

# Did you feel that? Multimodal interactions and making sense of uncanny events.

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*(Full abstract, with references)*

This presentation examines the application of video data and conversation analysis in the study of paranormal experiences. Paranormal experiences can be defined as instances "in which a person perceives phenomena that appear to defy scientific explanation" (McDonald, 1994: 35). In Britain alone, two-fifths of the population have reported a paranormal experience (Castro, Burrows and Wooffitt, 2014), and nearly one-fifth of Americans claim to have felt or sensed a presence (Lipka, 2015). Scholars have explored the psychological (French and Stone, 2013) and broader sociological (Goode, 2000) explanations for individual experiences; however, there is currently limited research into collective paranormal events. This paper will draw upon video data of paranormal research groups and the moments in which an uncanny event occurs. These events are often subjective in nature - experienced by individuals as embodied feelings, sensations or visions. This creates an interactive challenge for those participating in paranormal groups, who seek to validate and substantiate their paranormal claims through shared experiences. Drawing upon video data, this presentation will examine how the study of multimodal activities during paranormal events can help us to understand how people share and make sense of these experiences. It will also reflect on the opportunities and challenges presented by combining retrospective ethnographic knowledge and conversation analysis in this context. Finally, consideration will be given to combining video data, ethnographic knowledge and conversation analysis, and how doing so can provide potential benefit to wider research settings. It is proposed that paranormal experiences are communicated, shared and made sense of through embodied and multimodal activities. Furthermore, these activities help not only to collectively share experience, but also to establish the uncanny quality of paranormal events.

### References

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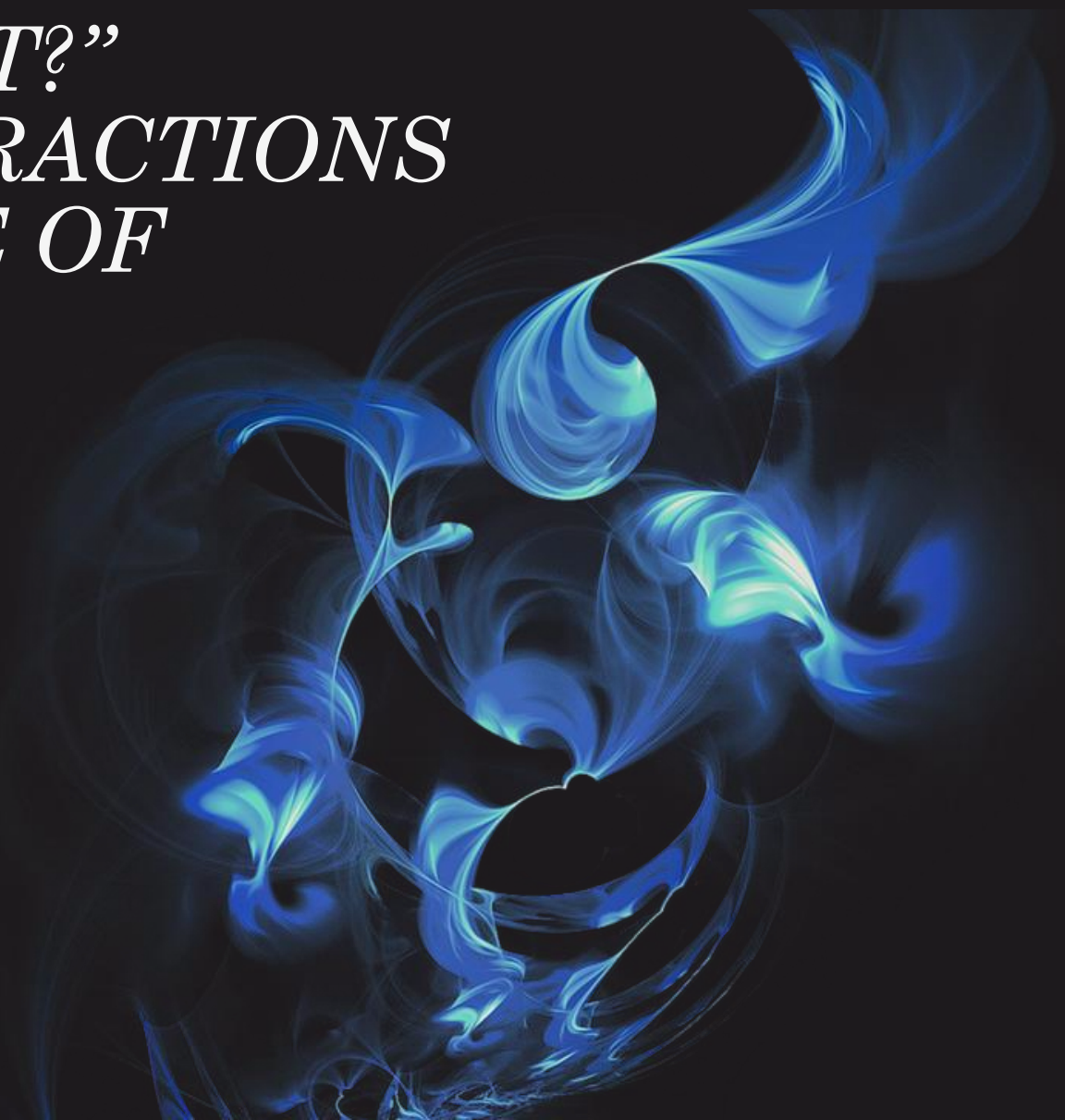
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*“DID YOU FEEL THAT?”  
MULTIMODAL INTERACTIONS  
AND MAKING SENSE OF  
UNCANNY EVENTS*

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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
  - 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/3mLMjX-tRjl>

# *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)

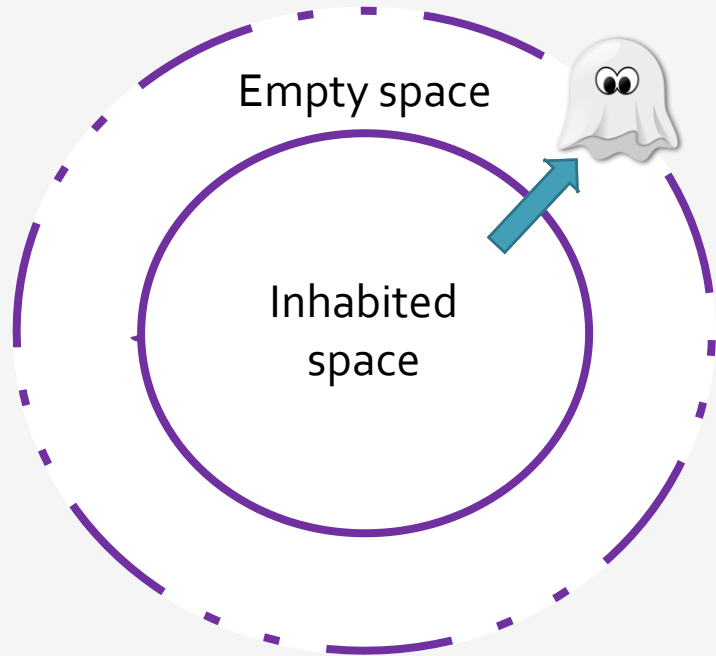
5.1.1 what that

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)

# *Empty space*

- '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!)



**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**



### 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*

# *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

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



**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"

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



**Figure 3.3**  
**Grandfather Clock: A gestures to heart**

A: it's like a heartbeat

122: A  
gestures to  
her heart



# *Some reflections...*

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- 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*
  - Reflective ethnographic knowledge helped to provide context, but can present some challenges in analyzing 'self' (group data sessions helped with this)
  - The benefits of ethnographic knowledge surpassed challenges – context, cultural understanding, inner experience – and may be of benefit to wider settings
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