing the ghostly effects of migration and modernisation that haunt so many?”<sup>64</sup>

For Céline and Jesse, “ghostly effects” are less immediately geopolitical: what it means to come into oneself, to come into close relationships, to come by professional success, and to link what comes later with what came first. Yet they also have broader reverberations: recall the motley international interspecies cast of “Bring Me The Horns of Wilmington’s Cow”; recall that *Before Sunrise* takes place just after the crystallization of the European Union through the Lisbon Treaty; recall that Vienna was a place of no return for many after its particularly brutal Kristallnacht pogrom; recall Greek citizens protesting against their keeper in the anti-EU protests that roiled Greece while *Midnight* was being filmed. When Céline storms out of their hotel room, even the left-behind wine bottle bears evidence of a fight: 1827, it reads, commemorating the Battle of Navarino, the decisive naval engagement of Greece’s earlier, eleven-year

war of independence against the Ottoman Empire (and prompting memories of another left-behind bottle in *Sunrise*.) And they too are migratory: recall that we never see the couple return to Vienna, or to Greece, or to any space, for that matter, after the fountain at which Jesse-as-Auden augurs, "Time will run like rabbits." They will not, it seems, always have Paris; at the moment they don't have joint custody of Hank (not to mention a functional relationship with Jesse's ever-spectral ex-wife); someday they won't have each other. Céline and Jesse's ghost-righting is all the more poignant for the ghosts that lurk at a distance, ghosts we suspect may never be righted.

While Linklater's ghosts are intimate and familial, while they are at a remove from the postcolonial contexts in which ghosts have been most robustly theorized, they offer a way forward for all who would look through rather than past historical ghosts—an answer in their attempt. If Park's concern is with "managing the ghostly effects" of change, Linklater additionally puts forth ghosts that effect change. These specters not only inspect the couple form, but, in the periphery of those gliding two shots, survey an outstretched landscape of displacement. Such a family portrait with ghosts—that faces the ghostly absences at the heart of love, that hears ghosts in speech and mimicry rather than merely spectating their form, that considers ghosts to be constitutive of Linklater's own form—captures their serious relational work. *Boyhood*'s anointing by critics has been traced to its presentation of "a family that can fracture without disintegrating"; *Before*'s lovers similarly waver and are similarly (ghost-) righted.<sup>65</sup> Céline and Jesse can risk dissolving into molecules and still hang onto the space-time continuum long enough for a holy moment or few. At last, for all who have called for it, a narrative (ghost-ridden and ghost-written and buoyed by ghost-righting) of learning to live through ghosts.

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## NOTES

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1. Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York: Penguin Press, 1985), 26.
2. Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 54.
3. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 24.
4. While length does not always index importance, it should be noted that Jesse's recollections on his deceased great-grandmother comprise, in a film devoted to lengthy conversations and *flânerie*, the first film's longest unbroken sequence of speech.
5. Bliss Cua Lim, "Spectral Times: The Ghost Film as Historical Allegory," *positions* 9, no. 2 (2001): 287.
6. Orrin Wang, "Ghost Theory," *Studies in Romanticism* 46, no. 2 (2007): 205.
7. The observation about the directionality of the train tracks comes from Peter Lurie, "Digital *Déjà Vu*: Cinephilia, Loss, and Medial Integrity in Linklater's *Before* Trilogy," *Film Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2015): 62.
8. Sara Ahmed (whose language, of affect aliens and promissory notes, often bears on my own) writes that happiness scripts direct us to marriage as a source of happiness and then use any happiness found there to generate marriage "as being good, as being what should be promoted as [a] good"; see *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 6. Cinema is rife with this promotion, and with heroines muffled by marriage, though this is not the focus of this paper.
9. For an illuminating discussion of an occasion on which Derrida was asked the same question, see Akira Lippit, *Ex-Cinema: From a Theory of Experimental Film and Video* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 94–95.
10. Such Steadicam reverse-tracking was later popularized by Sorkin in the *West Wing* but was also executed, by crane or on dollies, in works as early as *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) and *Paths of Glory* (1957).
11. Edgar Rubin, *Synsoplevede Figurer* [Visually experienced figures] (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 1915).
12. "Did it really happen that way?" is also a question Wang takes up in "Ghost Theory," as he investigates the *revenant* of romanticism as revolution; see esp. 208, 224.
13. Jacques Derrida, "Spectrographies," in Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2002), 117.
14. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994), xviii–xix; his emphasis.
15. For example, in a recent Special Dossier On Linklater in *Film Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2015), ghosts do not appear once.
16. The dialogue between ghosts and media, visual media especially, has been carefully sifted elsewhere; see Tom Gunning, "To Scan a Ghost: The Ontology of Mediated Presence," *Grey Room* 26 (Winter 2007): 94–127; Stefan Andriopoulos, *Ghostly Apparitions: German Idealism, The Gothic Novel, and Optical Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013); Raymond Bellour, "The Phantom's Due," in "A Special Issue on Expanded Photography," special issue, *Discourse* 16, no. 2 (1993): 164–174; Susan Bruce, "Sympathy for the Dead: (G)hosts, Hostilities and Mediums in Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others* and Postmortem Photography," *Discourse* 27, no. 2 (2005): 21–40; Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

17. Gunning, "Scan," 103.

18. Gunning, 103.

One also detects a certain wariness to articulate the precise relationship between ghostly bodies and living ones. To take one popular example, after viewers were disturbed by the suggestion that Casper the Friendly Ghost had once been a human child, the cartoon's creators, Harvey Comics, took to saying that Casper was a ghost simply because his parents were ghosts when they got married—deferring the question, "Whence ghostliness?" See Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark D. Arnold, "Baby-Boom Children and Harvey Comics After the Code: A Neighborhood of Little Girls and Boys," *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies* 3, no. 3 (2007).

19. Bruce, "Sympathy," 22.

Here I bracket longstanding debates about historically specific relationships between new technologies and new ways of apprehending spirits, including what Laura Mulvey would call the "technological uncanny," in *Death 24x a Section: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion, 2006), 27, quoted in *Cinematic Ghosts: Haunting and Spectrality from Silent Cinema to the Digital Era*, ed. Murray Leeder (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 6. In spite of Linklater's attention to new technologies like the rotoscope in his cinematic practice, *Before* concerns itself minimally with a wide range of quotidian technologies—telephony, photography, writing—and at times resists them outright (see page 8, 15–19). Whereas Sconce, for example, examines the sense of presence and sentience new communications technologies seem to emit, pressing on the "mystical powers" we ascribe to them and the "disembodied communion" they facilitate (*Haunted Media*, 6, 21), Linklater attends to forms of communion that hover between embodiment and disembodiment in channeling absent others.

20. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (London: Smith, Elder, 1870), 152.

21. Katherine A. Fowkes, *Giving Up the Ghost: Spirits, Ghosts, and Angels in Mainstream Comedy Films* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 12.

22. Fowkes, *Giving Up*, 15; Tom Ruffles, *Ghost Images: Cinema of the Afterlife* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2004), 8.

My examples here focus on Western cinema; it bears noting that in Asian cinema and scholarship thereof ghosts are tenured tropes, with a long career of creation and citation. Whether anonymous or ancestral, they are poised to render critique of modernization, globalization, and migration; see Andrew Hock Soon Ng, ed., *Asian Gothic* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008); Glen Mimura, *Ghostlife of Third Cinema: Asian American Film and Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Jane Chi Hyun Park, "Ghostliness in Asian Diasporic Film and Literature," *Asian Study Review* 35, no.1 (2011): 105–113; Lim, "Spectral Times." Ghost films have been a frequent target of censorship; as Laikwan Pang writes, "The very first mission of China's Film Inspection Committee was to abolish 'earlier martial-arts films featuring ghosts and spirits' in order to eliminate superstition and iniquitous thinking." "The State Against Ghosts: A Genealogy of China's Film Censorship Policy," *Screen* 52, no. 4 (2011): 463.

23. These parallel calls appear in Bruce, "Sympathy," 36; Park, "Ghostliness," 113; and Nancy Holland, "The Death of the Other/Father: A Feminist Reading of Derrida's Hauntology," *Hypatia* 16, no. 1 (2001): 69. They play on Derrida's line in *Specters*, xvii.

24. Lim, "Spectral Times," 319.

25. Lim, 287.



26. David T. Johnson notes the centrality of teachers and guides to many of Linklater's films; see "Not in One Dream, But in Many," *Film Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2015), especially 38. The pedagogical ghosting in *Before* is kin.
27. Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 74.
28. Barthes, 71.
29. Barthes, 101.
30. D. T. Max, "D.F.W.: Tracing the Ghostly Origins of a Phrase," *The New Yorker*, December 11, 2012, <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/d-f-w-tracing-the-ghostly-origins-of-a-phrase>.
31. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis (1959-1960): The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 121.
32. This question is not translated in the film; to retain a bit of its spectrality here, I translate it only in this first instance.
33. Recall that the cat, in Schrödinger's famous experiment, is trapped in a box with a contraption that will eventually kill it; watching from the outside, we cannot know whether the cat is alive or dead. Schrödinger coined the term *Verschränkung* (entanglement) to describe this dilemma; see Marie-Laure Ryan, "Narrative/Science Entanglements: On the Thousand and One Literary Lives of Schrodinger's Cat," *Narrative* 19, no. 2 (2011): 171–186.
- Linklater's lovers are also entangled: in the years between cinematic illuminations of their tale, we do not know whether Celine and Jesse are together or apart.
34. This line plays on Homi Bhabha's, who writes that the colonial mimic "mocks the monumentality of history," and who reminds us of the other histories that haunt the hinterlands of Linklater's text, especially where it refers to colonization (see pages 16–19). Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (Spring 1984): 128.
35. Bellour, "Phantom," 169.
36. Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time, Vol. III: The Guermentes Way*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff (1913; repr., New York: Modern Library, 1998), 357.
37. These experiences accord with Avery Gordon's observation that "[b]eing haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will [...] into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition"—in Jesse's case, that his life is a shadow of the one he should have shared with Céline. See *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008), 8.
38. His plight is a dark reflection of Andre Breton's, who wrote, in *Mad Love* (1937; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 89:

Where are you? I am playing hide and seek with ghosts. But I know I will end up finding you, and the whole world will be newly lit because we love each other, because a chain of illuminations passes through us.

Both play "hide and seek with ghosts," but only Breton is confident that the adored ghost will be found through the "chain of illuminations" that links them. In *Before*, these links are formed later, through the contemporary heliograms that are Linklater's titles: *Sunrise, Sunset, Midnight*.

39. T. S. Eliot, *Prufrock, and Other Observations* (New York: Knopf, 1920).
40. Barthes, *ALD*, 23.
41. Chakrabarty in Lim, "Spectral Times," 293.
42. Derrida, *Specters*, 139; his emphasis.
43. Lim, "Spectral Times," 309.
44. Lim, 318.
45. Derrida, *Specters*, xix.
46. Derrida, *Specters*, xviii–xix, original emphasis.
47. Steven Shaviro, "Emotion Capture: Affect in Digital Film," *Projections* 1, no. 2 (2007): 68.
48. Shaviro, 68.
49. Bellour, "Phantom," 168.
50. Bellour, 168.
51. Barthes, *ALD*, 207.
52. Barthes, 155.
53. Akira Lippit, "Reflections on Spectral Life," *Discourse* 30, no. 1–2 (2008): 246.
54. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 54.
55. Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 48–9.
56. David Denby, "Wanderers," *The New Yorker*, July 5, 2004.  
 Just examine what it keeps in its own albums: the posters that advertise the films all bear the couple in the midst of a holy moment, at the sites where Jesse speaks as Auden (in *Sunrise*) and as 82-year-old Celine (in *Midnight*), and at the site where Jesse is rendered speechless (in *Sunset*) by Celine's recollection of the now-absent red in his younger self's beard: "I remembered that, and I missed it."
57. Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, "Star," trans. John Johnston, *October* 1 (Spring 1976): 88. In Lippit, *Ex-Cinema*, 91.
58. Shaviro, "Emotion Capture;" Maja Manojlovic, "'Dream Is Destiny': Waking Life and the Digital Aesthetics of the In-between," *Discourse* 33, no 2 (2011): 184–202.
59. Manojlovic, 195.
60. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 193; in Manojlovic, "Dream," 197.
61. Gilles Deleuze, "Immanence: A Life," in *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 29. Quoted in Manojlovic, "Dream," 184.
62. Park, "Ghostliness," 112–113.
63. Park, 113.
64. Park, 113.
65. B. Ruby Rich, "The Right Time and Place: Richard Linklater's Instant Epic," *Film Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (2014): 42–74, 46.