

The Place of Ghosts

Despite no scientific evidence for ghosts in our in science orientated society ghosts will not seem to go away. My dissertation investigates the continuing fascination with ghosts that persists in society from a phenomenological perspective. The aim is to understand how people relate to the places they inhabit, and how ghosts fit in to the personal, social, and community level locational frameworks they construct.

Places matter to us, we live in them, we name them and move through them. They are the locations within which our entire lives and the lives of the people around us exist. Throughout our lives we create a complex locational framework. Within this framework exists concepts such as home, work, school, places for worship or socialisation, the list goes on. It is our lived experience within the world which creates these meaningful places for us (Casey 1996). Social and physical landscapes intertwine, however there is a temporal landscape to place whereby we envisage our meaningful places through time. Ghosts are a persistent part of our culture, it seems everyone has or knows a ghost story. This dissertation investigates what these ghost stories may tell us about people, our world, and how we relate to our places. Stories of ghosts appear to highlight the significance of the impact that we have on the spaces we inhabit, even after moving on. Ghosts connect us to the social past, they are generally conceived as the people who went before us. Their continued presence reminds us that we share space with them and our feelings about them reflect our feelings about places.

This dissertation explores the presence of ghosts as a phenomenological aspect of how people exist within and shape the places they inhabit.

The scholarship I intend to use is focused heavily around phenomenology of place using scholars such as Edward Casey, Michael Mayerfeld bell, and Caron Lipman. Casey explores the 'lived experience' of place, and the distinction between space and place from a phenomenological perspective (Casey 1996). Mayerfeld Bell takes this phenomenological approach to place and uses his own experience to write reflexively on how places elicit a sense of the people who used to inhabit them (Mayerfeld Bell 1997). His

definition of ghost, 'the sense of the presence of those who are not physically there,' (Mayerfeld Bell 1997:813) is broader than some, as he finds no necessity for a sighting of a physical manifestation of someone who has passed on. My dissertation will use this definition too, as it enables all the stories I have collected to be included in the discussion. Lipman (currently reading) explores the everyday experiences of those who live with 'anomalous' occurrences within their homes (Lipman 2016).

Methodology wise, I have collected ghost stories and anecdotes via unstructured interview. It was important not to lead people in telling their stories to maintain the authenticity of the experience. From these stories I have been identifying common themes and motifs in order to analyse what is recurrent in the experience of ghosts. The main theme I have found so far is location, which has changed my dissertation from an exploration of what ghosts teach us about life and death, as was originally intended, to the investigation of the phenomenology of place that it is now. Because of this change in direction, I plan to use autoethnography to explore my personal experience of place. This will ideally help me understand others perspective, and as I am using a phenomenological approach to place that emphasises the lived experience it is important that I have a solid understanding of lived experience from which to write. I will be using Kim Etherington and Charlotte Davies as a starting point for how to write reflexively (Charlotte Aull. Davies 1999; Etherington 2004).

The feedback to my presentation made me realise my dissertation was a little confused, as I got caught up in reading all the theory, so I did not have a clear angle to write from, nor was I placing enough emphasis on the participants themselves. It is the people that these ghost stories come from that are at the centre of the dissertation, as their ghost stories provide an insight into how they have experienced the places they inhabit. Therefore the dissertation will focus more on the people and their experience of place with the ghost stories illustrating how they relate to these places.

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