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'Seeing' ghosts: referential practice and experiencing uncanny events together.

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*'SEEING' GHOSTS:
REFERENTIAL PRACTICE AND
EXPERIENCING UNCANNY
EVENTS TOGETHER*

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Context

- Why study paranormal experiences?
 - 2/5 UK population reported an experience (Castro, Burrows & Wooffitt, 2014)
 - Seeking paranormal experiences has become a 'professionalised' activity - over 4,000 paranormal groups in the USA (Eaton, 2018)

- The challenge
 - Experiences are often spontaneous, subjective and personal – also essentially 'invisible'
 - We know relatively little about what happens when an experience takes place and how people make sense of it
 - Why do some experiences become 'uncanny'?

- Questions:
 - How do people experience paranormal events together?
 - How do people interpret and experience these events as uncanny?



Fig. 2. — Le globes de feu dans la salle.

Approach



- Collection of video data from personal involvement in a paranormal groups between 2006-2010
- Video data of groups (3-10) conducting paranormal investigations across the UK
- Collected prior to doctoral research – I am a participant in the data
- Selected instances where an experience occurs for analysis
- <https://youtu.be/83YArG2KrnM>

Did you feel 'that'?

- Use of the term 'that' when referring to events carries with it important social implications:
 - Acts as a reference
 - Ambiguous ('that' is not immediately defined)
 - Invites others to participate in the discovery and categorisation of 'that'



“what was that?”

“was that you?”



Extract 2.13

Grandfather Clock

17 G Are you scared (0.5) [of us?
18 [(A lifts her gaze off the board and
19 looks to top left of camera, G follows A's gaze)
20 (Unknown tap and then quiet "ooooo" (moaning) sound can be
21 heard. C looks towards the sound. A looks at C)
22 A [What the fuck is that? <--
23 A [(A winces whilst speaking. C and G look at A)
24 (Gauss meter can be heard increasing in the background)
25 C [Ehh-
26 [(C shakes her head whilst looking at A)

5.1.1 what that

Extract 2.1

Spooksfest

272 [(Scraping sound)
273 [(B and F look suddenly over the right of the room. F
274 jumps)
275 F [what[the- .hhhh sorry <--
276 B [what the hell was that .hhh
277 [(B and F look at each other, F jumps backwards
278 with hands up at face. B looks round to D)

Seeing Ghosts in Empty Spaces

- 'That' reference often accompanied by identification of an empty space through gesture/ embodied action.
- An empty space also carries important features – it indicates that something has caused the 'event' that is not physically present (possibly a ghost!)

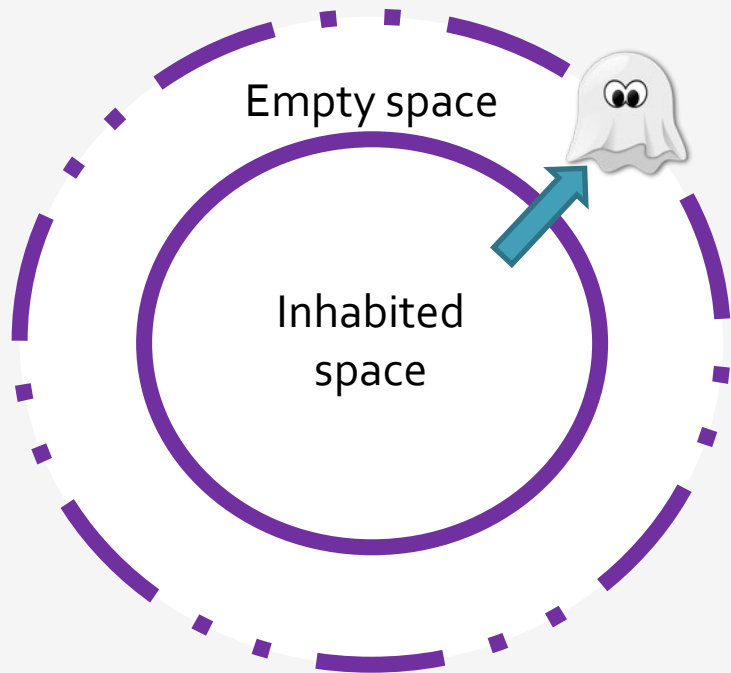


Figure 3.6 Grandfather Clock: A points to space

A: No it's not the same it's (.) it's(.)

C

th[ere

[It is yeah



114: A points to space

115: C turns to space

Figure 3.7
Tolbooth Bang: B points out of doorway

A: where did that come from?

B: °over°

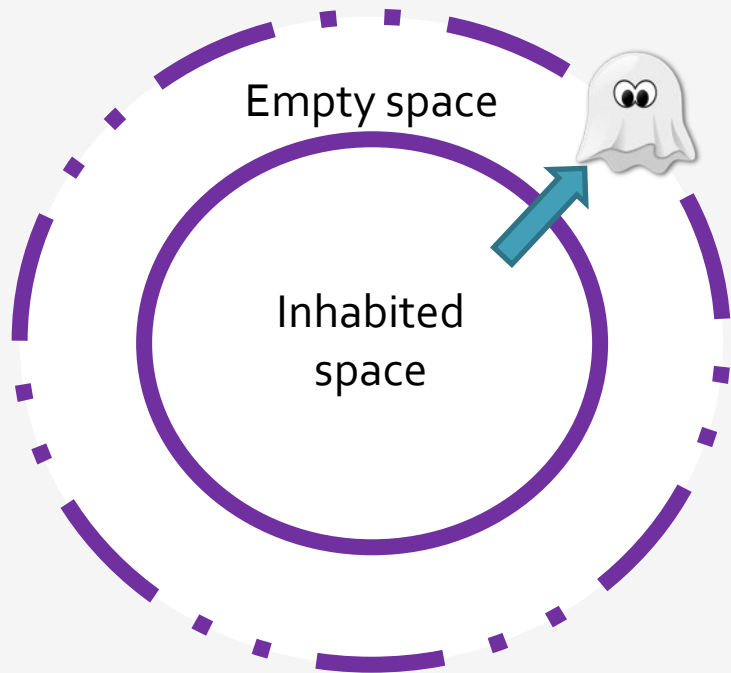


11: B holds hands up



13: B points out of doorway

Seeing Ghosts in Empty Spaces



- 'That' reference often accompanied by identification of an empty space through deictic gestures/ embodied action.
- An empty space also carries important features – it indicates that something has caused the 'event' that is not physically present (possibly a ghost!)

Multimodal action towards empty space locates an event and in doing so enables it to be shared and understood in the context of a uncanny/ normal explanation

Feeling 'spirits'

- Events are often experienced on or in the body (touch, feeling, temperature change...)
- Individuals display and communicate these experiences through embodied actions
- They also use embodied action to verify and substantiate uncanny qualities of an event



Figure 4.1
Alley Cat: C grabs arm

46: C grabs left arm



46: "Uh I just got- felt like
I got touched in the arm"

77: C looks towards A and
touches behind his left
shoulder



77: "[No like it was right-
it was up on my arm
right there"

Feeling 'spirits'

- Events are often experienced on or in the body (touch, feeling, temperature change...)
- Individuals display and communicate these experiences through embodied actions
- They also use embodied action to verify and substantiate uncanny qualities of an event
- They also communicate and describe the features of external events using embodied actions

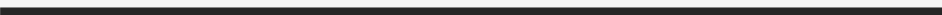
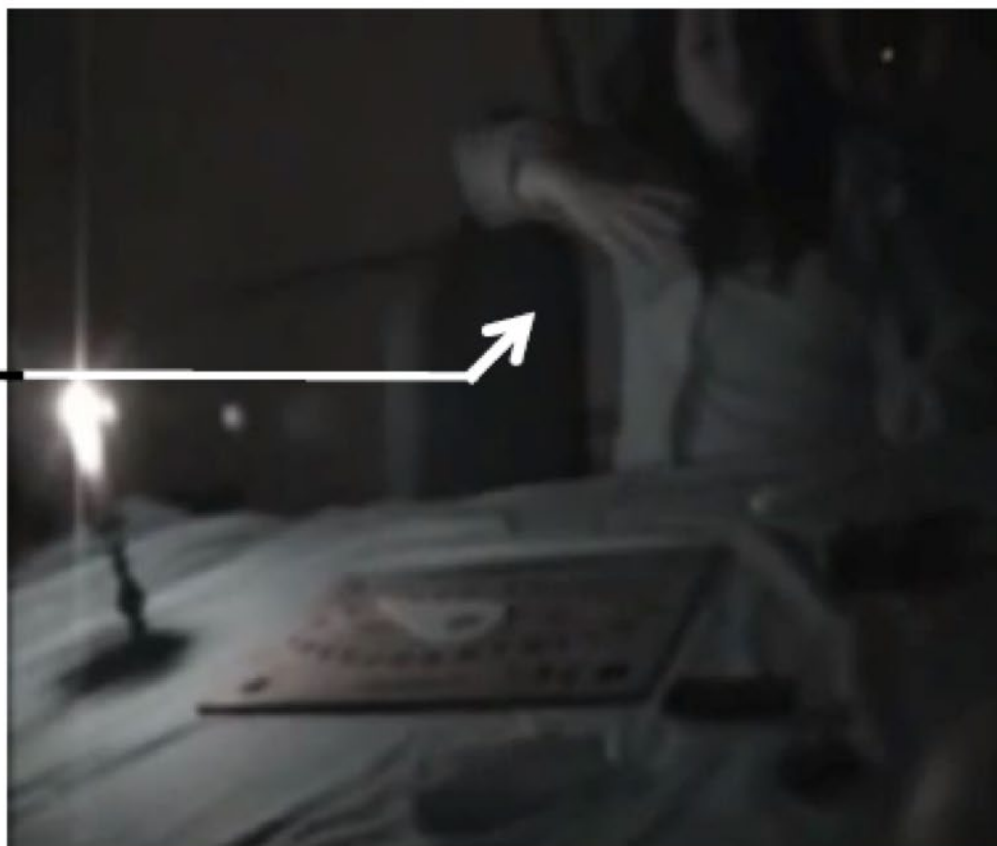


Figure 3.3
Grandfather Clock: A gestures to heart

A: it's like a heartbeat

*122: A
gestures to
her heart*



Feeling 'spirits'

- Events are often experienced on or in the body (touch, feeling, temperature change...)
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- They also communicate and describe the features of external events using embodied actions

Individuals present, share and communicate the uncanny qualities of their experience through multimodal and embodied action



Some reflections...

- Paranormal experiences are communicated, shared and made sense of through multimodal and embodied action
 - Studying interaction enabled a closer analysis of how people make sense of uncanny events and experience these collectively – *establishing the status of an uncanny event is a social activity*
 - Groups collectively 'see' ghosts together constructing a 'visible' referent from an invisible source, and this is achieved through referential action and interaction.
 - These events are categorised in relation to the interaction at hand, and characterised as uncanny through interactions between people and space.
 - 'Seeing' ghosts collectively is an interactional achievement.
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