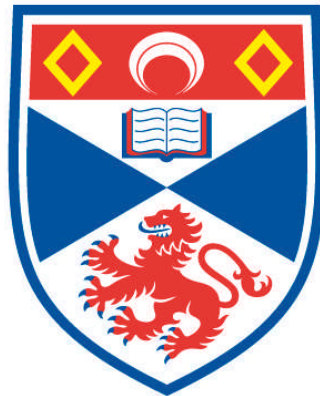


PARANORMAL TOURISM IN EDINBURGH
STORYTELLING, APPROPRIATING GHOST CULTURE AND
PRESENTING AN UNCANNY HERITAGE

Elizabeth Holzhauser

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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Paranormal Tourism in Edinburgh

**Storytelling, Appropriating Ghost Culture and Presenting an Uncanny
Heritage**

Elizabeth Holzhauser



University of
St Andrews

**This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD at the University of St
Andrews**

Date of Submission

3 February 2015

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I, Elizabeth Holzhauser, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 78,000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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ABSTRACT

The paranormal industry in Edinburgh has become a thriving niche within the country's tourist market. While ghost walks have been explored in anthropology from the perspective of spectacle, this thesis investigates and analyses the cultural framework which has furthered the success of the industry. Namely, the ways in which the paranormal industry have appropriated the beliefs and practices of an overarching ghost culture: a community of believers, investigators, mediums, and all those who actively attempt to engage with the paranormal.

The increased visibility of the paranormal within popular culture has spurred a wide interest in the unknown and unexplained. Ghost hunting television shows and the prevalence of ghost stories has inspired the desire for unique experiences, and for audiences to contextualise the supernatural within their own lives. The paranormal industry has grown to accommodate this intense, active enthusiasm for all things spectral, and belief has become a commodity.

This burgeoning fascination in ghosts has become an important aspect of how Scotland is sold as a destination. While commercial paranormal industries exist in other cities around the world, the historical perception of Scotland as *other* has created a precedence for the connection between Scottish national identity and the spectral. This thesis further investigates the ways in which the tourist industry continues to solidify the connection between Scottish heritage and the paranormal.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	10
INTRODUCTION	11
A On Scottish Tourism and the Growth of Ghost Culture	
B Spiritualism, the Uncanny, and Ghost Belief in Edinburgh's Tourism Industry	14
C Research Objective	17
D Thesis Inspiration Through Literature and Popular Culture	20
E About the Edinburgh Vaults: A Representative Microcosm of the Commercial Paranormal Industry	23
F Fieldwork: Ghost Hunting, Walks, and Medium Readings	25
G Fieldwork Complications	27
H Chapter Outlines	29
CHAPTER 1:	34
Ghosts in Scotland: Tourism History, the Scottish Brand, Victorian Spiritualism, and the Commercialisation of the Supernatural	
1.1 The Start of Tourism and the Scottish Brand	38
1.2 The Historical Representation of Ghosts Through Literature and Media	43
1.3 The Start of the Ghost Hunt and the Commercial Exploitation Of the Supernatural	49
1.4 The Rise of Victorian Spiritualism and Ghosts in Mainstream Culture	52
1.5 The Clash Between Spiritualist and Scientific Communities	54
1.6 The Phonograph: Recording Spirit Voices on the Other Side	59

1.7	Spirit Photography: The Photograph as Evidence of Spirits	62
1.8	Conclusion	66
CHAPTER 2:		68
Walking Tours: The Ghost Space, Tour Structure and Storytelling, Themes and Symbols		
2.1	Assembling the Ghostly Landscape: The Nature of the “Ghost Space”	70
2.2	Tour Structure, Isolation, and the Benefit of Darkness	76
2.3	Ghost Tour Terminology, Ghost Types, and the Incorporation of the Ghost Hunt for the Tourist Experience	85
2.4	The Ghosts on Edinburgh Tours: Similarities, Themes and Symbols	92
	2.4.2 The Story of the Malevolent Spirit: Violence and Danger	
	In the Safe Tourist Space, the Gendered Nature of Hauntings	
	2.4.2 The Story of the Mass Death: Suffering, Torture, and Murder	100
2.5	Conclusion	108
CHAPTER 3:		109
The Ghost Tour as Theatre: Setting the Stage, Death as a Spectacle, and Constructing Authenticity		
3.1	Recreating Historical Edinburgh Through Macabre Scenes	112
3.2	The Edinburgh Mob: The Role of the Tourist and the Public Spectacle of Torture Scenes	119
3.3	The Tourist Experience as a Rite of Passage	122
3.4	Perspectives on Authenticity	126
	3.4.1 Discussions of Authenticity and How Paranormal Events Emphasise Authenticity of Emotion	
	3.4.2 Subverting Authenticity	131

3.4.3	Hauntings as a Form of Authenticity	133
3.5	The Desequestering of Death	135
3.6	Conclusion	139
 CHAPTER 4:		140
The Mediumship: Spirit Communication and Creating a Ghostly Landscape		
4.1	Spirit Communication with Lenore: Creating the Emotional Link Between the Living and the Dead	144
4.2	On Vigils: Their Connection to Ancient Traditions and Sacred Time, Liminal and Liminoid Experiences	152
4.3	A Vigil with Danny: Creating a Sensory Ghost Space	156
4.4	A Vigil with Mary: Sensory Landscapes, Shamanism, and Spirit Vessels	165
4.5	Conclusion	172
 CHAPTER 5:		173
The Commercialisation of Ghost Hunting, and How Tourism Has Affected Scotland's Ghost Culture		
5.1	Sharing a Space with Tourists: How the Tourist Industry Has Impacted Paranormal Investigation	175
5.2	Tourism in the Investigatory Space: Ghost Investigations and Ghost Hunting, Comparisons and Methods, Beliefs and Intent	182
5.3	Similarities in Beliefs and Methods Between Ghost Hunters and Ghost Investigators	184
5.3.1	The Idea of the "Pure" Space	
5.3.2	Ghost Investigation Gear and Perceiving the Ghost Space With the Aid of Technology	186

5.3.3	The Combination of Science and Myth, Reinterpreting Ghost Stories	191
5.6	A Commercial Investigation with John: Spending a Night in the South Bridge Vaults	194
5.7	Independent Investigation with Douglas: The Roles of the Team, Sensitives, and Spending a Night in an Abandoned Hospital	202
5.8	Conclusion	210
CHAPTER 6:		211
Ghosts in Popular Culture: Online Paranormal Communities, and the Rise of the Televised Ghost Hunt		
6.1	My Ghost Story: A Personal Narrative of the Supernatural	214
6.2	Ghost Hunting: The Televised Ghost Hunt and the Changing Role of the Armchair Ghost Hunter	226
6.3	Conclusion	239
DISCUSSION		240
CONCLUSION		247
APPENDIX A		252
APPENDIX B		253
BIBLIOGRAPHY		255

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1:** A Photograph of table-tipping. Taken 1898 with medium Eusapia Palladino.
- Figure 2:** Davenport Bros and Fay: Prof. W.M. Fay's Dark Séance Advert from the 1850s.
- Figure 3:** The Medium Eva C. with a Materialisation on Her Head and a Luminous Apparition Between Her Hands, 1912
- Figure 4:** Photograph by Sybell Corbet, 1891, believed to have captured the spirit of Lord Combermere.
- Figure 5:** Photograph by Frederick Hudson c. 1874, featuring medium Florence Cook in a trance.
- Figure 6:** One of the hallways within the vaults capturing an orb.
- Figure 7:** Another view of the vaults.

INTRODUCTION

On Scottish Tourism and the Growth of Ghost Culture

Tourism is one of Scotland's biggest industries, with each year seeing a growth in both domestic and overseas visitors. A report conducted by Deloitte and commissioned by VisitBritain found that Scottish tourism was worth about £11.6 billion in 2013. Statistics show that most tourists in Scotland are UK citizens (73%; with 23% being Scottish, and 50% from the rest of the UK). There are over 292,000 jobs within the industry, equating to 10.9% of all jobs in Scotland. Deloitte is predicting that tourism could be worth up to £23.1 billion in the next 10 years ("Tourism Jobs and Growth", 2013).

Edinburgh's ghost tours have become a lucrative niche market within Scotland's travel industry. While there are no public statistical figures on these tours specifically, their popularity signifies an important aspect of how Scotland is sold as a destination. The connection between Scotland and the paranormal has been noted as a trend in VisitScotland's annual tourism survey; according to the Paranormal Witness Report, which has recorded over 700 paranormal sightings over the last 25 years, Edinburgh and Glasgow have been named as the UK's spookiest cities ("Trends and Statistics", 2013). The incorporation of ghosts as a critical aspect of Scottish heritage has become a key feature of the country's brand and how it is packaged for the tourist experience. As Inglis and Homes (2003) state, "Scotland's heritage is often presented to tourists today as involving paranormal and ghostly matters, with the presence of spectres from the past being represented as continuing to haunt its contemporary landscape" (51). The

commercialisation of the supernatural has become a burgeoning industry, with a wide range of events catering to those seeking unique experiences: from tours to ghost hunts to nights with mediums.

The paranormal industry has only become more successful and varied since the commencement of my research, with new events and tours emerging on a regular basis. Indeed, after the submission of this thesis, Scotland will be set to host its first paranormal festival. Scottish film producer Peter Broughan, the festival's founder and host, has stated that his goal is to make Halloween in Scotland as big as Hogmanay. He notes that growing interest in a supernatural Scotland has created the perfect conditions for such a festival to attract tourists from around the world:

Scotland has a great history of paranormal culture and mythology, and is associated in the international public mind with ghosts and myths and legends and all the rest of it, and I think a lot of people come to Scotland because they are fascinated by the history, and the castles, but also the supernatural strain that goes right through the centre of Scottish culture (McIver, 2013).

Broughan's statement summarises a fundamental argument of this thesis: Scottish culture and its history have become presented through the lens of the spectral, and the success of its commercial ghost industry is reflective of an increasing cultural interest in the paranormal.

Growing visibility of the supernatural in mainstream media – which includes books, television, and websites – mirrors this thriving fascination in the unknown. A recent survey conducted by OnePoll in 2014 that was commissioned by UKTV's Watch Channel questioned 2,000 British adults on supernatural phenomena. The results show that people are now more likely to believe in the paranormal than in a God (55% over 49%). Of the different unexplained phenomena included in the poll, belief in ghosts was the most widespread and accepted (33%). A

quarter (25%) of those claimed they had witnessed something they could not explain, and 16% were influenced by popular culture, including TV or film (OnePoll, 2014).

These figures point to a consistent, measured increase in paranormal belief for the last six decades. In the 1950s, only 10% of the British population believed in ghosts. By 1995, that number had risen to 31% (Gill, Hadaway, and Marler 1998), and by 2008, the number had reached 40% (ComRes, 2008). One could interpret the statistical results to a rise in religious belief, but that simply is not the case. Indeed, the British Social Attitudes Survey conducted in 2011 shows that religion is declining within the United Kingdom. The number of those who describe themselves as non-religious has increased from 31% to 50% in the last 30 years. Amongst young people between the ages of 18-24, those who identify as religious is just 36% (British Social Attitudes Survey, 2010). The figures in Scotland are even more drastic. In a 2001 census conducted by the Scottish Household Survey, 65% of Scots considered themselves to be Christian. By 2008, that figure had fallen to 57%. In 2009, the proportion of those who identify as non-religious passed half for the first time (“Declining Faith in Scotland?”, 2011).

While the connection between a decrease in religion in the United Kingdom and an increase in ghost belief is arguable, these statistics point to a single, vital inference: paranormal belief transcends religion. The paranormal has an appeal that is all-encompassing; its popularity on a widespread, international level points to an interest in unexplained phenomena. Fascination with the paranormal and the growing popularity of ghosts in popular culture has created a thriving commercial industry in Edinburgh that presents history and ghosts as inextricably entwined.

While tourists themselves may range between sceptic and believer, the success of Edinburgh's commercial paranormal industry is significant. Indeed, there are a number of events I discuss in this thesis which are specifically tailored for believers – including ones which encourage tourists to investigate the supernatural using ghost hunting tools to collect evidence of spectral phenomena. Within this thesis, I will be approaching tourism in Edinburgh (specifically in the South Bridge Vaults) as a microcosm of a wider, overarching *ghost culture*. I use the phrase *ghost culture* throughout this thesis to refer to a community at large that consists of: believers; ghost investigators and hunters; Spiritualist mediums and non-Spiritualist mediums. Their beliefs, scientific tools, and practices have been appropriated by tourism and popular culture, and have become the various amalgamated aspects of Edinburgh's commercial industry.¹

Spiritualism, the Uncanny, and Ghost Belief in Edinburgh's Tourism Industry

A primary contextual point in this thesis is a cultural notion of the Scottish uncanny and *otherness*, which I discuss from an historical, folkloric and contemporary point throughout. The notion of Scotland as a country of mystical Celts and spectral landscapes influenced my decision to specifically conduct my field research here. While ghost tours have become a prominent tourist draw in cities across the world, Scotland is an exceptional instance in which the

¹ At this point, I would like to clarify that while many individuals within ghost culture share similar beliefs, they are not always in agreement. Spiritualists, for example, have certain different beliefs from non-Spiritualist mediums, which are also different from ghost investigators. For the sake of brevity, clarity and ease, I have decided to utilize this term. However, within this thesis, I will use specific terms to address and account for differences in paranormal philosophies.

supernatural has become historically linked with its national identity. The view of Scotland as a place connected to the uncanny spread outside the country (particularly to England, historically Scotland's primary tourist demographic) through fiction that emerged during late 18th and 19th centuries, which combined Scottish folklore with the Gothic and Romantic aesthetic. Ian Duncan (2007) notes that the difference between Scottish and English Gothics is particularly apparent in the way they present *otherness*; English works concentrated on their ideas of the foreign or aristocratic *other*, either from a religious or socio-economic standpoint, while Scottish Gothics tackled nationality. He further argues that the Scottish Gothic consisted of "an association between the *national* and the *uncanny or supernatural*. . .[it] represents (with greater historical and anthropological specificity than England) the uncanny recursion of an ancestral identity alienated from modern life" (188). G. Gregory Smith famously referred to this "combination of opposites" as the "Caledonian anti-syzygy", where reality and the uncanny went hand in hand in a "jostling of contraries" (1919: 4). While I discuss this subject more in depth from an historical framework in the first chapter of this thesis, I feel it is important to note that the long, firmly rooted past of the Scottish uncanny is why I chose Scotland – its tourist industry, its ghost culture, and its folklore – as the focal point of this thesis. This connection between the supernatural and Scotland as a nation is the basis for its tourist industry and is what separates its industry from paranormal tours elsewhere in the world.

David Pecard and Michael DiGiovine (2014) note that this sense of nation-identifying *otherness* is purposeful from a commercial context. The "touristic Self" is explored through heritage sites that evoke cultural pasts and the discovery of hidden Selves in a social setting (4). By using spectres and the supernatural as a tourist draw, companies tap into the human desire for exploration and for the unknown, as well as further constructing a form of *autoethnographic*

expression, where they represent a site's history by engaging with the tourist's preconceived notions about a place (Pratt, 1992, 2008: 9). This process involves both collaborating with and appropriating "symbols" of national Scottish identity — in this case, its historic uncanny. The tour guide plays a part in entwining history with the spectral as tourists move through the physical space, forming what David Hesse refers to as a *sensuous history* (2013: 172). The stories are meant to evoke *feelings* within one's body, sensations of fear or adrenaline that may produce responses associated with ghostly presences, such as hair standing on end, or an awareness of noises in the dark setting. The tour becomes a journey that encourages a mind/body connection: the senses with contexts of experience (notions of ghostliness). Both play into a form of *otherness* — a Self-Other, in this instance — in which the tourist engages with their own beliefs surrounding the spiritual realm, either as believer or sceptic (Picard and Di Giovine, 2014: 4). However, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the difficulty in exploring what is, in part, a "feeling-based" subject such as ghost belief, what Diana Espirito Santo and Ruy Blanes call an "anthropology of intangibles". Their approach is to discuss these intangibles in tandem with broader debates on the interrelatedness between the Self and context, the environment and conceptual experience (2014: 4). This is an approach I have adopted within my work, as the subject of ghost belief ties into several overarching discussions in this thesis, particularly with regards to *otherness* and ideas of authenticity.

In the case of ghost tourism, *otherness* and notions of authenticity are further constructed by tourist companies through an ever-changing series of juxtapositions which deliberately evoke the *Caledonian anti-syzygy*: the historical site with the present site; life and afterlife; folklore stories with examples of tourist encounters with spirits. The historic site is firmly linked to the unknown, unfamiliar or uncanny. Blanes and Espirito Santo note how invisibilities and absences

play into the effect of ghost stories by “evoking anxieties, nostalgia and curiosity” and that “markers of absence paradoxically serve to draw and direct attention to presence, or a longing for it” (2014: 11). These images draw not only from Scottish folk belief and Gothic fiction² but from wider cultural ideas of mysticism, spiritism, and mediumship. Indeed, tour companies occasionally use mediums in their events to communicate with spirits on behalf of the living. In doing so, the tour allows for an immediate, personal interaction with the spirit world³, a connection to the *other* that is at least partially framed by the Self. Picard and Di Giovine note that this “Self-Other” relationship involves the articulation between personal experience and what visitors consume in tourism (2014: 6). Spiritualism and mediumship become a method through which tours balance commercialism with authenticity. The spirit world becomes accessible, “real”, and even measurable⁴ — for a fee.

Research Objective

The original objective of this research was to investigate the structure and storytelling on Edinburgh’s ghost tours. I sought to explore modern conceptualisations of the supernatural and how these ideas continue to play a role in the ghost tour industry. Within that focus was a look at notions of death and spectacle and how both emerged within tour structure, organisation, and storytelling. To clarify how I came to my original aim: much of the literature I had encountered on ghost tourism approached the content from a similarly limited viewpoint. Analyses presented

² notably Sir Walter Scott’s work, which I discuss in chapter 1.

³ Especially in the instance of the first vignette I detail in Chapter 4.

⁴ Through the use of ghost investigation tools on tours; See: Chapter 5.

tour structure as something largely self-contained, which portrayed history and Scottish culture from a paranormal perspective. In researching tourism during my early fieldwork, I came to adopt this narrowed outlook. Thus, I initially sought to focus this thesis on the themes presented within the context of walking tours. Though I continued to explore these topics within my research, I realised that approaching Edinburgh's paranormal industry from solely these objectives would have presented a limited and, frankly, superficial viewpoint of such a vibrant, expanding industry.

The more time I spent in the field, I came to understand that Edinburgh's paranormal tours mirror a larger ghost culture. Exclusively researching walking tours would have ignored the vital historical connection between Scotland and the supernatural that is the basis for its modern commercial industry. I also would have neglected the aspects of ghost culture that have made its industry such a success: the mediumship, ghost hunting, and the prevalence of the paranormal within popular culture. The latter, especially, has had a tremendous effect on both on Edinburgh's ghost culture and its growing tourism numbers. Key haunted locations within the city have been featured on television shows such as *Most Haunted* and *Ghost Adventures*, attracting a number of visitors seeking the paranormal for themselves.

The paranormal industry presents itself, in part, as an opportunity for tourists to act as participants rather than spectators. Burgeoning numbers of amateur ghost hunters have sparked new events in Edinburgh's tourist industry, including paid-for ghost hunts that are advertised as an experience "as seen on TV", séances, and nights spent in famously haunted locales. The different elements of wider ghost culture that I observed in tours include: the Scottish brand (an historical entwining of Scottish identity and locations with the paranormal); ghost hunting, which

includes both the terminology and tools used on investigations; Spiritualism, by incorporating mediums and other Spiritualist elements in commercial events; folklore and ritualistic ideas about spectres, which appear in the structure of events.

Thus, the objective of this research shifted to accommodate my new collected data, interviews, and observations. To juxtapose my research on walking tours, I sought to explore the aspects of ghost culture that have become appropriated by the commercial paranormal industry and packaged for visitor experience. This homogenising of ghost culture elements has had the dual effect of attracting visitors who are seeking unique experiences, as well as affecting the ghost culture in such a way that it is becoming increasingly tied with the commercial industry. While these observations could potentially be made in reference to existing paranormal industries elsewhere (cities within the United States, especially), Scotland is a special case. The perception of Scotland as *other* and the historical projection of the Scottish landscape as being tied with the mystical Celt have created a precedence for the link between Scottish national identity, its history and ghosts in contemporary commercial industries. This thesis will also investigate the ways in which Scottish otherness is further solidified in tours, as well as exploring the cultural framework for how the paranormal community and industry continues to grow and attract both curious visitors and believers alike.

Thesis Inspiration Through Literature and Popular Culture

The prominent representation of the paranormal on television captured my attention long before I began my research. A cursory glance at different networks revealed dozens of shows created around supernatural themes, from *My Ghost Story* on the Biography Channel to *Ghost Adventures* on the Travel Channel. Each station had their own spin on the genre, portraying ghost hunts with hand-held cameras, hauntings re-enacted in dramatic fashion, and some that attempt to prove the existence of spectres using fringe-science. With keen interest, I watched as participants on these shows detailed their own hauntings, investigated spirit presence, and conveyed their experiences and theories to the audience. As I commenced preliminary research on paranormal belief and televised narratives, I noted the distinct lack of anthropological research on the subject. While the subject of ghosts have been approached from folkloric and religious perspectives⁵ (Davies 2007; Blum 2007; Warner 2006; Melechi 2008); from an historical perspective (Inglis and Holmes 2003; Clarke 2012; Lecouteux 2007); and explored in storytelling (Smith 2010; Lynch 2004) little research has been done on the contemporary view of the paranormal as increasingly secular. Now, belief in the paranormal coincides with a cultural desire for exceptional and unique experiences.

In her book *Paranormal Media* (2011), Annette Hill argues that people's beliefs "are a basis from which market arises in popular culture" (16). Her short work on ghost tourism was the inspiration for my decision to broaden my research into other areas of the commercial paranormal industry. Existing literature on the subject of ghost tourism concentrates on the spectacle involved in walks (Stone 2006; McEvoy 2014; White 2013), which is essential to any

⁵ By religious, I'm referring to Spiritualism, which continues to have a role in contemporary ghost culture.

discussion on tourism and is certainly examined within this thesis. However, exclusively investigating this viewpoint overlooks the rising trend of commercial events tailored primarily for believers, such as ghost hunts and medium readings.⁶ Hill's research makes the connection between paranormal tourism and *belief* in the unexplained: "Extrasensory experiences are extremely rare, and yet people on a ghost hunting event invest a lot of emotional and psychological energy in looking for such an experiences" (ibid: 89).

While reading Hill's work, I recalled a ghost tour I had attended in Philadelphia long before I commenced this research. Nestled within the city's tour packages were advertisements for ghost walks of the old town. Like plenty of Edinburgh's tourists (and despite being a sceptic, myself), I thought it would be fun to attend as an hour of entertainment before dinner. The guide led us by candlelight past Independence Hall, the aged buildings of old town and through graveyards as she told us stories of spirit sightings within the city. The tour was part performance, mixed with aspects of folklore and history. As much as I expected entertainment, I also recognised that what Hill refers to as a *disquieting experience* – which she defines as an "emotional geography to an allegedly haunted location" (ibid) – had come over some of the other tourists. The effect was a combination of certain individuals becoming both increasingly silent, as well as agitated and jumpy at different unidentifiable noises in the dark. Despite the initial conceit of these tours as fun, the combined effect of storytelling with eerie, dark locations elicits emotional responses. Such an analysis ought to be included in any discussion of paranormal tourism because the structure of walks prompts tourists to experience the event through the context of their own beliefs and experiences.

⁶ I detail these events in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively.

Hill's analysis of ghost walks coincides with Avery Gordon's (1997) argument that hauntings are, fundamentally, social experiences (201). The relationship between sociality, tourism, and the emotional effect that arises while visiting certain locations are studied under the umbrella of *dark tourism*.⁷ Sharpley and Stone (2009) note that "dark tourism experiences may be consumed in order to give some phenomenological meaning to tourists' own social existence" (17). However, they place ghost tourism under the label of a *paler* experience, which they define as a tour that focuses on communal consumption as play.

While I address the spectacle present in ghost walks within this thesis, I would argue it is equally important to discuss the cultural frame of reference for why commercial events extend beyond ghost walks into believer events. Ghost hunts have become increasingly prominent within the commercial landscape, which are events hosted by professional ghost hunters that allow tourists to participate in investigations designed after those on prominent television shows. Any research performed on ghost hunts has approached them largely from the perspective of investigative techniques (Sabol, 2009; Ruickbie 2013; Fielding and O'Keeffe 2008). This thesis seeks to fill in these research gaps with fieldwork, as well as discuss the commercial paranormal industry from a wider cultural perspective.

⁷ Dark tourism involves visiting sites that are associated with death and tragic events. These locations become commercialized based on their dark histories. Examples include sites like Chernobyl, Jack the Ripper Tours in London, Auschwitz concentration camp, etcetera. Some sources (White and Frew, 2013; Sharpley and Stone, 2009) place ghost walks under the umbrella of dark tourism.

About the Edinburgh Vaults: A Representative Microcosm of the Commercial Paranormal

Industry

The Edinburgh vaults ⁸ are situated beneath the South Bridge, a structure which links the high street of Old Town with the Princes Street of New Town. The bridge is over 300 metres long; it is supported by 22 arches that dig as far down as 6 metres into the bed rock, but only one of the arches remains visible from the street. Legitimate businesses were once plentiful beneath the South Bridge, from merchants to cobblers. These businesses used certain vaults for storage purposes, primarily as a depository for wine and whisky. As the population of Edinburgh grew in the 17th and 18th centuries, the more impoverished areas of the city expanded past what tenements could comfortably accommodate. The homeless sought refuge beneath the South Bridge to escape the rainy, wet conditions on the streets outside. Soon the influx of people into the vaults pushed out the legitimate businesses, and the location became known as a type of red light district. Eventually the chambers fell into disrepair and were covered over in rubble, entirely forgotten until they were re-discovered in the 1980s.

Certain vaults under the South Bridge were later leased to various tour businesses. Mercat, the first company to operate out of the vaults, claims their intent was to use the location as an atmospheric place to tell ghost stories and historical anecdotes from the city above. However, as tourists began to both see and experience ghosts there, the focus of Mercat's tours shifted; now they regale visitors with tales of spirits spotted in the vaults. In recent years, Mercat

⁸ Collectively known as the South Bridge Vaults and split between the Blair Street Vaults and the Niddry Street Vaults, for their placements under the bridge and the street respectively.

has been joined by two other tour companies – City of the Dead Tours, and Auld Reekie Tours – who conduct their walks through different sets of vaults within the underground.

Today, the vaults are considered to be one of the most haunted places in the UK. Numerous ghost hunting teams and mediums have been brought in to investigate the abundant claims of paranormal experiences and sightings there. In the Mercat Tours information booklet *Descend and Discover: The Story of the Blair Street Underground Vaults* (n.d.) author Faith Geddes notes that the vaults became the focal point for a scientific study from the Edinburgh Ghost Project, conducted in 2001. The research was lead by Professor Richard Wiseman to investigate sightings in the vaults and see if the circumstances could be replicated or disproven within a group of volunteers. Geddes reports that 44% of volunteers reported that they had perceived paranormal activity, ranging from smells and touch to auditory phenomena (40). The Edinburgh vaults have also been featured in a number of different ghost hunting television shows, including *Most Haunted* and *Ghost Adventures*, as well as the BBC programme *Joe Swash Believes in Ghosts*. Tour companies have continued to report sightings and experiences from their walks, as well as photographs that are believed to lend credence to stories of hauntings.

Aside from the walking tours that take place within the vaults, tour companies run their own sanctioned ghost hunts several times per year, and investigators can host their own private events for a fee. Ghost hunts are advertised months in advance and tickets can be priced upwards of £50, selling out very quickly. The South Bridge vaults are reflective of the larger paranormal industry in Scotland, where ghost walks have become just one facet of a growing number of events.

The amount of different activities and tours conducted within the vaults, as well as its well-known reputation as a haunted location, made it an ideal location to conduct fieldwork. It exemplifies how the wider commercial industry has begun to expand its repertoire of events to cater to believers and hobbyists within the paranormal community. The different activities conducted in the vaults represent an ideal microcosm of an industry-wide incorporation of ghost culture beliefs and practices into commercial tourism, which have become packaged for the tourist experience.

Fieldwork: Ghost Hunting, Walks, and Medium Readings

While residing in Edinburgh, I carried out my exploration of the commercial paranormal industry by personally attending dozens of ghost walks⁹ and events.¹⁰ My intent was to familiarise myself with the structure and content of different walks, compare and contrast content, as well as note recurring themes within stories. This initial fieldwork was meant to gather the information for my original research objective. In order to become deeply familiar with the content and stories, I recorded each different walk multiple times to habituate myself with the tour's language and reappearing story types, as well as the layout of the vaults. I also

⁹ While there are a great number of tour companies in Edinburgh, I primarily focused on the tour companies that operated within the South Bridge Vaults: Mercat Tours, City of the Dead Tours, and Auld Reekie Tours. However, certain storytelling analysis also prompted the inclusion of Mary King's Close, which is a close under the buildings in Old Town that is also reputed to be haunted. In Chapter 2 I explore the ways in which all four tour companies have come to adopt similar stories and themes.

¹⁰ Including commercial ghost hunts, medium readings, and investigations.

interviewed official guides about tour content, the history of the vaults, and the script they use for storytelling.

Later, the information that I had gathered during my first year of fieldwork would be used to analyse the way companies incorporated the terminology, tools, and beliefs of a larger ghost culture within their events. My initial fieldwork on walking tours was supplemented by participating both in commercial events (ghost hunts) and investigations organised by independent groups. I became well acquainted with those in the independent investigation community, and well as with mediums who offered their expertise on commercial ghost hunts.

I spent the next year of my fieldwork becoming accustomed to the structure of commercial believer events to contrast with independent investigations. I also recorded interviews with investigators, mediums, and commercial ghost hunters to analyse the effect that tourism has had within ghost culture. My conversations with both mediums and non-commercial investigators allowed me to become better informed on the beliefs held by Spiritualists and those in ghost culture, respectively. While both sets of ideals have had elements incorporated into tourism, they have some fundamental differences in beliefs despite a close overlap. Thus, my overall goal with my later fieldwork was to understand the wider beliefs within ghost culture, being as well-rounded as possible to account for differing ideals and methodologies of those within the paranormal community.

Fieldwork Complications

In any anthropological work on the subject of tourism, the inclusion of the *tourist voice* creates an ongoing issue. Tourism is, by its nature, a transient experience for sightseers. Individuals only stay in locations for a short while, and their days are often already organised around other events or explorations of the area. The limited time allotted for speaking with tourists is largely restricted to tours. However, Anthropologist Edward Bruner noted the difficulty in interacting with tourists on walks as an ethnographer:

Tourists move so fast through the sights that it is hard to keep up with them . . . It is relatively easy to begin a discussion but in the middle of a sentence the tour leader announces that the group is moving on to the next site, and your information has disappeared . . . (1995: 225).

My own fieldwork was no exception to this continuing problem for tourism research. Indeed, the issues raised by Bruner are only exacerbated in the context of paranormal events. Beginning a discussion during walks or ghost hunts is challenging due to the way they are organised, where silence is considered a vital component in sensing the presence of spirits. While I was able to engage in a few discussions with tourists on ghost hunts, many were interrupted as we moved into the next chamber. Before and after events leaves little time for interviews; attendees are expected to gather mere minutes before the event starts, and tourists disperse far too quickly afterward.

However, the availability of the Internet offers opportunities for the inclusion of tourist voices. The increasing number of online review sites, as well as tourist participation in social media, is a new facet of travelling that presents tourist voices specifically posted for public

consumption. While including online posts may present its own problems,¹¹ it is one of the few presented opportunities to include the perspective of the traveller in tourism research. Internet posts are becoming increasingly vital to this area of study for multiple reasons: 1) Reviews and online posts are encouraged by tour companies. For commercial events, they are a means of authenticating a site as haunted, and certain stories and online images later become used on tours; 2) Online posts are becoming vital for word-of-mouth (WOM), which has been shown to impact the decisions of other tourists on whether to visit a site; 3) Reviews and social media posts make it possible for *tourists* to interact with one another about their experiences, which may or may not be possible within the limited structure of a tour. For this thesis, I sought out online posts from well-known review sites and social media sites to include within my research and added any on-site tourist discussions where I was able. These posts have been incorporated to both lend support to analyses, as well as discuss the various ways in which tourists experience sites – which now continues beyond the tour itself.

¹¹ The most common criticism toward the inclusion of online posts pertains to doubts about the *truthfulness* of internet posts. However, I would argue that there is little evidence that the honesty of internet posts is any less than in face to face interactions.

Chapter Outlines

This thesis is divided into six chapters, each of which discusses an aspect of commercial paranormal events, contrasted with beliefs, ideas, and practices within ghost culture. In Chapter One, “Ghosts in Scotland: Tourism History, The Scottish Brand, Victorian Spiritualism, and the Commercialisation of the Supernatural”, I explore the historical context for how the paranormal became an aspect of the Scottish brand. Since the 18th century, the marketing of Scottish national identity to tourists has involved elements of mysticism. This *othering* of Scotland is mirrored in literature during the 18th and 19th centuries, from Samuel Johnson’s inquiries into the Second Sight, to Sir Walter Scott’s use of spectres in his stories. This chapter explores how the romanticised “mystical Celt” and Highland aesthetic later solidified the paranormal as associated with the Scottish landscape.

This chapter further highlights the ways in the scientifically-minded post-Enlightenment culture and Victorian era Spiritualism created the framework for the contemporary views of spirits as being non-secular entities. The Victorian age emphasised a new way of attempting to interact with spectres through emerging technologies, which were some of the first efforts at scientifically investigating the paranormal. Soon the popularity of spirits and the use of scientific applications to investigate the unknown were increasingly commercialised to a public that had become spirit obsessed. I discuss how ghost belief became linked with the desire to scientifically prove the existence of ghosts, as well as how the rise of Spiritualism connected ghost belief with spectacle and performance.

Chapters Two and Three are dedicated strictly to examining ghost walks, primarily focusing on the structure, larger cultural concepts, and storytelling. In Chapter Two, “Walking Tours: The Ghost Space, Tour Structure and Storytelling, Themes and Symbols”, I critically analyse the structure, tales, and content within ghost walks. My discussion concentrates on the recurring themes and ghost types which are presented within stories. The storytelling on ghost walks present aspects of ghost culture belief which are critical for framing the spectral world to tourists. Walking tours create atmosphere by their deliberate use of darkness, and candlelight that resembles certain ritualistic elements surrounding spirit folklore and spectral manifestations. Amongst this is an examination of what I call the *ghost space*, the metaphysical landscape where ghosts reside, and how it is presented to tourists through language, terminology, and adoption of specific ghost culture spirit types.

Chapter Three, “The Ghost Tour as Theatre: Setting the Stage, Death as a Spectacle, and Constructing Authenticity”, offers a look at the spectacle-driven aspect of tours. Certain tours present torture, tragedy and death as part of the entertainment, offering tourists the unique experience of participating in a performance as a form of street theatre. The use of spectacle raises discussions about ideas of authenticity, and how paranormal events both construct and subvert authenticity within tour storytelling (the former through detailed accounts of hauntings that occurred on former tours, and the latter through the use of theatre and play). I also examine the ways in which guides reconstruct an historical Edinburgh that encourages both imagination and a “mental tour” within the physical space. The imagined space encouraged on tours involves the vital association of historical Edinburgh and its contemporary cityscape as being entwined with hauntings. Therefore, the past identity of the city is framed within the context of the paranormal.

Chapters Four and Five are devoted to the broader research I performed during fieldwork, specifically on other paranormal events which are tailored for believers. These events have become a growing, vital part of the tourist landscape. Chapter Four, “The Mediumship: Spirit Communication and Creating a Ghostly Landscape”, discusses the mediumship and the role mediums hold within the paranormal community. I compare two different types of medium events: one involving a medium from the Spiritualist church, and the other two highlight medium participation on ghost hunts. The two types of events present contrasting mediumship practices, as well as vital distinctions in how they interpret the spirit world and convey it for tourists.

Mediums conduct their readings in a way that resembles certain ritualistic and folkloric elements pertaining to spirit summoning. The first vignette offers an account of how a Spiritualist medium conveys messages from spirits for certain members in the audience. Her performance reflects beliefs within Spiritualism about the idea of *spirit families* as well as addressing key ideas about death and dying to frame the experience for the audience. The second two vignettes explore how mediums on ghost hunts recreate a mental picture of the spirit landscape and the ghosts within it for the tourist.

Chapter Five, “The Commercialisation of Ghost Hunting, and How Tourism Has Affected Scotland’s Ghost Culture”, compares the conflicting ideologies between ghost hunters (those who make money hosting events for tourists; the term is also used for those employed by television networks) and ghost investigators. In presenting ghost hunts to paying customers, the structure of a traditional investigation changes to accommodate the tourist experience. This includes underplaying the importance of the scientific method (which is considered vital in ghost

culture) in order to enhance the emotional geography of the space. In doing so, tourists become more open to the suggestion that certain occurrences have spectral origins.

This chapter also explores how the increase in paranormal tourists has created an influx of ghost hunting events set up for the express purpose of capitalising on the popularity of ghosts in the media. Certain locations become popular places to host events, making it expensive and increasingly difficult for investigators within ghost culture to conduct their own legitimate scientific studies. The affect is a ghost culture that is becoming increasingly commercialised for the benefit of tourists.

Chapter Six, “Ghosts in Popular Culture: Online Paranormal Communities, And the Rise of the Televised Ghost Hunt”, continues the discussion of the ways in which commercialism and the media has affected the ghost culture at large. The paranormal is becoming increasingly visible on television, with new ghost hunting and storytelling shows emerging regularly. Companies within Edinburgh are taking advantage of this rising interest in the supernatural by tailoring their events to recreate the feel of televised ghost hunts. This has had the incredible effect of spurring new businesses that appeal to amateur ghost hunters.

I also discuss the role that the internet plays in creating an ongoing paranormal discourse. Internet communities have become vital places to discuss paranormal belief, the legitimacy of ghost hunting shows, and new ways of interacting with spirits. Online discussion is encouraged by tour companies, who prompt visitors to discuss their experiences and share pictures via social media. This chapter highlights the ways in which personal ghost stories have become increasingly shared through the internet and on television. In response, people seek out

commercial paranormal events in order to emulate the extraordinary experiences they see in media.

CHAPTER 1:

Ghosts in Scotland: Tourism History, the Scottish Brand, Victorian Spiritualism, and the Commercialisation of the Supernatural

By discussing the history, branding, and commercialisation of the supernatural in Scottish tourism, I realise I am undertaking to write about a considerably substantial and significant aspect of the country's history. Unavoidably – and regrettably – this requires a great deal of condensing on my part to fit such a consequential topic into a single chapter for this research; truthfully, an entire thesis could be written on the subjects I write here alone. While this chapter may not be satisfying in terms of overall in-depth analysis of these subjects, it would be an incredible oversight on my part if I avoided the history of Scottish tourism, its branding, and its connection to the supernatural. All three lead to the eventual incorporation of Spiritualism and ghost hunting as a basis for contemporary ghost walks. While ghost tourism is not limited solely to Scotland, the spectre has become a common figure within the Scottish tourist landscape. In any tourist destination, heritage is vital to how the place is commoditised for the tourist experience – but in Scotland, heritage is presented to tourists through the lens of the paranormal (Inglis and Holmes, 2003: 51). This chapter presents and analyses the growth of Scottish tourism, and how the paranormal, magical, and mystical has become entwined with the country's heritage and commercial branding — to the point where tourists are encouraged to come to

Scotland to experience the paranormal for themselves.¹² Historical context is also an important aspect of how tours within Scotland are framed; guides build on a perspective through the focal points of history, storytelling, Spiritualism¹³, science¹⁴, and popular culture, which I intend to recreate through this dissertation. There is a past/present dynamic to the way ghost tourism and the Scottish brand have been presented commercially, and how these aspects are merged together within the ghost culture in Edinburgh are important to the core of this thesis. The topics I will discuss in this chapter – from the formation of Scotland’s national identity as being paired with the supernatural to the emergence of Spiritualism during the Victorian era – are the various amalgamated parts of what has become the country’s paranormal tourist industry. These aspects continue to play a part in how the paranormal is packaged for the visitor experience.

Indeed, hauntings have become inextricably linked to Scottish identity. As Mary Inglis and David Holmes state, “A ghostly guise assists the industry through mysticising Scottish heritage as more glorious than the mundane every dayness of the present in which the tourist normally lives” (2003: 56). The branding of Scotland as entwined with the paranormal has been ongoing for centuries, creating a national identity that has become defined by its exotic, magical and aesthetically romanticised *otherness*. The commercial view of Scotland creates a connection between its landscape, urban locales and geographic features with the strange and paranormal. From tales of fairies to the Loch Ness monster to spectres, the Scottish rural and urban scenery has become metaphysically associated with mythological creatures, which propagate a

¹² This theme of the “paranormal tourist” is recurring throughout this thesis, most especially in regards to those seeking ghost hunting experiences.

¹³ Through the use of mediums.

¹⁴ Via ghost hunting experts and their terminology.

perception of the country as exotic. Literature and writings from significant historic figures created a precedence for the *othering* of Scotland. As far back as Shakespeare and *Macbeth*, Scotland's witches, ghosts, and paranormal creatures have been presented to an English audience. Scottish otherness was reaffirmed in the early 18th century when Martin Martin wrote about the habits and superstitions of the rural Scottish. Later, Samuel Johnson's enquiries into the *Second Sight*, which were influenced by Martin's work, further entwined the paranormal with Scotland's culture. Johnson's travels revealed graphic testimonials from seers residing in the Scottish isles. The experience left Johnson, a noted sceptic, willing to believe in their claims.

Johnson's influence – as well as tales and novels singling out Scotland as firmly *other* – have drawn tourists to the country for generations, either with the goal of seeking an experience for their own or to see the places named in famous works. Commercial tourism in Scotland began to connect various locations with the paranormal, creating sensationalised historical frameworks to draw visitors. Sir Walter Scott's popular writings on Scottish history is credited with these trends; David McCrone, Angela Morris, and Richard Kiely (1995) argue that Scott “gave birth to a new way of thinking about the past”, which “introduced the idea of past and present as two very different entities” (4). This dynamic is incorporated into tourism through the past being characterised by its interaction with the present through hauntings (Inglis and Holmes, 2003: 51). Scott's influence happened to coincide with an era interested in all things Celtic, and his stories of spectres and ghosts amid the romanticised views of Scotland only further reinforced Scotland's otherness and paranormal branding.

However, Scott's influence also came during a *post-Enlightenment* age¹⁵ that emphasised scepticism toward beliefs which were considered superstitious. While there was a fascination with ghosts and spectres – reflected in much of the Gothic-revival literature produced at the end of Scott's life and afterward – the topic was approached with both doubt and, in some cases, derision, from authors of the day. It was not until Victorian era Spiritualism¹⁶ had grown to become such an influential aspect of British (and American) society that the paranormal became approached through the scientific perspective. The Victorian era Spiritualism obsession ignited an intellectual dispute between scientific and paranormal communities, where the use of revolutionary instruments and inventions became appropriated by spiritualists to prove the existence of ghosts. The adoption of scientific devices to support paranormal theory angered scientists and philosophers, sparking intense debate across written media. This conflict between scientific and spiritualist communities, as well as the use of devices to support the presence of paranormal entities, is a debate that continues to be a critical aspect of contemporary ghost culture. By approaching this subject from a historical perspective, I intend to offer a foundation for the topics I discuss throughout this thesis, and how aspects of Spiritualism and the tourist industry emerged and created the unique, vibrant ghost culture I examined during my fieldwork in Edinburgh.

¹⁵ The Scottish Enlightenment was considered to have ended in the late 18th century, so this post-Enlightenment would have encompassed the years immediately following, through to the mid-19th century.

¹⁶ From the mid-19th century onwards.

The Start of Tourism and the Scottish Brand

The contemporary Scottish brand has merged together elements of the romantic aesthetic¹⁷, the supernatural, and Spiritualism in its marketing to tourists. The Scottish *brand* is an important aspect to its tourist industry, and exploring the historical circumstances in which it was created is absolutely necessary for understanding how the paranormal became such an influential aspect of the country's commercial identity.

While Scotland became of Britain with the Act of the Union of 1707, tensions between Scotland and England – which would later become, and remain, its main tourist market – did not subside in the years after negotiations. Scottish historian Peter Hume Brown noted in his work *Early Travellers in Scotland* (1891) how few visitors came to the country before the latter half of the 17th century. Although Hume Brown may have exaggerated the lack of travel between England and Scotland, the ever-present hostility between the two countries may have negatively affected any movement between them (Seaton 1998: 8). The true start of Scotland's tourist industry began during the latter half of the 18th century (after the last Jacobite uprising), which later flourished due to several key influences which I will discuss within this chapter.

The first waves of visitors to Scotland were those who took advantage of its proximity. Scotland was newly part of the United Kingdom, yet it was entirely separate and considered “exotic” due to the limited travel between the two countries in the years prior. To English travellers, eager for a taste of something different and yet in closer than the Continent, Scotland

¹⁷ Notably, Celtic and Highland symbolism.

was ideal due to its cultural differences and a geography yet largely unexplored by English travellers (Inglis and Holmes, 2003: 52). The exploration of Scotland was significant in that it began out of a demand for strange and unfamiliar experiences that contrasted with the homogeneity and mundane nature of English life – specifically of those living in London who could afford to travel.

One such individual was English author Samuel Johnson, who famously explored the Highlands and islands of Scotland with his friend James Boswell in an attempt to seek his ideal concept of the “noble savage”. His views of the wild Highlander came from works like Martin Martin’s *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (1719), which detailed the everyday lives of those residing in more rural Scottish areas. Boswell kept a record of his and Johnson’s trip to the Scottish Isles in his work *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775), which culminated in an inquiry into the *Second Sight*.

In Scottish folklore and history, the Second Sight was a paranormal gift possessed by *seers*. These certain persons have “the faculty of seeing otherwise invisible objects” (Rev. MacGregor, 1922: 33). The Second Sight also included the ability to see the past and the future, as well as being able to witness spectres, which were locally referred to as *taisch*. Johnson noted that the Sight was considered an “involuntary affection” that only a rare number of individuals possessed. Residents of the local islands were known to strongly believe in the accuracy of the seers’ visions, despite the practice being at odds with local Presbyterian faith (Johnson, 1775/1820: 342). Johnson was a profound sceptic, being a product of 18th century Enlightenment ideals which dominated English and urban Scottish thinking at the time. During this particular period one critically questioned customs, and morals, with strong belief in rationality and

irrefutable scientific proof. Despite Johnson's belief that the Second Sight was "ascribed only to a people very little enlightened" (ibid: 341), he admitted, "I never could advance my curiosity to conviction; but came away at last only willing to believe" (ibid: 343). Travellers like Johnson¹⁸ who wrote about their profound experiences in Scotland served to intensify and propagate Scotland's status as *other*. More than that, they formulated the precedent for Scotland as being a country that is ostensibly linked to the supernatural, a connection which has endured in modern tourism promotion.

The tourist view of Scottish *otherness* became even more pronounced during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, kindled by a significant interest in all things Celtic and Celtic-inspired. Rising interest in Celtic mysticism clashed with the scientific ideals of the Enlightenment, sparking an intellectual debate which would continue throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁹ Inglis and Holmes contend that the popularity and success of Celtic-inspired stories throughout England was the product of a "Romantic reaction against the rationalist modes of thought associated with the intellectual project of the Enlightenment" (2003: 53). Moreover Scottish culture was quickly appropriated by tourists due to an increase in the number of travellers during the rise of Romanticism and the popularity of Gothic literature.²⁰ Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes argue that Celticism was used as "a tool in the construction and expansion of the post-1745 British state" (2003: I), through which Scotland, its rich history, and its distinctive culture

¹⁸ Other influential English travelers to Scotland included John Lightfoot and Thomas Pennant, who were both themselves influenced by Johnson's travels.

¹⁹ This will be further elaborated upon in the next section of this chapter.

²⁰ Romanticism is roughly considered to have lasted between 1800-1850. It has some overlap with rise of Victorian Gothic literature during the Gothic revival, which began in the mid 19th century and continued into the early 20th century.

were commercialised for English visitors. Literature and storytelling also played a critical role in constructing a Scottish brand which continues into our own contemporary age: one where Celtic culture was firmly linked to mysticism. The national identity of Scotland became synonymous with the iconography of the Highlands – from the misty mountains and glens, clansmen in kilts, bagpipes, and claymores (Womack, 1989: 1). During the Romantic era, these visual Highland representations were also adopted by lowland Scots residing within urban and industrial settings to distinguish themselves as equally exotic (McCrone et al., 1995: 57).

The association between Scotland and mysticism became more firmly connected with the popularity of the *Ossian poems* (1761). During the course of his travels in the Scottish Highlands, poet James Macpherson claimed to have discovered fragments of an ancient epic poem, written in Gaelic, by Ossian, the Son of Fingal. The poems depicted epic battles set against majestic landscapes, with great Scottish heroes. Despite doubts surrounding the authenticity of Macpherson's claims concerning the discovery of the ancient documents; notable figures of the day vigorously promoted the poems, including literary authors David Hume, Adam Ferguson, and Hugh Blair. Kenneth McNeil attributes the strong support as validating the need for Scottish identity to remain conspicuously separate and distinct from the rest of Britain: “. . . when Scots took up the cause of Ossian, they did so within the context of a strident patriotism that was nevertheless pro-union. Ossian therefore played a key role in establishing a Scottish model of British ‘identity-in-difference’” (McNeil, 2007: 26). The Ossian poems presented Scotland as a culturally disparate nation, which neatly fit with the English view of Scotland as already separate and different. Despite the Ossian poems being an inauthentic representation of Scottish history, the poems succeeded in disseminating the view of the “mystical”, Celtic Scotland. Malcolm Chapman describes the romantic view of the Celt as “a magical figure, bard,

warrior and enchanter, beyond the reach of this world, and an object of love and yearning for those doomed to wander among material things in the cold light of reason” (1992: 253). The Celt as presented in the Ossian poems became yet another illustration of Scottish culture being presented as magical, despite it being an inauthentic account of Scottish history.

This was further propagated through the aesthetic appeal of Scotland’s geographical features, ancient castles and abbeys – another popular attraction during the Romantic era. The Scottish landscape was described as rugged and *picturesque*, with guidebooks focusing on “the wild grandeur of the landscape, remoteness and peace, coupled with a dash of romantic history” (McCrone, et al., 1995: 59). The picturesque aesthetic made the Scottish landscape integral to its literary narrative, contrasting the story against the topography of the Scottish Highlands (Withers, 2006: 15). Fraser MacDonald argues that “these visual ideologies are. . .an important vehicle of capital accumulation, the images being bought and sold all over the world and part of a global imagining of Scotland as a commodity” (54: 2002). The development of the Scottish brand, from the view of its landscape, culture, and heritage was created largely by, and specifically for, the English and European audience. That commercial view of Scotland did not exist solely outside of the country, but *within* it, as well. McNeil notes that MacPherson, the true author of the Ossian poems, “became the agent by which the indigenous culture of the Highlands was ‘opened up’ to imperial expansion” (2007: 27). The Highland identity, glorified within the Ossian poems, became accepted as a form of national Scottish identity. English tourists from primarily urban landscapes held Romantic notions about Scotland as both wild and magical. More than that, Scotland and the paranormal and magical became even more firmly entwined. The English views of Highland culture became absorbed into what was widely considered authentically Scottish, and it became the signature by which Scottish literature thrived.

The Historical Representation of Ghosts Through Literature and Media

The literary works of Sir Walter Scott benefitted greatly from the romanticised view of the Scottish aesthetic. Alastair Durie argues it was during this era that “Scotland passed from being the preserve of a few moneyed and culturally motivated tourists . . . to becoming a mass destination for all levels of society” (2003: 44). Scotland became a prime tourist destination when Scott published his seminal work *Lady of the Lake* in 1810. Its influence was striking at the time, with 20,000 copies sold to a public eager to consume Scottish literature. *Lady of the Lake* is credited with inspiring the initial rush of visitors to the Trossachs. Perhaps more significantly, it reignited the *literary tourism* which was originally sparked by the Ossian poems, where visitors came from as far as the United States to see the places eloquently described within Scott’s works.

Scott’s stories represented a romantic, picturesque view of Scotland, a countryside dotted with spectres, as well as the supernatural. Contrary to some claims, Scott did not start tourism in Scotland, but he contributed a great deal to expanding it and making the country a popular destination for visitors (Durie, 2003: 48). McCrone, Kiely, and Morris note that he is responsible for the “deformation” of Scottish culture by creating a “Caledonian Anti-syzygy”, a term coined by G. Gregory Smith to describe a national identity of Scotland torn between “unrestrained fantasy and dour realism” (1995: 61). The Romantic era of Scotland had framed a Scottish identity that was a product of a mystical “Highlander” past which even now remains a vital part of its national identity. Scott’s stories of spectres and hauntings interspersed through the Scottish countryside were a marked contrast to the widespread rational-minded principles that were a product of the Enlightenment. Inglis and Holmes argue that during Scott’s time there was a “desire to resurrect the past against the dullness and spiritual vacuity of the present,” a sentiment

that still holds true in the way Scotland is projected to tourists (2003: 54). Scott's literature is of particular importance to the historical framework of this thesis due to its instrumental influence on the mainstream link between Scotland and the paranormal that would later become vital to its tourist industry. Almost every book Scott wrote contains some references to paranormal aspects of Scottish folklore, from ghosts to spectres, fairies and even the Second Sight. Notorious horror author H.P. Lovecraft once wrote that Scott "frequently concerned himself with the weird, weaving it into many of his novels and poems," and that in Scott's work *Wandering Willie's Tale in Redgauntlet* (1824), in particular, "the force of the spectral and the diabolic is enhanced by a grotesque homeliness of speech and atmosphere" (Lovecraft, 1973: 40).

Sir Walter Scott's accomplished literary work was significant in Scottish literature because he drew on existing Highland folklore and language for his stories. He encouraged the historians of his era to study records and recreate accounts of antiquity, giving credence to a new way of thinking about the past that eventually became cherished as heritage (McCrone et al. 1995: 4). However, to that end, Scott is also blamed with creating the Scottish romantic aesthetic and further othering its culture and history (ibid, 61). This past/present interaction between Scottish history and a Scottish present played out in Scott's stories through spectres and the paranormal, a dynamic that has been incorporated into modern tourism. Through the spectre, the history of a location – and its peoples – becomes interactive with the physical present. Scott's focus on the supernatural in particular was influential to its inclusion in tourism. Despite Scott's surface scepticism of the supernatural (a product of his Enlightenment upbringing), he wrote the contents for his book *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (which he began in 1829) that "the abstract possibility of apparitions must be admitted by everyone who believes in a Deity, and his

superintending omnipotence”, and he later adds that “supernatural communication cannot be denied in theory” (1830/1831: 51).

Scott’s work cherished Scotland’s folkloric roots, including rural superstitions. He wrote in particular about the concepts of *Highland spirits*. In the Highlands, ghosts were seen as either manifestations of spirits of the dead, or spirits of the living – who were soon to die. In Scott’s time, spirits of the dead not only sought revenge on the spirits of the living, but they also warned of impending disaster (Thompson, 1976/2013: 69). Spirits of the Highlands differed from other types of folkloric spirits because they represented the past and the future, as well as warnings that were significant in a present context. Thompson argues that the Highland ghost “is a complex being, reflecting history, ethnic origin, the character of the region and personal experience” (ibid: 70).

Scott drew on a number of these Highland ghost beliefs in his work, notably in *The Highland Widow*, when the witch-like aunt acts as the warning spectre. In *The Two Drovers*, Scott uses the figure of the aunt with the Second Sight to be the voice of Highland tradition and honour. Despite Scott’s claims that “a supernatural tale is, in most cases, received as an agreeable mode of amusing society” (Scott, 1830/1831: 300), Scott showed serious interest in the supernatural in his lifetime. His stories also reflected the conflict between folk belief and Enlightenment belief that he was torn between during his life. *Old Mortality*, in particular, is reflective of folkloric belief that those who died violently were more prone to haunting the place in which they were killed. This idea is perpetuated in contemporary ghost tours, that places of violent or mass deaths affect the metaphysical space and create a draw for lingering spirits. As Mercat Tours states in their advertisements, “You’ll hear of bloody plots that led to treason and

torture; secret lives that lead to horrific deaths and tormented souls.” (“Hidden and Haunted”, n.d., para. 3). These both reflect significant beliefs about Highland spirits and how they come to haunt locations.

Scott’s interest in the paranormal would eventually culminate in his work *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, which was only released towards the end of Scott’s life. *Letters* evidenced his keen interest in Scottish legends and supernatural belief. Importantly, it created a visibility for the supernatural from the perspective of folklore and thoughtful analysis rather than sensationalised storytelling. Through Scott’s work, Scottish myths and legends were made available for widespread consumption during the post-Enlightenment age that had taken hold of the British public (including urban areas in Scotland) that emphasised science and scepticism. When Scott wrote *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, he thought the public belief in the supernatural had long since dwindled:

“Tales of ghosts and demonology are out of date at forty years and upwards . . . it is only in the morning of life that this feeling of superstition ‘comes o’er us like a summer cloud,’ affecting us with fear, which is solemn and awful rather than painful; and I am tempted to think, that if I were to write on the subject at all, it should have been during a period of life when I could have treated it with more interesting vivacity, and might have been at least amusing, if I could not be instructive” (Scott, 1830/1831: 337).

Despite Scott’s outlook on ghosts being out of date, Andrew Smith argues that “. . . ghost beliefs were not eradicated during the Enlightenment as ghostly manifestations were tested with some empirical rigor in an attempt to account for spirit activity as an occulted aspect of the natural world” (2010: 2). Scott’s work had created a dialogue about the supernatural during the post-Enlightenment, when the scientifically minded public were keen on investigating the subject through scientific methods. While Scott’s *Letters* had been written under the long shadow of Enlightenment ideals, there was a resurgence of paranormal interest by the time his research was

finally printed. The mid-19th century Gothic-revival incorporated the aesthetic of Romanticism, combined with horror and melodrama in literature. Victorian-Gothic literature made the paranormal, ghostly, and the strange commonplace, and it became vastly popular throughout Britain. The literature of the era, much like the media now, created a visibility for ghosts and the paranormal. Suddenly, the topic was present in a wide range of popular literature enthusiastically consumed by an eager public.

Perhaps most notable was the discussion that emerged over Scottish author Catherine Crowe's *The Night-Side of Nature; or Ghosts and Ghost-Seers* (1848), which was an attempt to persuade readers to look into ghost stories and contextualise them for answers to life after death. Crowe's accounts of ghosts were taken from many sources, including folklore and retellings from friends who had personally experienced paranormal activity. Crowe is credited with introducing the word *poltergeist* – a type of spirit that would later become a popular draw for tourists onto ghost tours and hunts²¹ – into the English language. However, her book was met with the customary scepticism of a post-Enlightenment age, notably from Charles Dickens. While Dickens's literature also included ghosts, he criticised the paranormal aspects of Crowe's work, claiming that the existence of ghosts relied upon:

“... *imperfect grounds of proof [and] in a vast number of cases [ghosts] are known to be delusions superinduced by a well-understood, and by no means uncommon disease . . . they are often asserted to be seen . . . in that imperfect state of perception, between sleeping and waking, than which there is hardly any less reliable incidental to our nature*” (Dickens as cited in Collins, 1963: 8-9).

Dickens's comments were published in the *Examiner*, creating the context for a critical discussion of ghosts within popular media. It was a reflection of the conflict between paranormal

²¹ Which will also be discussed later and in more detail in Chapter 2.

belief and scientific thought that emerged during the mid 19th century. Through science, there were those who sought to prove or disprove the existence of spirits, a parallel to contemporary ghost hunters who use the scientific method to document spirit activity.²² Even Dickens himself, like Scott, was well read in ghost folklore and collected it throughout his lifetime. Like other literature during the Gothic era, Dickens's ghosts were set against the backdrop of people's everyday lives, and the spectre's role shifted from being harmful creatures to be feared to entities seeking to communicate with, and in some cases help, the living.

The mid-19th century marked a de-sequestering of folkloric spectres and the Second Sight through Gothic literature, where spirits' existence in death were entwined with the living literary protagonists. Spectres represented "principles of social justice", as they were typically linked with guilt and lapses in morality (Smith, 2010: 3). In that regard, the literature of the time showed a significant shift in how ghosts were regarded by the British public: ghosts became known as secular entities (Hill, 2011: 22). Before that, ghosts were considered to be lingering remnants of a superstitious, uneducated population who believed them to be dangerous entities who were tactile and wrought havoc on the living, and were also quite capable of immense harm (Davies: 2007: 18). Moreover Gothic ghost stories "became narratives of personal, social and religious significance" (Hill, 2011: 23), and represented shift in how ghost stories were not only consumed by British culture at large, but had sparked a resurgence of interest in the paranormal.

²² See: Chapter 5.

The Start of the Ghost Hunt and the Commercial Exploitation of the Supernatural

Through Gothic literature, ghosts became associated with urban geographies, changing the way ghosts were presented to the public that has endured into our modern era. Prior to the mid-19th century, ghosts were viewed as spectres that haunted long ago battlefields, farmlands and small rural villages. In Scotland, this was an aspect of the Romanticised notion of ghosts; they were an aspect of the paranormal *other* set against the misty, rugged backdrop of the Scottish Highlands, or haunted those they once knew in life. Owen Davies chronicled ghost belief and hauntings going back 500 years for his book *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* (2007), and discussed the phenomenon of people gathering to hunt ghosts in urban spaces for spectacle and entertainment. Those in cities who had heard rumours of “ghostly rappings” gathered at locations to witness the sensation (90).

In one particular instance at a churchyard of Christ Church in Westminster, the effigy of a ghost constructed from white paper drew an estimated crowd of 5,000-6,000 people. The mid 19th century media, which had once played a large role in debunking and criticising claims of hauntings, suddenly began to generate word of mouth for these early ghost hunts in order to sell their newspapers. The publicised locales became sensations, drawing people in droves who were eager to experience the paranormal for themselves. In some cases, these became organised ghost hunts that consisted of hundreds, or even thousands, of people seeking the truth behind rumours of hauntings. These hunts were not without some criticism from post-Enlightenment thinkers, who described the events as “uncouth and vulgar, a disgraceful mix of ‘superstition and a lack of civility’” (ibid: 92). Davies argues that the “rapid spread of dailies in other big towns from the 1850s onwards, meant that a swift momentum of interest could build up regarding the

appearance of a ghost, thereby helping shape public perception and involvement in hauntings” (ibid: 91). Through public media consumption, ghosts became entities to be investigated and sought out, with hunts regarded as social activities within communities. Widespread interest in ghosts created commercial viability for locations; they sold papers and attracted crowds of curious onlookers who sought to investigate ghosts, much like the role television plays in sparking interest in contemporary ghost hunts. This was startlingly different from previous generations, where ghosts were entities to be feared and avoided.

The flagging Scottish tourist industry exploited this new paranormal obsession to attract crowds to supposedly haunted locations. During the mid-19th century, British tourism had become highly competitive, and Scotland, once considered exotic and fascinating, saw less tourist interest than before (Durie, 2003: 129). Scotland was forced to reshape its tourist industry to reignite demand from their primary market: English tourists. Alastair Durie (2003) noted the fierce competitiveness between Scotland and England, who both sought to attract tourists who could not afford holiday travel to the Continent. He stated that it was, “resort against resort, region against region, country against country, and unlike nowadays there was no government-sponsored strategy” (129). Private parties and individuals who benefitted from tourism widely promoted Scotland’s brand, playing up the aspects that had made Sir Walter Scott’s work so famous in the first place: the romantic aesthetic. Destinations emphasised their otherness by connecting locations to ghosts, packaging the paranormal for the tourist experience.²³ Roger Clarke (2012) wrote about the intense rivalry between sites claiming to be the “most haunted”,

²³ Incidentally, ghosts also became another competitive point between Scottish and English destinations, a competition that endures within today’s tourist industry. The most notable being the rivalry between York and Edinburgh for being considered “most haunted city in the UK.”.

an advertisement pubs and inns employed to attract tourists seeking a likelihood of personal paranormal experiences. The phrase has become commonly used in contemporary tourism²⁴, and would become the title for a current popular British television show *Most Haunted*, which sought to explore and hunt for ghosts in locations for the benefit of viewers.²⁵

The same advertising that brings crowds of people to haunted locations in our contemporary society was introduced during the Victorian era. Crowds of ghost hunters gathered at locations purported to be haunted sparked a trend of commercialised ghost experiences. Among this was leisure ghost hunting, as exemplified in Harriet Martineau's *The English Lakes* (1855), in which she eloquently describes haunted locations that might be of interest to her readers. In one instance, she details a hill path near Scales in the Lake District, stating, "This part is the very home of superstition and romance" (96). In her guide, Martineau combines romanticism and hauntings, both with the geography of the countryside that connects to the paranormal – ideas reflected in Gothic literature. Clarke (2012) attributes Victorian era interest in ghosts to urban spread: "The rapid industrialisation of Britain and the gulf between country folk beliefs and city materialism acted as [a] powerful modifier" (297). Entwined with increasing industrialisation were the ease of travel and the spread of popular media, creating increased visibility and advertisements for haunted locations. Through literature, popular media, and tourism, the paranormal had become a mainstream subject, and the question of life after death only became further popularised with the influence of Spiritualism.

²⁴ Including the Edinburgh vaults, the location that frames this thesis.

²⁵ See: Chapter 6.

The Rise of Victorian Spiritualism and Ghosts in Mainstream Culture

The Victorian age saw a newfound interest in spirits which had never before been matched on such a widespread basis. Owen Davies (2007) argues that “Mesmerism and Methodism may have created a sympathetic atmosphere for spiritual inquiry but it was Spiritualism that made ghost investigation a mainstream intellectual pursuit again” (89). Spiritualism entailed a deliberate attempt to communicate with spirits, brought on by the belief that good spirits enabled people to see into God’s realms and would offer guidance to the living. Davies notes that before Spiritualism had taken hold in Britain, the “main reason for wishing to encounter the dead was in order to banish them rather than seek their spiritual guidance” (ibid: 71). The Victorian era marked a time in which people not only sought out paranormal experiences, but utilised new scientific inventions in an attempt to explain – and prove – spectral phenomenon. Both Victorian era Spiritualism and the science versus paranormal debate are themes that will continue to be expounded upon within the other chapters of this thesis. Like ghost hunting and the Romantic aesthetic, Spiritualism has been incorporated into contemporary tourism in Scotland. Spiritualist mediums and scientific inventions have become influential to Edinburgh’s ghost culture, and both are now used for commercial ghost hunts and walks. The mediumship and the appropriation of the scientific method to confirm paranormal activity both rose out of the combined influence of Victorian Spiritualism and the post-Enlightenment ideals.

The mentality toward spirits during this era changed the way people not only regarded ghosts, but attempted to interact with them through various methods of communication. Before the popularity of Spiritualism, ghosts had been considered extremely dangerous entities capable

of seeking vengeance and even intentionally harming the living. Previously individuals had sought only to appease or avoid them, but certainly never deliberately communicate with them. The historical fear associated with spectral entities and the later Enlightenment-era ambivalence of all things supernatural had receded in the wake of curiosity and the desire to make connections with the spirit realm. As Annette Hill (2011) argues, “Spiritualism sought guidance from the dead on how to live a better life” (25). Ghosts were no longer feared, but instead sought out for answers and proof of life after death. Spiritualism’s core beliefs were originally based on the theories of Swedish scientist Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg’s theories involved the creation of a relevant and powerful link between the world of the dead and the world of the living. He referred this association as the “theory of correspondence”, which included a bevy of unseen forces that bound both worlds together (Blum 2007: 12). The subject of Victorian-era Spiritualism covers a vast wealth of topics²⁶ – however, for the sake of brevity the focus will be on the aspects that first began with the rise in Spiritualism which subsequently became an integral part of the ghost culture and tourism. In Edinburgh there were early attempts to make sense of the mediumship, spirit communication, and ghosts by utilising scientific means and technology. These are topics that will be discussed in a contemporary context in later chapters that are important not just within Edinburgh’s ghost culture, but within the context of tourism.

Spiritualism first rose to prominence in the United States before spreading to Britain. The belief system introduced two new terms into the common language: a *medium*, which described an individual whose body was the tool for communication, either through speech, interpretation, or possession; and a *sensitive*, someone sensitive to spirit presence. In the mid-19th century, there

²⁶ Including politics, gender, as well as attempts to defy gender norms of the era.

were reportedly some 30,000 mediums working in the United States. The medium would have been similar to what Johnson observed in those with the Second Sight: the ability to see both past and future events as communicated by spirits on the other side. These terms were used by the new spiritualist movement intending to shed the baggage of superstition associated with the Second Sight. In truth, they were simply rebranding already existing folk ideas to appeal to the more scientifically minded populace of the Victorian age. In doing so, mediums and sensitives were able to generate wider interest in the paranormal by commercialising the spirit world, and encouraging an already eager public to join in making their own personal connections with ghosts.

The Clash Between Spiritualist and Scientific Communities

The Fox sisters, two young farm girls from upstate New York, are credited with sparking intense curiosity which spread Spiritualism throughout the United States in the late 1840s. They received both local and national attention for their ability to contact a spirit visitor they called Mr. Split-foot, who communicated with them via a series of raps. The Fox sisters became a national sensation, performing private séances and appearing in P.T. Barnum's American Museum where he charged admission for those seeking to communicate with Mr. Split-foot through the sisters. Victorian-era spirit communication was significant in that it was fundamentally linked to the technology of the era. Even Mr. Split-foot's rappings emulated a

ciphered code very similar to what Morse used for his magnetic telegraph. Marina Warner (2006) notes that tensions between science and religion during the Victorian age had a heavy impact on the collective social consciousness of the era. New technologies and scientific discoveries offered a new perspective on life, and created “new extended mysteries beyond the reach of scientific empiricism” (221). The first dot-dashed message (called Morse Code) Samuel Morse sent between Baltimore and Washington, DC (1846) highlighted the prevalent outlook: “What hath god wrought?” After Morse’s first long distance communication, “rappings, and séances and psychic research spread in step with the new uses of electricity and communication technologies” (ibid: 222).

Author Deborah Blum (2007) claims that in the mid-1800s, the United States “seemed possessed” by Spiritualism. At least two million American citizens were said to be ardent believers of spirit communication, and numerous individuals believed they had communicated directly to the dead (20). Blum argues that the “era was one of intense moral imbalance – religion apparently under siege from science, technology seemingly rewriting the laws of reality” (ibid: 8). The influence of the Enlightenment had cast a long shadow in terms of its emphasis on scientific thought. Belief in spirits and the paranormal were still considered to be superstitious and uneducated, despite Spiritualism’s attempts to link science with the existence of spirits. The clash of Spiritualism against a scientifically minded society is something that resonates into our contemporary age, but initially found its roots in the Victorian era when rudimentary technology and invention blossomed with industry.

Victorian era spirit belief and post-Enlightenment ideals conflicted, at first, when scientists sought to disprove the methods mediums used to communicate with spirits. Blum

(2007) cites the example of scientist Michael Faraday, who invented an early prototype of an electric motor. Faraday also conducted several laboratory experiments involving a piece of equipment called the *talking table*. The talking table was used by mediums to prove the presence of a spirit, who communicated with the living by moving or rotation the table thus answering simple yes or no questions.



Figure 1: A photograph of table-tipping. Taken 1898 with medium Eusapia Palladino.

Faraday described his experiment to the *Times* in a letter detailing his methods: he placed glass rollers between two pieces of wood and fastened them together. If anyone sitting at the table pushed the upper board, it slid over the lower board. He attached an instrument to the upper board to record any minute movements. When those participating in Faraday's experiment sat at the table, it moved despite their claims that they had been sitting still. Faraday concluded that the movements were unconscious and inadvertent muscle twitches made by the participants themselves and not by spirits. Despite arguments from those in the spiritualist movement, Faraday dismissed them: "If spirit communications, not utterly worthless, should happen to start into activity, I will trust the spirits to find out for themselves how they can move my attention" (Faraday as cited in Blum, 2007: 21).

However, Faraday's anxious calls for scientifically minded scepticism were completely ignored by the torrent of people seeking to communicate with spirits. Spiritualism spread from the United States across the sea to Britain, and mediums became international celebrities, visited by thousands. The commercialisation of spirit communication presented itself in the form of séances, private parties, and publicly driven spectacles, some that have become emulated in Edinburgh's current tourist industry. Initial commercially driven ghost events included everyday objects set up for the express purpose of spirit communication. Séances were performed for large audiences, where spirits communicated via levitating objects, table tilting, prototypical Ouija boards and other forms of talking boards.



Figure 2: The Davenport Brothers were American illusionists who rose to popularity in the 1850s. After touring the United States, they performed their shows throughout England, helping to spread the fascination with Spiritualism to the United Kingdom.

Despite the success and widespread draw of the paranormal spectacle, these everyday objects were simply not enough to substantiate spiritual presence to sceptical communities. Spiritualists began looking for new ways of both evidencing the paranormal and improving spirit communication through new, emerging technologies. Communication and recording instruments, in particular, became utilised as more and more people became eager to experience spirits directly and personally rather than through mediums. Through the use of new technologies, some individuals claimed the mediumship was no longer necessary. In making the spiritual realm more accessible to those without the gift of mediumship, the roles of mediums became limited. Technology created a more personal link to the spiritual realm, by which people could form their own individual connections without the service of mediums and sensitives. Steven Connor

argues that spirit belief and scientific thought became even more connected as those within the spiritualist movement participated in a *twinning or ghosting* of the development of new technologies, especially those used for communication (2000: 363). This created a period of “extraordinary science”, through which people experimented with new technological methods to prove the existence of spirits (Abbott, 2007: 32). The public became enthralled with new technology which they believed offered proof that spirits were constantly on the other side waiting, and willing, to communicate with the living – and that this realm was accessible to everyone through the use of novel inventions.

The Phonograph: Recording Spirit Voices on the Other Side

Certain inventions used for spirit communication were well ahead of their time, and therefore took on a magical status. Communication technologies, in particular, were thought to be otherworldly because since they were capable of transmitting information and existed as capsules of time (Hill, 2011: 33). The focus for these next two sections will be on the phonograph and the camera. These instruments became influential not only to spiritualists of the Victorian era, but maintain particular importance to ghost hunters in our modern age. The phonograph, which recorded and played back sound, was the prototype for what would become digital voice recorders.²⁷ Abbott notes that the phonograph was “credited with a redefinition of

²⁷ In Chapter 5 I discuss how ghost hunters use digital recorders in locations to capture the voices of the dead.

time and space,” and that its voice recordings could be shipped even overseas for people to hear the voices of family members or colleagues (2007: 31).



Figure 3: The Medium Eva C. with a Materialisation on Her Head and a Luminous Apparition Between Her Hands

Through its ability to record sounds, the phonograph preserved the voices of people before their deaths, capturing pieces of them that could carry on in the lives of the living. It was a voice without shape or body that lived on through technology. Jacque Perriault referred to the phonograph as “the first technology which actively attempts to conjure up death” (Perriault as quoted in Durham Peters, 1999: 161). Journalist W.T. Stead praised the telephone and the phonograph, stating:

Countless generations mourning the dead have cried with vain longings to hear the sound of the voice that is still . . . Now the very sound and accent of the living words of the dead whose bodies are dust have become the inheritance of mankind (Stead as quoted in Douglas-Fairhurst, 2002: 1).

The phonograph’s significant contribution to the era was in its ability to immortalise the voices of the living, so a part of them would live on after death through technology. However, for the Victorian spiritualist, the phonograph was also considered a way to capture the voices of spirits on the other side who wished to communicate with their living loved ones. Through these two roles the phonograph played during the Victorian era, “the human became just another haunted machine” (Warwick, 2014: 374). Within that human/machine dichotomy, spiritualists believed the phonograph captured pieces of the soul that could be played back to the living, the same use the digital recorder plays in the modern ghost hunt. Once associated with immortalising dead loved ones through the recordings left before they passed, the phonograph took on a mystical quality: it became connected with auditory spectral phenomena.

Spirit Photography: The Photograph as Evidence of Spirits

Another invention which became more developed for capturing the paranormal was photography. While the camera had been invented prior to the phonograph, it was not until long after its invention that it became utilised for the purpose of capturing spirits on film. For spiritualists seeking to make connections to the spirit realm, the camera became a replacement for those in the mediumship. Before photography, the medium's abilities were considered by believers to be supported by science: the living, conscious body has an electromagnetic field that changes at the moment of death; spirits are those who are capable of staying in communication with the living and mediums are more in tune with their frequency (Gutierrez, 2009: 65). However, as scientists and sceptics became increasingly critical of the spiritualist movement, they called for more evidence. The spiritualist movement changed under the scientific gaze and the need to prove the existence of the supernatural became a new objective. These new technologies were a method through which spiritualists could both prove and develop links with the spirit world (Warner, 2006: 225). The medium – the human element of spirit communication – was the primary culprit for the sceptic's critique due to their potential for dishonesty.

The camera eliminated the need for a medium, and therefore the potential for both human error and deception. Cameras produced images which were considered more objective than what might be received through a medium; and the ghost could be witnessed by those without the ability to communicate with spirits. Elizabeth Edwards notes the significance of the camera's role in presenting reality, that photographs became used as empirical facts and evidence. She

referred to this as a *reality effect*, in which photographs were used to present an unbiased, ultimate truth (2012: 16).

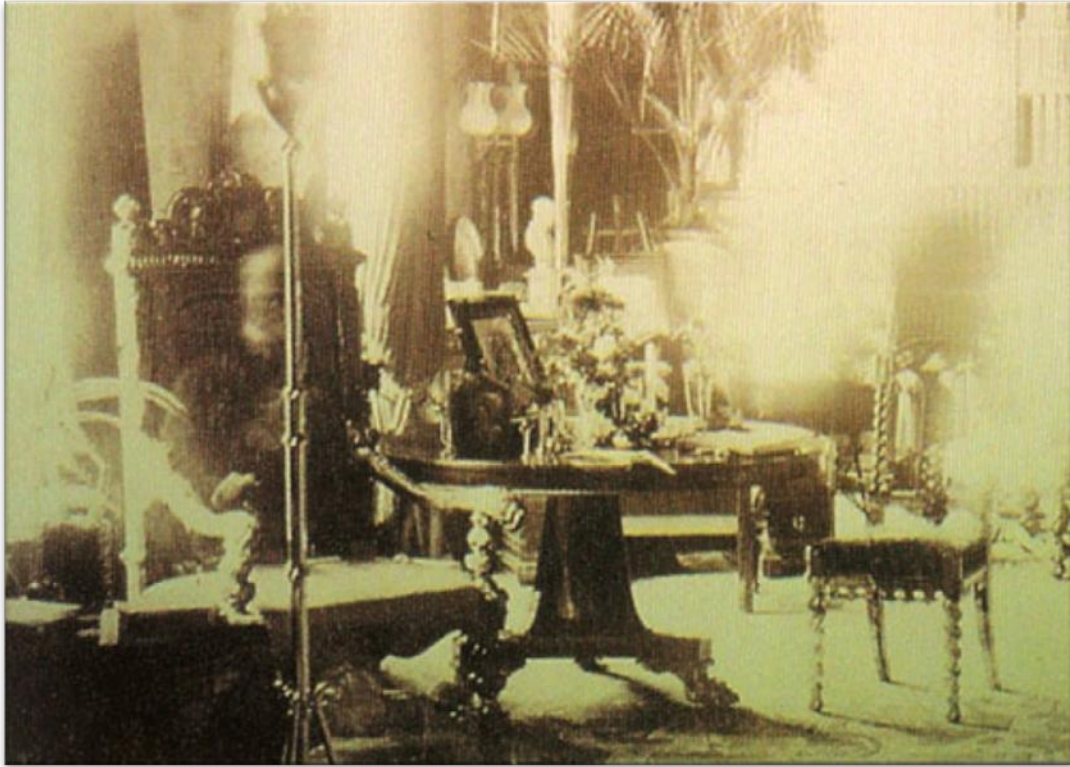


Figure 4: This photograph was taken by Sybell Corbet in 1891. She believed the photograph captured the spirit of Lord Combermere. The photograph would have taken up to an hour to expose.

Annette Hill notes that the photograph, in particular, is an example of what Roger Silverstone (1994) referred to as *double articulation*, where the material object is associated with psychological and social matters (Hill, 2011: 33). While the objective and practical use of the photograph could be explained by the amount of light the shutter lets into the box, early photographs were nonetheless associated with the supernatural (the light allowed into the box was believed to “steal” or “capture” the light of the soul – the source of the belief that the camera steals the soul). Spiritualists believed that the dead were beyond the abilities of human sight, but

within a range that could be picked up by the camera, a notion that endures in modern ghost hunting and spiritualist communities. Despite these ideas surrounding the camera, the existence of photographic evidence was crucial to proving the existence of spirits (Warner, 2006: 222). Davies notes the irony in the fact that Spiritualism “soon came to rely on materialism for proof of its anti-materialist premise” (2007: 130).

In an effort to adapt to this new age of spirit photography, the role of the medium was altered. Stacey Abbott notes that “these developments demonstrated an increasing separation between the medium and the spirit world as the medium gradually shifted from acting as an interpreter of messages to an operator facilitating communication” (Abbot, 2009: 31). Mediums, eager to maintain relevance in a technologically shifting world, went from being the body through which spirits communicated with the living to being the source of what attracted ghosts to certain instruments. A notable technique used by mediums was the psychic photograph, noted by Warner (2006) as a combination of psychic science (as practiced by mediums) and photography, which was becoming more available as a household appliance. The psychic photograph allowed mediums, acting as the body for spirits, to project images onto the photographs.



Figure 5: This photograph by Frederick Hudson (c. 1874) features medium Florence Cook in a trance. In the photo, Cook is being looked over by a spirit she called “Katie King”.

Trance mediums presented themselves as being able to summon spirits in photographs at will. Warner notes this as a “translation of thoughts into images”, which “shaped the trust which Victorians placed in spirit photographs.” (ibid: 229). Warner likens mediums in this sense as “human Victrolas”²⁸, “an instrument that is both receiving and transmitting” (230). Photography

²⁸ “Victrola” being another word for the phonograph. In this sense, the concept of the phonograph and the role of the camera became combined; the medium participated as a living phonograph who conjures spirits to be captured on film.

changed the way Victorians thought about the ghost, from immaterial entities to entities consisting of some form of light and substances which could be imprinted within the body of the camera onto film. Photography also created a method through which the general public could visually experience spirits for themselves, in a way that was both personal and significant. Suddenly, spirits had become even more accessible, with those interested in investigating spirits continuing to use emerging technologies to investigate and connect with the paranormal.

Conclusion

The contemporary Scottish brand is one in which the past and present have become connected and interactive, and the paranormal is the bridge through which they intersect. Through the romantic aesthetic and literature of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment age, Scottish identity has become defined by its connection to the supernatural. As Rev. Charles Rogers once wrote, “. . .the spectres of murdered persons, or of their murdered hovered, it was believed, about old ruins and sequestered dells. They followed those who had deprived them of their mortal tenements.” (Rogers, 1869: 255). The spectre continues to be an intrinsic part of Scotland’s urban and rural geography that is marketed to tourists. The ghost is what marks the Scottish countryside as other and as a compelling tourist destination in that “. . . the phantom transmogrifies the mundane landscapes of present-day Scotland. It drapes over these terrains a shroud through which the tourist can gaze out of the present and into a mist-covered past, the

representatives of which are phantoms and ghouls” (Inglis and Holmes, 2003: 61). The tourist landscape of Scotland is marked by the spectre, and ghost stories have become another aspect of the country’s history. This chapter has shown how the Scottish brand came to include the paranormal, and the eventual aspects of the commercial ghost industry that is reflected in Edinburgh. The desire to prove the existence of spirits through technology remains an important aspect of ghost hunting in contemporary ghost investigations. The influence of photography and digital voice recordings, especially, remain the most important methods through which ghost investigators provide proof of hauntings in a location. The spiritualist ideals that became present in the Victorian era, the conflict between science and belief, and the paranormal brand that established Scotland as other, remain vital components of ghost culture. These topics continue to play out within both the commercial and investigatory paranormal spheres in Edinburgh and are addressed within the contemporary setting for the rest of this thesis.

CHAPTER 2:

Walking Tours: The Ghost Space, Tour Structure and Storytelling, Themes and Symbols

My field research for this thesis included personally attending dozens of organised ghost tours and events within the city of Edinburgh. The overarching goal was to get a sense of the tour atmosphere, as well as the different categories of tours each individual company presented. My fieldwork first commenced as an interest in ghost stories, both in cataloguing and exploring the different styles of each tale. As my research progressed and I recorded additional stories on ghost walks, I began to notice similarities in the tales, as well as the format of tours for each individual company and even across several companies. Through both written and recorded data, I became familiar enough with stories to spot contrasting aspects and resemblances. Next, I analysed the structure of tours, as well as how the stories reflected wider cultural ideas within ghost culture, Spiritualism, ritual, and folklore.

The Edinburgh ghost tour industry is a vivid combination of performance, ghost hunting, and storytelling. Each tour caters to a different kind of audience; some are structured largely for entertainment purposes, to tell stories in a theatrical manner about ghosts set against the backdrop of a gory and violent historical Edinburgh. Others include a sombre approach to exploring the different types of spirits that haunt various places in Old Town, incorporating aspects of a ghost investigating Edinburgh sub-culture that is active in trying to scientifically verify the existence of spirits. Despite the tonal, presentational, and subject differences between

tours, they share many of the same types of stories. Michele M. Hanks posits that the ghost stories relayed on tours represent a form of *mythico-history*, a term coined by Lisa Malkki (1995) to describe a set of stories that confront both the past and structure of everyday life, which converge in order to make (or remake) a world (2011: 134). In the case of tours, the mythico-history is the construction of an environment where the realm of the dead and the realm of the living remain entwined through ghost lore. More than that, the stories told on tours show clear parallels to prominent beliefs, ideas and themes of Edinburgh's ghost culture.

This chapter seeks to explore the similarities in structure, motifs, and content of the stories told on the ghost walks. Qualitative data (recordings, pictures, handwritten notations) were collected from four principal tour companies within Edinburgh: Mary King's Close, Auld Reekie Tours, Mercat Tours, and City of the Dead. Additionally specific attention was paid to the construction of what I call the *ghost space*, the spiritual landscape created on the ghost tours, the place where spirits reside, and how that information is communicated to tourists. Within the ghost space are particular types of spirits whose stories have narrative commonalities across different walks with competing Edinburgh tour companies. I will analyse these resemblances, as well as explore the ways in which stories appropriate existing beliefs within ghost culture, their folkloric basis, and how tours create and build an historical framework for their tales.

Assembling the Ghostly Landscape: The Nature of the “Ghost Space”

Throughout this thesis, certain sections within tour chapters will be devoted to larger cultural ghost beliefs within Edinburgh’s ghost community. These ideas formulate the basis, structure, and framework for ghost walks in Edinburgh. A particularly important aspect is the *ghost space*, a phrase I coined while participating in walking tours. The term reflects the manner in which tour guides verbally relay stories about the secondary spiritual landscape that resides alongside our living world. John Sabol (2007: 23) describes what I call the ghost space as being composed of *haunt stratigraphy*, an anthropological space in which the past (where the spirits inhabit) and the present (where the living inhabit) intersect and interact with one another. He further details this to be a place of, “symmetrical interlacing of memories, actions, thoughts, and performances, from disparate sources.” Each story told on the tour represents a facet of this ghost space, a single pocket in time for each specific ghost. The spiritual landscape itself becomes reflective of that spectre’s own time, former life, as well as their experiences and memories.

In Edinburgh’s Spiritualist community, there are certain parts of the ghost space used as a single dimensional reality or *second life*. The entities inhabiting this reality are entirely separate from the other spirits in the same ghost space. In this place they are able to live out their own afterlife in complete ignorance of the other spirits who may haunt the same location. Not only that, but the sequestered nature of the ghost space allows them remain unaware of the living as they move through the physical present. The location itself is a place spirits are attached to and unable to leave; their ghost space becomes a combination of how the space appeared in the spirit’s past and the endless repetition of the once habitual behaviour in their former lives. The

place is considered significant to the spirit either because of the manner in which they died or because they are so attached to their former lives – and their old routines – that they return to continue them in the ghost space (Davies, 2007: 4). On the tour, the creation of this other dimension becomes a mode of creating a framework around stories of hauntings. As Avery Gordon (1997) explains, “A ghost . . . [is] that special instance of the merging of the visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present . . . the making of worldly relations and into the making of our accounts of the world” (24). The Edinburgh vaults are reflective of this between-ness, a psychically charged location that connects history and the present, and where the invisible spectres of the dead connect with the living, despite being visibly absent (Pile, 2005: 171).

During an extensive review of notes and recordings from various ghost tours (and other similar events), I parsed the type of spirits living within the ghost space into several distinct groups. In the first group, the spirit constructs a ghost space that is completely separate from spirits who may haunt the same location. This spectre is not only unaware of living people who may move through the physical site, but they are also ignorant of the presence of other spirits. Mediums within Edinburgh’s Spiritualist community describe the space these spirits create as *pocket dimensions* of their own time – where the spirit conceives a location as it originally existed during their former life. Moreover, these spirits have afterlives entirely run on repetition, or what John Sabol (2009) describes as a *memory bank* of experiences, in which their reality is entirely dependent upon the collected recollections of their former lives (45). This aspect of the ghost space is considered within the Spiritualist community to be rarely accessible except by

mediums or those sensitive to the presence of spirits.²⁹ Indeed, some ghost investigators do not consider these to be ghosts³⁰ at all, but *psychic imprints* (also called *residual hauntings*) of people or events which have left their mark on a location; they are an echo left behind residual intense emotion. According to Dan, a ghost investigator I interviewed, the energy a person “imprints” on a location can even be impressed by living people; he and his team have to distinguish between these residual hauntings and actual spirits while in the field. However, other ghost investigators I spoke with disagreed, believing that after death some ghosts go on to repeat certain events which were significant to them in life – either the way in which they were killed, or even just their daily routine. Despite their differences, both philosophies agree that this spirit-type has little with the living; they are occasionally glimpsed, but their consciousness remains solely within the reality they have created.

The next group of ghosts are purported to exist within a larger spiritual landscape. These spectres seem to be more critically conscious of territorial separations – the individual, partitioned spaces within the ghost space – as well as being more aware of the distinction between a living physical space and their own existence relative to that. That is to say, these spirits are also considered to be aware of the living world we inhabit and may attempt to interact with those in it. This type of spirit occupies the ghost space at large, not being confined to their dimensional realities or memory banks. In terms of interaction, these spirits manifest in what is

²⁹ Further expounded upon in Chapter 4.

³⁰ As in, a *conscious* presence in an alternate reality.

considered within the Spiritualist community to be a *typical* haunting – as in, those experienced by living persons via their senses, most commonly sight, touch, and hearing.³¹

To clarify, the ghost space is both a representation of the physical location, as well as a spatial disruption: “Ghosts and haunting . . . are special and temporal: located at a threshold that allows emotions and experiences to cross from one setting to another, in a flash, ghosts and haunting disrupt prosaic senses of time and space.” (Pile, 2005: 163). In contrast, the living world encompasses the same reality, yet one that is entirely separate from the ghost space. Within the ghost culture it is considered to be the central dimension, one in which the ghost space revolves around, within, and alongside. Those within ghost culture refer to the separation of these worlds as the *veil*, defined as a gossamer thin divider between the ghost space and the world of the living; a haunted location is considered to be where a pathway or opening exists between these two worlds (Guiley, 2008: 42). When people are able to see or sense spirits, they are at a location where the world of the living and the ghost space have briefly connected, which is referred to as a *lift of the veil*. When the veil lifts, however briefly, it allows for a fleeting glimpse into the ghostly landscape.

In Edinburgh’s ghost culture, the belief is that the connection between the world of the living and the world of the dead are fleeting – that spirits do not have a hold in the living world. The tenuous link ghosts have to a location is primarily created by events pertaining to their former lives, their attachment to the space, or their emotional mark on it. Because of this, a spirit’s ability to reach through the veil to be seen or experienced by the living takes a great deal

³¹ Mediums and sensitives consider their gifts to operate as a *sixth sense* (also called *subtle perception ability*), in which they can “see” dual realities: the physical space as seen with their eyes, and the spiritual space as seen in their mind.

of effort on their part – though certain spirits are able to act in short bursts of intense emotion that can cause the manipulation of physical objects in an attempt to communicate with the living. However, for those within the ghost culture who wish to make contact, certain time periods are pivotal for catching a glimpse of the ghost space or for investigators to use their tools to gain evidence of the existence of ghosts. Sacred times – like midnight and Halloween – are important within the community. These are considered liminal phases where the worlds of the living and the dead become briefly linked. The idea stems from the belief that spirits resided in a form of purgatory and one night per year were denied the light of God and so returned to earth for vengeance or to right injustices (Davies, 2007: 17).³²

Liminal spaces and times are vital elements of ghost culture, and tourism by extension. The underground vaults are considered special, a location where the ghost space lies closer to the world of the living. Steve Pile refers to these location-types as *anachronisms*, disruptions of linear times and spaces, where the very presence of ghosts alter both time and space, leaving both affected (Pile, 2005: 164). Pile's concept of spatial disruption plays out in how tours are constructed, as well: people move through the physical present while imagining both the past and the spiritual landscape. The story of the Cobbler's spectre acknowledges the past confronting the present: *The spirit of the Cobbler still lingers here . . . he is particularly interested in your shoes. Modern shoes, especially trainers, baffle him. But make sure to linger a few seconds to let him see them.* Anachronisms are a concept mirrored within the ghost space: the presence of the living is just as out-of-time to the spectres in the vaults as the spectres are to the physical present.

³² Sacred time and space will be explored further in Chapter 4.

The tour industry uses ghost culture beliefs pertaining to ghost space as the foundation for tours. While commercial collaborations with mediums and ghost hunters are elaborated upon in later chapters³³, both anachronisms and thinning veils are fundamental aspects of the ghost space constructed on walking tours. These larger, overarching ideas within the Spiritualist community have become reflected even in the advertisements:

With troubling, true stories of gruesome punishment and unsettled spirits, we will relish giving you a flavour of life, and death, in Old Edinburgh. You'll visit the shadowy closes where the ghosts still cling to the ancient sites and explore the gruesome past in the safety of daylight. However, the Blair Street Underground Vaults always lie in shadow..
(“Ghostly Underground”, n.d.).

Guides tell tales of past history and tourist ghost encounters, while weaving in the creation of the ghost space. They often speak of spirits being “*frequently spotted in the archway of that door over there,*” or, “*this spirit has been known to walk above our heads, where the floor of the original room once stood.*” While these are effective in maintaining a spooky atmosphere for the benefit of tourists, they also create a mental image of the ghost space, an invisible landscape in which spirits are always lingering and present, yet rarely experienced by the living. As well as creating a “gaze” of the other side for tourists to piece together, tours produce what Avery Gordon (1997) calls a *sensuous knowledge*. In relation to ghost tours, Annette Hill (2011: 105) describes sensuous knowledge as an, “awareness of the invisible, of the hidden aspects of history and social issues . . . [Sensuous knowledge] is linked to knowledge of hauntings and paranormal beliefs, and psychological knowledge of haunting atmospheres.” Descriptive imagery both suggests spectral presence to tourists, and encourages a frame of mind that becomes ruled by the haptic qualities of the senses. Together, stories and sensuous knowledge

³³ See: Chapter 4 and 5, respectively.

form a perception of the space that connects the past with the present, and the living with the dead.

Sensuous knowledge is related to the anthropological concept of *tacit knowledge*. Victor Turner argues that tacit knowledge is closely linked to the transformative qualities of metaphor, that “Metaphor is our means of effecting instantaneous fusion of two separated realms of experience into one illuminating, iconic, encapsulating image” (Turner 1974: 4). On ghost tours, these two separate realms are the living physical world, and the separate realm of the dead; together, they make up the ghost space. For tourists, the experience is further exemplified when guides share anecdotes of previous visitor encounters with spirits. Stories of alleged paranormal encounters add context to the creation of the ghost space on tours. Ghost stories solidify the link between the ghost space and the physical location in the minds of tourists. The result is a deliberate reworking of the central ideas within ghost culture, packaged and presented in the structure of narrative.

Tour Structure, Isolation, and the Benefit of Darkness

Although each tour company in Edinburgh has their own stories to accompany the different vaults which they own and operate through, there are many similarities in the way they structure tours. In this section, I will refer to *the tour* for the sake of brevity – but to clarify, the focus will be on the structure of the walks for three of the major Edinburgh tour companies (that

operate out of the vaults) mentioned before: City of the Dead Tours, Mercat Tours, and Auld Reekie Tours. The tours are grouped together in this section for a single purpose: so the vault tours are presented in a way that highlights shared presentation across companies.

The tour begins within the heart of Edinburgh's Old Town (Auld Reekie at Tron Kirk, and City of the Dead/Mercat Tours both operate in the vicinity of the Mercat Cross), which is surrounded by Edinburgh's earliest historic buildings. The Mercat Cross itself is the reproduction of an old relic from a past Edinburgh that entertained through public displays of torture and had a lively, seedy underbelly of criminal life. Aside from these places being visible, easy to find locations within the city centre, they evoke what Pile describes as the *phantasmagoria* of a city, that "a city also haunts by commemorating its dead, in part by making them endure in its physical architecture" (Pile, 2005: 162). By beginning the tour within the Old Town, ghosts of the past become linked to the living. The surrounding architecture is a means of introducing the spirit world through an immediate visual sense of place, evoking the past geography of the city. Guides shape a mental picture of an historical Edinburgh through storytelling and descriptive historical culture references juxtaposed against the physical setting. After all, each of these tours have entrances into the vaults that could just as easily become a meeting space – but the act of leading tourists through the streets of the Old Town is part of contextualising the link between Edinburgh's past with the ghosts that haunt its streets. The city itself has become an extension of the ghost space created for tourists. Guides detail how places of death become significant spiritual locations which hold emotional importance via their traumatic pasts (Hill, 2011: 96). More than that, the group movement through the streets establishes the inclusive, social nature of ghost walks. This intentional *communitas* is later eliminated through the deliberate use of

darkness, constructing a sense of isolation that promotes a heightened sensory experience (ibid: 105).

After being led through the streets of Old Town, tourists are taken to the entrance of the vaults. Each is locked up to prevent unauthorised entry, and a single person within the tour is designated to become the last person to enter. The first vault room the tour is led into is often reputed to be the most haunted within the location. Past the initial threshold, darkness plays a role in how the tour is constructed. The vaults themselves are lit only by candlelight, and each guide holds a single candle that they carry with them as they lead the group through the chambers. The effect easily creates an overall chilling, eerie atmosphere for telling ghost stories, as well as a sense of isolation and atmosphere despite the large, tourist filled space. Storytelling within the historical space, while holding a candle, becomes an anachronistic act. Candlelight is meant to evoke an immediate sense of historical imagery, while ghost stories contrast that with paranormal imagery.

Hill (2011) describes the effect of darkness in tours as combining both intense personal emotions (brought on by an elevated sense of awareness through the unease triggered by the sudden lack of light) with the mutual, shared experiences of a group structure (105). Darkness also kindles the potential for unique tourist experiences. In a comment posted online about Auld Reekie's ghost walk, the tourist stated:

. . .its amazing how the dark can play tricks on your mind-- im sure in the room with the stones there was someone in there- felt something a bit wierd down my right side and when i got back to the car i noticed i had a small fingernail imprint on my finger-- if i

ever come back to edinburgh i will do the night tour-- if i feel brave enough. (Sarah Jane Walker, 2013).³⁴

The act of listening to ghost stories while in the deliberate, isolating darkness creates an awareness of surroundings where the senses are heightened and adrenaline forces an ultra-alertness of the room: the people, smells, sounds, and tactile senses, especially. It is an experience beyond the gaze, the visual sense, and instead entwined with the sensory and emotional. Tied with that is an acute fear response to anything believed to be paranormal in nature. Fear is an experiential trigger influenced by a combination of ghost stories and the unease of being in a dark, unfamiliar space. Both create conditions in which the tourist becomes more susceptible to influence.

However, certain people within the paranormal community believe that these are the perfect conditions for becoming more sensitive to spirits. These beliefs mirror shamanic rites of initiation described by Knud Rasmussen of how the lack of light is utilised to create an environment where the initiate can, “see through darkness and perceive things . . . which are hidden from others.” (1929: 111) He further writes about darkness being a symbol for death, one that represents a transition into the world of the dead, where the lack of light forces the initiate to concentrate and become more aware of their surroundings (ibid: 112). While the lack of light is certainly used to construct a unique, chilling atmosphere for storytelling – and I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that purpose, at least in part – but I believe it is equally important to address how aspects of ghost culture are appropriated into even the structural level of ghost tours. The use of darkness and candlelight is one such practice. After all, the tour guides could just as easily use torches or – if they wished to maintain the air of historical effect such as with

³⁴ Quoted verbatim.

their use of capes as costume – they could use a lantern. Instead, they lead the tour from room to room with only a single candle lit. Within ghost culture, darkness is optimum for experiencing spirits, an idea that relates to ritualistic and shamanic ideas of visual deprivation being important to the evocation of spirits (Rogo, 1987: 138). Darkness is a vital component of what Constance Classen (1993) refers to as *sensory journeys*, an experience which forms an understanding of the world and places in it. In Spiritualism, the senses are important not only to communicating with ghosts, but in becoming in tune with their world through heightened feelings.

The presence of candlelight in such a journey parallels with the practice of séance and the idea that candlelight attracts spirits. Eliade wrote about Malayan séances where, “the arrival of the spirit is manifested by the quivering of a candle flame” (1964: 345). This idea of spirits manipulating candlelight – and, indeed, spirits being drawn to the light itself – is present within the tour structure. One guide spoke about a tour he had led where he walked into the largest vault room, and the candle’s flame immediately flickered violently and extinguished. *It seemed odd*, he said, *as there isn’t much of a draft that’s able to come through down here. The air is always pretty still*. So he lit the candle a second time and it also flickered and went out. So he lit it again. *The flame flickered and flickered . . . and I realized it was as if someone were breathing next to the candle flame, causing it to go out each time*. This is a personal story this particular guide liked to tell on his tours. After the tour ended, I asked him about if it really happened or if it was just something he told on the walks. *No, it really happened. Couldn’t get out of the room fast enough. I do tell it on the tours because people find it interesting, but sometimes the candles down there do behave a bit odd*.

Aside from the singular handheld candles, each threshold between chambers is lit with its own flame, the wax from many previous candles splattered across the ground. Each room within the underground becomes its own unique setting for each different story. Stories begin with an elaborate historical introduction before segueing into a conversation about the spirit that haunts the particular room. In an interview with one of the guides for Mercat Tours, Sarah, told me:

We always start with the setting. The vaults are already pretty atmospheric as they are, but the history sets the mood for the ghost stories. We tell the history of the vaults, then Mercat's findings there, and if any past tourists had any stories we share those.

By leading in with the history of the vaults, the tour company intertwines the ghost stories with a dynamic past. The spatial identity of the vaults is constructed through stories of the past and established within the context of a ghost story. Narratives of tourist encounters within the vaults offer a deliberate framing of the historical space as firmly entwined with a paranormal reality. The framework of the tour unifies the site with a real live past, while the ghost stories themselves further legitimise the place as haunted: “[the ghost] . . . set[s] the parameters as to what the Scottish landscape *means*, and . . . authenticate[s] such ways of seeing and knowing, thus rendering the experience more “authentic” than it otherwise would have been.” (Inglis and Holmes, 2003: 61). The space seemingly comes to life for the tourist by a series of juxtapositions: past and present, living and dead, darkness and light. These are aspects that not only create a more vivid experience for the tourist, but also build upon the vaults reputation as haunted. Each story adds to its reputation and establishes an environment where the combination of storytelling, heightened senses, and darkness leave tourists open to the suggestion that certain sensations may have supernatural origins.

Tourist stories both develop and disseminate the idea of the vaults' *otherness*. Otherness is connected to what Eliade (1987) referred to as a *sacred space*; ghost investigators believe that certain locations are a natural *hot spot* for spectral activity. According to investigators I interviewed, hot spots are largely activated through horrific events (mass death), but are also considered a natural location in which spirits are attracted. Tourism promotes otherness through the connection between ghost stories and history (Seaton, 2009: 84). In this sense, tour companies promote a deliberate otherness which is self-perpetuating: tourists believe they have sensed or photographed something while on the tour, and widely spread their tales via internet reviews and blogs. This review left on the Mercat Tours Facebook page is one such example: “. . . am unsettled - shoelaces came undone all on their own in the cobblers room, and the pic I took def has a face of a lady and an orb” (Davey, 2014).³⁵ Facebook comments are cross-posted to the user's wall, so those on their friend's list can both see and share with their own friends. These experiences (along with photographic evidence) are also posted to Trip Advisor, one of the most widely used review sites for companies:

I was not prepared to feel spooked, but I did feel a poke in my back in the vault where the wee boy haunts (apparently). When I turned around expecting someone to say sorry, there was no one there!! We also heard stones getting chucked, or moved after we exited one room but there was no one there. When we looked again we saw a white shadow of light in the corner at the back of the pitch back room, when we stared further, it dissapeared in front of our eyes! IGo with an open mind but I was a bit freaked and unsettled and I could not sleep well that night for thinking about it all (Belgian_Scott, 2013).³⁶

In sharing reviews both to Facebook and to sites like Trip Advisor, experiences are read, consumed, and internalised by other tourists seeking unique experiences in the city. The public

³⁵ Quoted verbatim.

³⁶ Quoted verbatim.

perception of the vaults is defined by its hauntings, and visitors attend out of the expectation – or at least the *desire* – to prove the claims correct.

In continuing with the idea of otherness and sacred spaces, the emphasis on *thresholds* also plays a large part in Spiritualist culture and in the construction of ghost tours. Thresholds are frequently linked with Victor Turner's idea of liminal spaces, where liminality is connected to death, invisibility, and darkness, which are symbols of transition into a betwixt-and-between state (Turner, 1969: 95). Again, these are overarching ideas one may not immediately associate with tourism, but have a larger role in the ideas of Edinburgh's ghost hunting and Spiritualist communities. The idea of *in-between* states is significant when communicating with spirits, calling them forth, and creating an atmosphere on the tour wherein the vaults themselves are considered in-between. They are presented as a sacred space between life and death.

In reference to storytelling and overall tour structure, thresholds are a way of visualising and making sense of the ghost space. Each individual room in the vaults has its own history and its own ghost that haunts within it – and more significantly, these spirits can be made aware of the boundaries and thresholds that separate their haunt spaces. *Mr. Boots doesn't come in here*, Sarah the tour guide said, referring to the malevolent spirit that haunts the Mercat vaults. The tour was in one of the smaller rooms at the back of their set of vaults, where rocks are piled into two opposing corners. *He lingers in the hallway out there, but he has never once been spotted in this room. We think it's because the presence of the Cobbler keeps him away . . . Mr. Boots doesn't have any power in this room.* The Cobbler allegedly haunts the pile of rocks in one of the corners of the room. According to Mercat Tours, they found artefacts of shoes left over from when the vaults had been blossoming with business in the 18th and 19th centuries. They refer to

this specific room as the *Cobbler's Room*, after the pleasant spirit who apparently takes interest in visitors' shoes. "Psychics have advised us to go into this room if we have difficulties in the vaults. The strong, positive, benign spirit of the Cobbler will protect us" (Geddes, n.d.: 42). The idea of malevolent entities being unable to cross a particular threshold is one that connects back to legends describing certain spaces that keep evil spirits at bay, such as consecrated ground.

Incidentally, The Cobbler has kept claim over the room he worked in during his former life, just as Mr. Boots continues to hold ownership over the White Room. These two spirits are considered the strongest within Mercat's set of vaults as they seem to be able to communicate with the realm of the living more easily than the other spirits within the same space. This represents another significant juxtaposition within Spiritualist beliefs: the malevolent spirit versus the benevolent spirit. Emanuel Swedenborg, whose writings influenced the formation of Spiritualism, claimed people attract both good and evil spirits; good spirits are assigned by God, but people attract evil ones themselves. Evil spirits set out to intentionally harm the living, and the other seeks to protect them (Williams-Hogan, 2013: 66). This belief is also derived from folkloric ideas about spirits and their purpose in a haunting: some perceived spirits return to seek vengeance upon the living, while others believed they played a more protective role, returning to defend their families from tragedy and misfortune (Rogers, 2002: 40). The threshold between the space that the Cobbler defends and that which Mr. Boots has claimed represents a strict boundary within the ghost space, and with it, their ability to communicate with and manipulate the physical living space the tourists inhabit ("Mr. Boots has no power in here.").

The different rooms in the vaults reflect changes in ownership between certain ghost spaces, and further represent the separated boundary between the realms of the living and the

realms of the dead (Thomassen, 2012: 22). Tourists in this instance walk between the territories of these two spirits, a liminal space partitioned by these liminal beings where each holds power within their own “claimed” spaces. As the tourist passes between thresholds, their journey is reflective of what Eliade refers to as a *break in the homogeneity of space*. He noted that this “break is symbolised by an opening by which passage from one cosmic region to another is made possible” (1987: 37). Eliade’s notion on symbolic passages is related to a wider idea of tourism as a sacred journey (c.f. Graburn, 1978; Turner & Turner, 1978; Bauman 1996). In this sense, the journey becomes a liminal, ritual event. The stories of the dead are part of that journey, and each room within the vaults represents an aspect of a living past. In the structure of the ghost tour, the vaults do not exist as a singular, complete landscape, but rather as a setting where the individual spaces are significant to each spirit, and each spirit exists between liminal thresholds.

Ghost Tour Terminology, Ghost Types, and The Incorporation of the Ghost Hunt for the Tourist Experience

Spiritualism is not the only aspect of the ghost community that has been integrated into the walking tours. The ghost walks have also incorporated a number of beliefs held by *ghost hunters* or *ghost investigators*. Not only has their terminology been included into the tour’s language, but so have their tools; such as *electro-magnetic field* (EMF) meters. Ghost hunters use these meters to look for spikes in the EMF signal; the spikes suggest a change in electrical

current, and the belief is that a nearby spirit is responsible for this signal spike. Furthermore there has been a transferred use of terminology in the *types* of spirits that are said to inhabit the vaults. These categories were no doubt borrowed from ghost investigators, popularised by ghost hunting on television shows and within the media. For example *mini ghost hunts* are walks slightly over an hour in length. On these tours, they hand out EMF meters to those attending the walks and explain spirit terminology that has been used in the ghost hunting community to distinguish between the manifestations of different types of spirits present within a haunted environment. My research shows these tours not only mimic the exact techniques used in ghost hunting, but these methods also have been made even more prevalent by their use within pop culture.³⁷

One of the first things explained to tourists on these investigatory walks is the very question, “What is a ghost?” which is important to clarify to the reader of this dissertation as well. Throughout the research process, the definition of what qualifies as a “ghost” seems to change depending upon the source (written, verbal, media, etc.). There are believers within the community who view ghosts as lost souls who have an emotional attachment to a particular place, object, or person and are so connected to this remnant of their former lives that their spirit remains linked to it even in the afterlife. For others, a ghost was a soul who experienced an untimely, tragic death and remained in a purgatorial ghost space after their lives were ripped away too early. The one commonality both ideas share is that for whatever reason, ghosts are caught in an in-between state due to their inability to cross over into their awaiting and proper afterlife. Within the Edinburgh ghost community, haunting is considered to be a thoroughly unnatural state for the deceased; it is a complete disruption in the flow of existence between life

³⁷ See: Chapter 6.

and death. Again, is hypothesised to be caused by either an excessive attachment to the living state, or an inability to move on due to a tragic end. In the Mercat Tours official souvenir guide, they refer to ghosts as, “. . . deceased persons who are grounded in the environment, trapped here by tragedy or ‘unfinished business’” (Geddes, n.d., 39). And their act of *haunting* is defined within the culture as, “a repeated appearance of a ghost before someone or in a certain location” (Davies, 2007: 3). These are patterns of spectre behaviour that have been noted by the larger ghost culture and subsequently appropriated by the ghost walk.

Further, throughout this thesis, words such as “ghost”, “spirit”, and “spectre,” will be used to reference the souls of the dead. Although there is a theoretical debate within existing literature (Sabol, 2007; Poo, 2009) and in my field research on whether these are separate, distinct types of spirits or simply different words for the same thing. However, ghost tours simplify and homogenise these terms into a single definition: a once living person who now resides in an unnatural state of death. Since these words are used interchangeably within the tour structure and the community at large in the general sense, I will adopt their loose terminology in this dissertation. Indeed, the only ghost type on the tour which received its own very clear, specific word (with specific connotations) was the *poltergeist*. On investigatory walks, this is the first spirit explained to tourists, in part, because it was a type made famous by Tobe Hooper’s 1982 film *Poltergeist*. One of the earliest notable uses of the term was by Claude Auge in the 19th century to mean:

Knocking spirits, souls of the dead who manifest their presence by knocking against the walls, the furniture, or who express their thoughts by knocking a number of time equivalent to the position of the letter of the alphabet they wish to designate. (Auge, 1897, as cited in Lecouteux, 2007: 9)

The use of poltergeist has come to mean something entirely different in modern ghost hunting culture and on the ghost walks. The word gained intense notoriety after Hooper's film became a smash hit, a cult classic, and was eventually adopted into a pop culture lexicon to become synonymous with a *malevolent spirit*. It is used to describe a ghost who uses primarily acoustic phenomenon to conduct its hauntings (Lecouteux, 2007: 18). On ghost walks, the label poltergeist also includes spirits who use tactile manipulation to their benefit, such as scratching, bruising, and pushing. Poltergeists are considered the strongest and most responsive type of spirits due to their ability to influence the physical, living world. Owen Davies argues that poltergeist activity is a public spectacle, treated as dramatic entertainment, but also believed to be irrefutable proof of the spirit world (Davies, 2007: 80). Ghost tours claim that phenomena such as thrown objects, footsteps, rappings, and tactile events like pushing or scratching are all caused by poltergeists in the vaults. These occurrences are observable by tourists, and presented by tour companies as dramatic evidence of hauntings.

Tour companies also publicise poltergeists on printed tour literature; the threat of a participant meeting the poltergeist is utilised on pamphlets and in tour literature to create a sense of danger around the tour: "This part of the South Bridge Vaults is known as Damnation Alley. With good reason. These dark tunnels and are stalked by a malevolent presence known as the South Bridge Entity" ("Underground City of the Dead Ghost Tour", n.d. para. 3). This particular spirit is an important tourist draw because – by the poltergeist's very nature – they are considered extremely active. The word's incorporation into the popular culture lexicon and its use on widely-watched television shows also creates an immediate, identifiable aspect of a haunting to any tourists who are personally unfamiliar with ghost investigations. Tours now utilise the poltergeist not only as a way to advertise the vaults, but as a guarantee that spirits at the site are

active. The scenario of a spectral encounter becomes a real possibility: “. . . the ghost walk can assert itself as being good value for money, because it provides what it promises – an encounter with the fearful – one that other types of tour cannot fulfill.” (Inglis and Holmes, 2003: 60). While the tours are clear about there being different ghost types, the poltergeist is the most immediate, recognisable, and marketable aspect of the tour.

The next most popular type of spirit is referred to as the *wandering spirit*. This spirit was briefly mentioned in a previous discussion of the ghost space, how certain spirits exist within their own pocket dimensions and choose to either interact with or ignore the living within that same space. These spirits significantly contribute to the overall tour atmosphere because they constitute an actual living part of local history. Furthermore, these entities exist within a ghost space modelled after their own former lives. Tour guides espouse upon the historical-based lives of these spirits as though they had never died; indeed wandering spirits may not be aware of their own deaths at all, and live out a second life in the same manner as their first. In ghost hunting, this manner of a haunting is often referred to as a *time slip*, a point at which the unchanged world of the spirit and the altered world of the living intersect. Moreover a living individual is able to catch a glimpse of this spirit performing their day to day rituals within the confines of their own ghost space. Mercat’s souvenir guidebook describes their function as *residual*, claiming “they retrace steps taken in life, like a video or DVD playing back a scene”. [Wandering spirits] do not notice our presence and are no threat.” (Geddes, n.d., 39). This is reflective of Sabol’s theory which states that a ghost is eager to maintain its own awareness of the world it has created; the world of its former life, so emotional barriers have been put in place to actively avoid the influence of the living (Sabol, 2007: xxvii).

Although the ghost hunting community has segregated the spiritual world into a multitude of spirits types primarily categorised through their haunt behaviour, tours tend to limit their explanations to two primary kinds – which represent the most common examples of hauntings witnessed on the tour. Moreover these spirits are exemplified through certain stories which will be detailed later, and by descriptions of their distinct haunt behaviour. According to Mercat’s souvenir guidebook, spirits manifest in many different ways, notably through the senses of sight, sound, and touch:

People saw figures when the rest of the vaults were empty. [They] heard footsteps when everyone was standing still. [They] felt changes in temperature when there was no source of a draught. [They] experienced changes in atmosphere from one vault to another. [They] captured orbs, circles of bright light, white, blue, or even black on camera. (Geddes, n.d., 38).

These descriptions of spirit manifestations are also used by ghost hunters within the community as proof of supernatural presence to the uninitiated. Edinburgh’s tours have clearly adopted similar explanations and terminology which demonstrates the link between ghost hunting culture and the creation of the current tour structure. Tourist evidence of hauntings via photography and spikes on the EMF meters have provided tour companies with enough confirmation to claim that their location is indeed haunted.

There is also a past/present dynamic of the ghost tour, where the history of the vaults becomes inextricably linked with it as a haunted location. The vaults are, then, constructed as authentic through the presence of the ghost “which operates as a hallmark of the archaic nature of the locale in question” (Inglis and Holmes, 2003: 56). Sabol notes that this creates an ongoing narrative between these two aspects of the ghost story: the history and the haunting (Sabol, 2007: xxiii). By entwining the haunting with the past space, ghost tours create a continuing relationship

between history and the physical, contemporary reality, where the supernatural interaction with tourists becomes a part of the location's narrative. The ghost stories are supported and further perpetuated through sightings and personal experiences. Avery Gordon refers to this as a *structure of feeling*, or a connection between the personal feelings that arise on the tour and their connection with the location as paranormal experiences (Gordon, 1997: 63). Tourists become part of an ongoing verification process, a continued confirmation that what they are experiencing either has a real-world explanation or is supernatural in origin. This process remains continuous outside the tour through internet comments such as this one left on City of the Dead Tours Facebook wall:

I really enjoyed the tour but was reluctant to say twice thought I heard children's laughter. In the black tomb and our side of the MacKenzie's tomb. Just thought it might have been some dumb echo acoustic anomaly. Anyone else heard children's laughter?? (John Leightell, 2014)³⁸

This structure of feeling is further reaffirmed through the tour's use of traditional ghost hunting tools. Photography is greatly encouraged on tours and has long since been important to ghost hunters to capture manifestations on film, referred to as spirit photography. EMF meters are a more modern tool in the ghost hunter's arsenal. The EMF metre is a device used to record the ambient electromagnetic fields in a room. In the ghost culture, they believe that spirits emit an electromagnetic frequency which can be detected, tracked, and recorded as scientific proof of the existence of some spirits. Not only has this become an accepted belief of the manifestation of spirits, but it has also been considered as an answer to the question of *what* ghosts are, and how they interact with their environment: "The theory of ghosts as residual electromagnetic impulses left behind by the strong emotions of the deceased, emphasises the dampness and enclosed

³⁸ Quoted verbatim.

environment of buildings required to retain this residual memory” (Davies, 2007: 47). This is an overarching idea within ghost culture which has been reflected in ghost hunting television shows and adopted by local tours via their use of EMF meters which reflects how ghosts seemingly interact with the space. The integration of these beliefs from ghost investigations into the overall structure of the ghost tour displays how close the relationships are between Edinburgh’s ghost culture, media representations (ghost investigations on television), and commercial ghost endeavours.

The Ghosts On Edinburgh Tours: Similarities, Themes and Symbols

Now that ghosts and ghost-types within Edinburgh’s culture have been clarified, In this section I will analyse examples of the similarities of stories told within various tours. An analysis of my recordings showed several common story types shared between local tour companies, as well as specific threads among stories that bear a striking resemblance to one another. These commonalities are significant in that they have become part of a single, unified genre of ghost story. I will address the themes that materialised within these co-joined tales, how they reflect ghost culture beliefs, their folkloric basis, and the manner in which they connect to overarching theories in the anthropology of *dark tourism*.

I: The Story of the Malevolent Spirit: Violence and Danger in the Safe Tourist Space, the
Gendered Nature of Hauntings

The *malevolent spirit* was second most common ghost story encountered during my examination of my field recordings. The malevolent spirit is usually described as a *poltergeist*, and characterised as one who may cause harm to visitors within the vaults. Its unwelcoming presence is purported by tourist companies to cause physical harm, illness, dizziness, or cold sweat. In this section the primary focus will be on the malevolent spirit stories for the three principal Edinburgh tour companies (Auld Reekie Tours, City of the Dead Tours and Mercat Tours). Specific attention will be paid to the similarities in their manifestations, and how the stories incorporate wider ghost theory and folkloric elements.

Mercat Tours' most active malevolent spirit is *Mr. Boots*, now made perhaps even more infamous after his mention in shows like *Most Haunted* and Syfy's *Ghost Hunters*.

We call him Mr. Boots because he wears long, knee-length leather boots and his footsteps can be heard echoing through the vaults and the corridors. We believe he might have once been a slum landlord down here in the vaults, extorting money from the people who lived down here. Another theory is that he's a body snatcher, who stored his bodies in the White Room. He has been sighted in every room except the Cobbler's Room and has made it known to us that he very much doesn't like us to be down here. His presence becomes the most powerful while in the White Room, which he considers his room. In fact, there was a woman standing there at the back where the fireplace would have once stood. She thought she felt a draft on her neck . . . slow, periodic, as if someone were breathing right next to her. Then she heard a whisper in her ear: "Get out . . . get out. . . GET OUT!"

Mr. Boots is not the only poltergeist-type spirit within Mercat's vaults that has been known to cause visitors discomfort or physical injury. Another spirit, known as the *Veiled Woman*, haunts the same physical space as the Cobbler (who is known to be exceptionally friendly). She is

purported to manifest on the pile of rocks opposite of where the Cobbler haunts. It has been said that:

Any female visitors might feel quite uncomfortable over there in that corner, where the Veiled Woman haunts. We haven't been able to figure out if she wears a veil because that's what she died in, or if that's how her grief is manifesting, but she's known to appear entirely dressed in black. We think she might have died in childbirth, but she's an angry spirit and any young women here of childbearing age might feel uncomfortable grief if they linger too long over in that corner. Sometimes, she has been known to cause physical pain to young ladies as well, so you're safer over here next to the Cobbler.

City of the Dead Tours refers to their malevolent spirit as the *South Bridge Entity*. They believe this entity may be the ghost of George “Bloody” MacKenzie, the notorious judge who presided over the slaughter of the Covenanters in the 17th century.³⁹:

The South Bridge entity is a very active poltergeist down here in the vaults. He has been known to cause physical injury to certain tourists, who come away with bruises and scratches. Sometimes, he has been known to grab people. A number of visitors have had experiences in the Haunted Vault, where the South Bridge entity frequents. He particularly likes to attack young, attractive women, so any ladies among us might be particularly vulnerable to his attacks . . .

Similarly, Auld Reekie Tours' malevolent spirit is considered much more demonic in nature. Their story involves a coven of witches in contemporary Edinburgh who used a portion of the vaults as a place of worship and to cast spells. They chose a small room at the back of the vault which was warm and dry-a perfect place for their service.

They set up all their supplies, a mirror in the corner, a stone circle in the centre of the room. The witches felt an immediate sense of discomfort in the room, as if they were unwelcome. The leader of the coven sensed a very disquieting presence – an evil presence. When the rest of the coven became uncomfortable conducting their rituals in the room, he decided to spend the night in the vault and cast the spirit out.

³⁹ This association deliberately connects the ghost of Bloody MacKenzie, to the mass death story for City of the Dead Tours, described in the next section. Another story claimed MacKenzie was the spirit primarily responsible for the fires that raged through the city centre of Edinburgh, which would connect him to the death story for Auld Reekie tours. See next section.

There are two alternate endings for this story. In the first story the leader of the coven successfully traps the spirit within the confines of the stone circle in the centre of the room. In the second rendition, the leader realised that the mirror he had set up in the room had become an active gateway; allowing evil spirits unlimited access into the temple and the vaults. This situation was cause for immediate concern so the witches quickly moved their temple to another section of the vault but the mirror continued to let spirits through. The coven leader beseeched a friend to remove and destroy the mirror. Not too long afterwards the man was hit and killed by a car.

On the tour circuit, malevolent spirits add authenticity⁴⁰ to ghost tours in the form of active hauntings. They are a part of the spectacle, the entertainment, and their manifestations proof of the presence and influence of the spirit world (Davies, 2007: 80). After all, participants enthusiastically attend the ghost tours – at least in part – in the hope of experiencing the supernatural, in having their own genuine experience with a haunting. Annette Hill refers to this as *psychic tourism*. She argues that common people have a vested interest in these experiences, in the emotional and psychological intensity of the tour, and an extrasensory perception that is created *by* the tourist: “they produce and perform the experience they hope to have” (2011: 90). Ghost tours are marketed based upon a possible encounter with the malevolent spirit; the stories of poltergeists are a main draw within tourist literature. The possibility of a dangerous encounter with a malevolent spirit becomes a part of that commercial lure, how tour companies entice tourists into attending with the suggestion that a supernatural experience is a distinct possibility:

⁴⁰ The concept of *authenticity* is elaborated on further in Chapter 3.

An encounter with the poltergeist is the highlight of the tour, with hundreds of people claiming to have been attacked by the entity. The MacKenzie Poltergeist is now regarded as the best documented supernatural case of all time and the tour has become equally famous – the subject of a book as well as scores of television documentaries, newspaper articles and websites . . . The Mackenzie Poltergeist can cause genuine physical and mental distress. Not suitable for pregnant women or people with a heart condition. You join the tour at your own risk. (“City of the Dead Haunted Graveyard Tour”, n.d. para. 4)

Stories and accounts of malevolent spirits are quite successful at making the dead, and the world of the dead, seem accessible to the common person – which is only reinforced through stories and photographs of tourist encounters. Guides perpetuate the belief that this alternate dimension of spirits can be felt and touched, as well as capable of harming the living. One encompassing idea of dark tourism is the mediation between the living and the dead. Tony Walter notes the attempt tours make to form an emotional attachment between the tourist and the mentally conjured memory of those killed at a site, more than compassion for the tragic event as a whole (2009: 51). In the case of ghost tourism, this relationship is exclusive to ghosts, revolving around the dreadful stories of their death, while being further reinforced through tales of past visitor encounters.

The difference between dark tourism and ghost tourism is in the *memento mori*, the reminder to the living that their existence is finite and has an end (“Remember, man, that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return.” Genesis 3:19). Dark tourism analyses how the geographical location itself – through its history of mass death and tragedy – holds the tragic remnants of death. In contrast, ghost tourism considers that the death of a person is not finite, but the beginning of a second life. Individuals carry on in a separate afterlife – and poltergeists show that those in the afterlife still can have a connection to their former lives, and are able to make contact with the living. The *memento mori*, is an essential element of dark tourism and the

subsequent tourist fascination with sites of death. Ghosts are a reminder that after death, life begins anew – that, as they say in the Spiritualist community – we have a *second life*, or *second breath* (the ancient Greeks used the word *pneuma* meaning the *breath or the spirit* to describe the soul). Likewise a poltergeist or malevolent spirit is an ample reminder that one can still be active after death and that the dead are certainly capable of harming living beings.

During a ghost tour, the presence of a poltergeist is proof of the existence of the supernatural world, and that it remains entwined with everyday life (Lecouteux, 2007: 184). This specific type of spirit is defined not by its past existence, but by its post-death continuation, one that interacts with and revolves around the living, and remains ardent protectors of their spaces. The stories projected by various tour companies always describe a spirit who shows an attachment (or obsession) to a certain room, space, or object: Mr. Boots and the White Room; the South Bridge Entity and the Haunted Vault; and Auld Reekie's evil spirit and the mirror. Whenever the space or possessed apparatus becomes threatened by the living, the spirit reacts violently. John Sabol echoes the belief within the paranormal community that poltergeists are a product of both their awareness of the living, and their fervent desire to cling to (and protect) their own haunt spaces (Sabol, 2007: xxv). The space (or object) reflects a memory from the spirits past. Tourists who inadvertently move through this physical, present space are considered by the ghost to be invaders who have disgraced the memory space that they hold to be a significant aspect of their former life (Gordon, 1997: 166). The malevolent spirit is considered a territorial creature that has simply grown too attached to its former existence.

The poltergeist has significant connections to religion and folklore. Malevolent spectres in pre-Christian and Christian Europe were thought to have the ability to emerge from their

graves for the sole purpose of tormenting and seeking justice against those living who wronged them (Davies, 2007: 101). This is also reflected in old European and Scottish lore of witchcraft; it was believed witches used dark magic to call upon the spirits to do their bidding and harm those they seek to punish. This idea is continued in contemporary witchcraft belief. In her work *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*, Tanya M. Luhrmann interviewed a practicing witch who spoke about important times of power for female witches. During these intervals, witches can conjure ghosts and unwittingly cause harm: "Menstruation is the time of the greatest witchpower for any women. That's when women have their car accidents, go in for ghosts, cause poltergeists – it's just the power going haywire. Poltergeists are often associated with menstruating women" (1989: 110). Interestingly there is also a gendered dynamic of poltergeist hauntings: malevolent spirits are nearly always portrayed as masculine spirits, as are demons or devils. In folklore, there is no differentiation between evil spirits, devils or demons. In unison these creatures possess the abilities to harm a certain person or group of people (Llewellyn Barstow, 1994: 12).

For instance, Auld Reekie tours has explicitly linked one of their stories to witchcraft and magic. Their malevolent spirit was unwittingly conjured by a coven. The current belief is that the spirit continues to harm visitors brave enough to step into the stone circle, a liminal space between the world of the living and the imprisoned world the evil spirit inhabits. In my tour recordings, a large portion of spirits are said to prefer female victims, or perhaps women, as a whole, tend to report paranormal experiences more often than men. In fact women are considerably more likely to claim they have: have resided in a haunted house; experienced ghosts while on visit to a haunted house or other location; believe in psychic phenomena; and have used a Ouija board at least once (Bader, Menchen, and Baker, 2010: 74). In the Spiritualist

community, they believe that women are more in tune with their own psychic energies; they naturally sense an imbalance between the worlds where humans and spirits reside, and are more likely to be sensitive to the ghost space than males. Women are considered *sensitives*, or those who have the ability to commune with the world of the dead, who have made a connection with a spirit, or are able to tune their senses with the world of spirits. One medium within the Spiritualist church referred to such women as *charges*, as in electric charges who are able to find a balance between the world of spirit and the world of the living.

In Spiritualism, there is an idea that the soul holds onto its personality in the afterlife because that personality was particularly successful or powerful while the spirit was still living.⁴¹ In the world of the dead, poltergeists perpetually beget negativity because they are repetitious beings and continue to pursue acts of malevolence (Zukav, 1990: 184). They seek vengeance by inflicting illness and pain (on the tours participants have experienced symptoms of physical discomfort, scratches, and bruises). Susan Greenwood (2009) wrote about the physical symptoms of ghosts as being a “Sickness [that is perceived] to be a process whereby spirits try to take a person to the spirit realm . . . [involving] a struggle between the spirits of the living and the spirits of the dead” (118). Spiritualists believed these spirits were considered unclean and full of “angry passions” and “vengeful feelings” (Hazelgrove, 2000: 65). Affirmation of these emotions

⁴¹ This ties in with another manner in which poltergeists are connected to stories of mass death. City of the Dead Tours and Mercat Tours entwined their death stories (next section) with the crimes their poltergeists committed while they were still alive. City of the Dead tours connected its poltergeist with a massive fire which burned out of control; killing hundreds of people (this identical poltergeist was responsible for the deaths in Auld Reekie’s story). While Mercat connects theirs to resurrection men.

These stories are reflective of Spiritualist beliefs that for some individuals, death is not necessarily a cleansing or a shedding of one’s former life. Just as the spirits from the mass death are tied to a place through their shared tragedy, the spirits of those responsible for the suffering are tied to the identical location through the crimes committed in their former lives. Both groups are now inextricably linked to a location.

is in how they chose to harm the living. City of the Dead Tours has an online photo gallery of “Evidence of mysterious attacks during tours” (“Evidence of Mysterious Attacks During Tours”, n.d.), in which they invite those who have attended their tours to submit photographs of the scratches, bruises, and bloody marks left from their encounters with the South Bridge Entity. Thus, their visceral feelings in the vaults are affirmed through visual proof of their encounter with a spirit. The contribution of their photographs adds another layer of authenticity to substantiate the claims of the South Bridge Vaults being among the most haunted places in Europe. Internet media which is viewed by millions of potential customers reinforces the tours goal of providing frights to its visitors through potential paranormal dangers. Hill (2011) claims that ghost stories set in the vaults “add another layer of meaning to the history and memory of this place and the people who visit it” (95). The malevolent spirit story is an addition to the landscape of Edinburgh’s ghosts that creates perpetuating stories through tourist experiences.

II. The Story of the Mass Death: Suffering, Torture, and Murder

The most common tale on the ghost tour pertains to death – after all, tragic, gruesome deaths are how those in the Spiritualist and ghost hunting communities believe a ghost often comes to exist in the first place. However, the subject of *mass death* is significant in that it is the only communal story linked to the four major tour companies (Auld Reekie Tours, City of the Dead Tours, Mercat Tours, and Mary King’s Close). Legends of mass death are one of the aspects of ghost tourism that connects the overarching theories of dark tourism. These attractions utilise horrific past experiences – and ghosts, as well – not only to confront death, but for the tourist to contextualise it within their own lives (Sharpley and Stone, 2009: 116). Through the

story of mass death, the sense of deliberate otherness that tours evoke is again recreated through the lens of the macabre. Philip Stone argues that by relaying historically gruesome moments, the tours “cast light on otherwise unseen (taboo) subjects” (Stone, 2009: 185). He also notes that this type of *lighter dark tourism* is the “purposeful commoditisation of death, pain and suffering” (ibid: 184). However, in the case of the ghost walks there is also a significant link to Spiritualist ideas about emotional, supernatural geographies created through mass death and significant tragedy.

I should clarify that the tours do not share an *identical* story about mass death, but their different tales effectively convey group suffering, resulting in a unified haunted space that has arisen from considerable misfortune. In the interest of disclosure: the stories are not necessarily entirely factual; they draw from real historical events, however sensationalised for the benefit of tourists. With that said the primary interest of my research is in the stories themselves – their content, structure, shared motifs, and ultimately their connection to ghost culture. For this reason this section will focus on analysing story content, any similarities, and investigate the relation to anthropological theories on tourism. It was clear from collected fieldwork recordings that mass death was the most prevalent tale told by the tour companies. Unanimously the four companies included within this research had a version of a horrific death scene either from an environmental tragedy, murder, or execution.

For instance, Auld Reekie Tours has a story which originates within their largest vault. There, the guide dramatically recounted a day (date unspecified) when fires in Edinburgh raged across the city. As it was told by the guide: *A large number of people fled into the vaults to escape the flames and tumbling bricks around them, believing that since stone doesn't burn they*

would be relatively safe in the underground. However, the fires around the South Bridge burned so hot that the stones began to heat and the vaults became a massive oven, cooking alive those who sought refuge. Now some visitors claim that they can still hear the screams of those who perished in the tragedy . . .

In comparison the story at Mary King's Close fixates upon the plague which ripped through Edinburgh in the 17th century, earning it the nickname "Bloody Mary's Close." *The filthy conditions within the Flodden Wall were a perfect place to breed disease. Here in Mary King's Close, the population was suddenly struck with a plague. The city, in its infinite wisdom, decided to control the plague by bricking up buildings to trap the ill inhabitants inside; the same thing happened in Mary King's close. It was sealed up to trap the plague inside and months went by before the City Council finally opened it up again to remove the many, many corpses. By then, rigor mortis had set in and they had to chop up the bodies for burial. After that, tales of hauntings began to spread that those who once lived in the close never left.*

City of the Dead Tour lacks a historically-linked mass death that was set directly within own set of vaults. Instead, their tours have successfully associated their spirits with the hauntings with a mass death that occurred off-site, at the Greyfriars Kirk, where imprisonment and eventual execution of the Covenanters⁴² is believed to have created a great deal of supernatural phenomena. Indeed, their tour explores the ancient cemetery as well as the South Bridge vaults, which is an artful way of interconnecting the two locations to their audience. *The hauntings between the vaults on South Bridge and those in Greyfriars Kirk are eerily similar, and we have a theory about that. The history of the Greyfriars Kirkyard starts out innocently enough as an*

⁴² Covenanters were those who bound themselves to the Presbyterian doctrine and were persecuted for their beliefs.

overflow cemetery decreed by Mary Queen of Scots. Then in the sixteenth century, after a violent struggle against the oppression of the crown, the Covenanters were imprisoned on the grounds of the Greyfriars Kirkyard. They were denied food and shelter in a freezing graveyard, and were tortured to get them to renounce their beliefs and embrace the crown. Months went by, and those who had managed to survive were finally executed. And their presiding judge, George “Bloody” MacKenzie haunts both the graveyards and the South Bridge vaults, still terrorising people even in death . . .

Mercat Tours is another tour company which does not have a mass death story directly set in their own vaults. Rather, Mercat has linked their vaults to the lurid tales of *resurrection men*, or more commonly known as body snatchers. These individuals allegedly secreted their stolen corpses into the underground vaults and subsequently sold the bodies to the Edinburgh Medical School on Niddry Street. *The difficult and gruesome nature of the job made the jobs of the resurrection men difficult. Mortsafes – iron bars kept over graves to protect bodies – had started to prevent them from conducting their lucrative business. And as demand for their services and bodies grew beyond the supply, some resorted to murder. Burke and Hare murdered sixteen people to continue their business, and rumour has it they stored some of their bodies here to keep them fresh for the medical students at the university.*

These stories not only create an historic grounding for the ghost lore set in the vaults, but they also weave in parts of a wider dark Edinburgh, a macabre past with stories notable former citizens and their gruesome deaths. Stories concerning the subject of mass and tragic deaths are significant because they create an emotional geography that enhances the tour, where the space becomes meaningful in a way that creates an affecting experience for the tourist. Hill (2011)

refers to these as *disquieting experiences*, where “ghosts bring history to life in the personal, emotional, and psychological meaning of spirits. A haunted house, street or village is psychically charged with the past and the present . . .” (94). These narratives work to expose the tragedies of the past that occurred at locations which may no longer be visible. They create a threshold where the traumas of the past are communicated and remembered in the present space (Pile, 2005: 174). John Urry notes that the human conception of finitude is reinforced by reminders of death, and that the sensory experience of a place is fortified by both the personal and the collective experience (Urry, 1995: 15). However, in framing tragic stories around ghosts, it becomes an easy, “safe” way of confronting death, the macabre, and tragedy. It further exemplifies a cultural shift in how people – especially tourists – have become spectators of death and represents a change in how this subject is presented to the general public. As John Tercier (2005: 22) notes, “we see death, but we do not ‘touch’ it.” However, the unique experience of ghost tourism begins by carefully developing an environment where tourists are provided the ability to actively interact with a realm between life and death through the ghost space.

Indeed, that is precisely how ghost tour companies market their sites: they provide a special glimpse of the ghost and ultimately, a view into the realm of the dead. Despite the past tragedy connected to the location, the spectre becomes a way of luring tourists (and their money) to the site (Inglis and Holmes, 2003: 57). Legends of mass death reveals past misfortune and macabre, but in a way that enhances the mood of the tour. The addition of ghosts takes the event of mass death and transforms it into a potential supernatural experience. One defining factor that separates ghost tourism from other types of dark tourism is that a unique historical event is entwined with the paranormal. Indeed, ghost stories in Scotland *define* the sites themselves, where tragedy and mass death is a simple precursor to a haunting. Lennon and Foley note that

sites where tragedy or violent death has occurred possess a “religious or ideological significance, which transcends the event itself to provide meaning to a group of people” (2007: 3). On ghost tours, the importance of the tragic event is overshadowed by the supernatural stories related to it. Tourists are forced to recontextualise and make sense of the space in the context of a haunting rather than the historical event, which impels them to consider their own beliefs, as well. The sites themselves no longer exist solely as historic locations, or as relics of a time long past, or even as place where a prolific tragedy occurred. They exist now as physical ghost spaces, as hot spots for the supernatural.

In ghost culture, the sites of a mass death are looked upon as a prime location for hauntings to occur. They create a shared trauma space where the metaphysical location has been so impacted by a past tragic event that a break forms within the ghost space. The breach is considered so dynamic and impactful that lingering spirits are drawn to and around this area. It is an emotional geography not just for the tourists who visit, but for the ghosts who haunt there, as well; in this sense, the spirit world and the living world become mirrors of one another. Both spirit and tourist are drawn to the location and into the emotional echoes created by tragedy and misfortune: “the sites of hauntings come to represent the terror of death, and at the same time the emotional life given to these places through the trauma of the past.” (Hill, 2011: 96). Mass death leaves an imprint that is significant for the tourist (as a reminder of death) as well as the ghost (through shared trauma).

In addition to the emotional importance connected to the site, there are stories that reflect folkloric beliefs concerning the serious matter of graves and corpses being disturbed or desecrated. The tale of the body snatchers (Burke and Hare) and the subsequent presence of

spirits who haunt the vaults connect back to notions in the Spiritualist community that a *proper afterlife* may not in fact be a permanent state and can be interrupted. Folkloric notions of grave desecration are common throughout the world, the idea being that the grave is a “resting place for the body, marking the death of the individual with some intention of fostering the journey to the afterlife” (Howarth and Leaman, 2003: 68). In Edinburgh’s ghost culture, the belief is that spirits belonging to the victims of body snatchers haunt the vaults because their eternal rest was disrupted after their graves were desecrated and their bodies moved. This action jarred them from their rightful resting place, eternally trapping them in the unnatural afterlife with other spirits. Spirits were thought to awaken in order to seek vengeance on those who disturbed their final rest.

Another extension is the staunch belief that spirits cannot progress to the proper afterlife until they have a formal burial. Local ghost tour companies (City of the Dead Tours, Mary King’s Close, and Auld Reekie) tours have several stories reflective of the belief that disquieted spirits are the result of those who have been given improper burials. In the case of Mary King’s Close, the local citizens who died of the plague were subsequently dismembered; hundreds of their bodies were haphazardly discarded in unmarked graves in what is now the Meadows. Similarly, City of the Dead Tours has a ghostly narrative which takes place in Greyfriars Kirkyard. For centuries this site was originally used for overflow interments for the Canongate cemetery. However, Greyfriars only contains several hundred marked gravestones throughout the entire cemetery. According to local legend, gravediggers buried corpses atop due to a severe lack of space— eventually interring over 100,000 corpses.

The ancient belief is that individuals must be provided a respectable burial with an appropriately marked grave – these are symbols of respect and remembrance to the once living person. Moreover spirits have the ability to become wrathful when their burial spaces are permanently disturbed and tread upon by the living, who are completely unaware of their existence. This controversy is further addressed by Mercat’s account of about Burke and Hare (and the other resurrection men). As the narrative goes those given a decent, proper burial had their final resting places disturbed by resurrection men who unceremoniously dug up the bodies and sold them to the local medical school. Next the corpses were completely dismembered by the medical students. Even those who had been buried properly in the graveyards – in their own designated graves – had been desecrated, ripped away from their peaceful afterlife after their bodies were unceremoniously disturbed, dug up, and dismembered. This is considered to be the reason their spirits still haunt the vaults.

The tours have created a story in which folklore, mass tragedy, and belief in ghosts have been combined for the benefit of the tourist: “The visitor is now a customer, the place has a brand identity, and the ghost is a desirable lodger rather than an unwelcome guest.” (Davies, 2007: 64). The story of the mass death is what Jerome de Groot refers to as the “historical imaginary,” the connection between history and cultural production, where the past is fetishised and commoditised by cultural industries into a “consumable product” (de Groot, 2009: 181). The mass death is particularly significant because it is a tragedy which is verbally and emotionally relayed to a group in order to create a collective emotional register. This is how the ghost story is commoditised to tourists. First by constructing an emotional-social environment that connects the events of the past with beliefs about death and the afterlife, then by utilising folkloric and religious ideas involving burial that may be recognisable to tourist.

Conclusion

Ghost tourism in Edinburgh is reflective of its ghost culture. It is a vivid mix of Spiritualism, folklore, pop culture and ghost investigations that have built the framework for the ghost walk. The structure of the investigatory ghost tour, in particular, accommodates the tourist seeking a personal encounter with the supernatural. Companies promote stories involving malevolent spirits seeking to harm tourists, creating an atmosphere where hauntings are legitimised through past tourist experiences. Companies encourage proof of these experiences through the use of EMF meters and photography, which are then posted in internet galleries and in online reviews. These experiences establish a form of authenticity within the ghost culture, where personal narratives and photographs build the reputation of the vaults as haunted. The tours themselves construct an atmosphere where the past and the present are interactive and connected through hauntings and commemorations of the dead through their stories. The similarities in structure and ghost stories on the tours form a ghostly landscape in Edinburgh that is linked together through a shared ghost space. This ghost space is then relayed to tourist in ways that forces them to confront their own ideas about mortality, creating a *memento mori* that is inextricably linked to the afterlife and the stories of the city's spirits.

CHAPTER 3:

The Ghost Tour as Theatre: Setting the Stage, Death as a Spectacle, and Constructing Authenticity

The Edinburgh commercial ghost industry is comprised of a wide range of different types of tours. Among the walking tours the structure and tone differ between outings which emphasise ghost hunting by appropriating investigational tools and methods (investigatory tours) or excursions which take a more educational approach (history tours). This chapter will focus on the walks that foremostly feature amusement in the form of street theatre. On these *performance tours* the entertainment during the walk is provided by the guide's elaborate and drama-filled performances and rich storytelling ability. Although performance tours share some of the same stories as investigatory and history tours, they widely differ in their style and presentation, as well as the manner in which they acknowledge and confront themes of death. While investigatory tours emphasise both history and ghost hunting – with particular emphasis upon the second life (or life after death) – performance tours address death in a way that is pure spectacle, entertainment, and “fun” for the tourist. As one advertisement reads:

Entertainment – 17th Century style! The best way to enjoy our grim, grisly and ghostly past is to hear it as our ghoulish ancestors...the infamous 'Edinburgh mob' loved the 'entertainment' of blood, guts and gore. And there was plenty provided, especially at the Mercat Cross. ("Ghosts and Ghouls Tour", n.d.)

The primary feature of a performance tour is in a contemporary enactment of public spectacles involving torture and death; both were historically commonplace in the city of

Edinburgh. This tour-type creates an energising past/present dynamic through its conspicuous contrast of the city's ancient past with the contemporary culture of Edinburgh. On the walk through the streets, tour guides construct a profound experience for the participant, highlighting the difference between profane (city) and sacred (vaults) worlds.⁴³ The tour becomes a doubly liminal experience, first through the act of historical performance (see Turner, 1982), and then by the symbolic act of crossing a threshold into the belowground space. The otherness of the vaults are conspicuously displayed by being utterly separated from the essence of the contemporary aboveground, a historical capsule in time, and in auratic quality it possesses (Seaton, 2009: 86). Tour guides reference this auratic quality in their discussion of the vaults as an *atmospheric* place to tell ghost stories.

The tour's particular combination of storytelling and performance is firmly rooted in spectacle, with the perhaps most notable parallel being the paranormal performances which rose to prominence in the 19th and early 20th centuries.⁴⁴ Sue Jennings observes that death performances have a transformative quality which "enables the private and individual experience to become public and social" (1995: 23). The dramatic performances guides use during the ghost tours is further intensified by audience members participating in the spectacle, or playing certain notable characters that add a visual entertainment value to the overall story.

By publicly encouraging attendees to voluntarily take on a part as actors, their roles subsequently shift from observer to character, from an individual experience to one enjoyed by

⁴³ Performance tours greatly utilize ideas of the "sacred" and "profane" spaces in the way they split the tour between the aboveground city and the belowground vaults. I will discuss this later in the chapter in terms of its use of liminality.

⁴⁴ As discussed in Chapter 1.

the collective audience. Performance tours reflect Victor Turner's thoughts on the existential quality of *communitas*, that "it involves the whole man in his relation to other men" (1969: 127). In reality participants are paying for a unique experience, one in which the tourist becomes an active part of the entertainment for their fellow tourists. More than that, what sets the performance tours apart from other types of tours is the extent that death and tragedy are constantly utilised as part of the act. The reasoning behind the interest in such a vivid tour attractions has been discussed within dark tour literature, notably by Dann (1998, as cited in Stone and Sharpley 2009: 576), who identified eight influences: mastering childhood fears; tourists seeking novelty; nostalgia; the fascination with and celebration of deviance; bloodlust; and 'dicing with death.'

Ghost tours, by their very nature, enthusiastically confront themes of death and tragedy. Performance tours take this emphasis a step further by presenting death as entertainment, a spectacle to be shared by all within a communal setting. Therefore this chapter will focus on the unique experiences offered by performance tours, how they embrace and de-sequester death with a combination of spectacle and play. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which performance tours resemble and appropriate rights of initiation. Later in the chapter, I will discuss concepts of authenticity in the manner in which tours both break and embrace traditional ideas of authenticity in anthropological literature, as well as how this concept applies to heritage.

Recreating Historical Edinburgh Through Macabre Scenes

The style of the performance tour is immediately identifiable, beginning with how the guide speaks. The guide is dressed in black clothing with a theatrical black cape draped around his shoulders (a uniform common on all tour-types). Next the guide melodramatically introduces himself in a loud, boisterous theatrical voice. Within the first few minutes of the tour, it is clear from the guide's tone that this is meant to be exaggerated and dramatic – already the tourists are laughing at his jokes.

The first timeframe used for this particular tour is Edinburgh, 1600s. The enactment begins at the Mercat Cross, which at the time was used to announce royal proclamations, or to make a public example of criminals in the form of grotesque punishments. The story starts at a boarding house in Edinburgh during the time of Cromwell:

A man visiting from the south stopped in to have a drink. He raised his glass in a toast and shouts, "God save the King!" and out of politeness, another man lifted his drink in return. Of course, at the time, Scotland was a republic – and Scotland had no king. So this would have been treason. And the penalty for traitors in Scotland followed one rule: that the punishment must fit the crime. So the fate of these two men was particularly gruesome. For their traitorous words, they were to receive three sets of thirteen lashes with a cat o' nine tails, all while the Edinburgh mob watched on with glee . . . But their punishment didn't end there. The man who listened got a nail driven right through his ear, pinning him to the Mercat cross. And the man who spoke got his mouth cut open in a great, wide smile. For the punishment must fit the crime, ladies and gentlemen.

Mercat Tours describes the walk as, "a light-hearted entertaining look at our ghoulish past and ghostly present" ("Ghosts and Ghouls", n.d.). While the content of the tour references gruesome tales of public execution and torture, it does so in a jaunty reconstruction of

Edinburgh's darkest past. Philip Stone constructed a spectrum with a conceptual darkest-to-lightest framework in his analyses of dark tourism; this performance tour – even while referencing a particularly brutal public torture scene – is considered among the lighter manifestations of dark tourism: “. . . lighter forms of dark tourism are those commercial visitor attractions which trade on [re]created and [re]presented death and suffering” (Stone, 2006: 152). On this particular tour, Mercat recreates an historical Edinburgh where public execution was commonplace and a form of entertainment for those who dwelled within the city. Indeed, this performance utilises the imagery of torture as part of the tour's appeal. Steve Pile notes that the nature of these stories, and their appeal, is primarily dependent upon the bloody recreation of these scenes, that “the more terrible the injuries, the more cruel the practices, the more blood, the better” (Pile, 2005: 126). The entertainment focus is purely based upon one specific element: tragic, gruesome death.

The ghost stories connected to these certain tours tend to emphasise death over the paranormal. The following story of an inn simply referred to as Number 17, which is haunted by a malevolent spirit, is one such example.

Number 17 was bought by a couple who admired the beauty of the house, with the intent to turn it into an inn. However, the attic room had a distinct atmosphere to it that can only be described as . . . unpleasant. Guests were wary of entering the room, seeming to sense that something dark resided in that room. Finally one day, a housekeeper went to the attic to clean it and let out a bloodcurdling scream. When the innkeepers came in to see what was the matter, they found the housekeeper in the room with a look of terror . . . staring up at the ceiling.

Word spread about the haunted inn, and students at the University began to dare each other to spend the night in the attic room. A student by the name of Andrew Muir accepted the dare. Andrew was a very religious man, and offered to spend the night in the interest of spiritual matters. The couple, eager to end the rumours of the haunting, agreed to let him stay. For Andrew's safety, they gave him a bell to ring if he experienced anything out of the ordinary. After a few hours, the innkeepers were awoken by the bell

and a scream. They rushed to the attic and opened the door . . . and there was Andrew Muir, dead. The bell still at his side. His face contorted in sheer terror.

While the story of Number 17 begins in the manner of a traditional haunt story – the house, the haunted room, and sightings – it ultimately focuses on, and ends in, death. The entity at Number 17 is not related to an historic past, nor is it one which bears any connection to the immediate surroundings. Instead, it is a story of death which takes place in the context of a haunting, at an undisclosed setting somewhere within the city. This story exemplifies the ways in which performance tours present a cohesive interworking of ghost stories within dark tourism, where the ghost is yet another feature associated with Edinburgh's sordid history. Stone refers to these tour-types as "dark fun factories", in which the focus of the walk is centred on real or fictional death and macabre events, all created to be "fun-centric" for the participant (Stone, 2006: 152). More than that, the tour deliberately creates a profound mental and visual discrepancy of Edinburgh, where its dark, tragedy-filled past contrasts with the vibrant contemporary city it has become. Performance-based tours utilise a large portion of the tour to acquaint the tourists with the Old Town section of the city. As the tour guide leads through the ancient parts of the city, they verbally reconstruct for their audience a version of Edinburgh that is grounded in a macabre past. The stories engage the imagination by forcing the tourist to contextualise and recreate the past Edinburgh in their minds – even as they act out torture scenes from an historical Edinburgh.⁴⁵ Tour performances create an interaction between the past space and the present space, any preconceived notions tourists have of a national identity continue to be shaped by these narrative events (Simone-Charteris, Boyd and Burns, 2013: 60).

⁴⁵ More on this later in the chapter.

Additionally, tours create spatial identity for Edinburgh's streets that are framed around the macabre and the supernatural, where death is always prominent. Auld Reekie Tours highlights this subject further by leading tourists through an authentic torture museum located within their underground vault. Dimly lit green lights fill the room to reveal glass cases along the walls. Inside the glass cases are various objects that tourists can observe at their leisure. Chains and various other instruments are hung along the walls: screws, nails, hammers, and collections of metal objects. Each had, at one time, been used for its own kind of torture. The guide gingerly leads tourists through the museum displays, stopping to describe key pieces in vivid detail with descriptions like "bones cracking," "cartilage snapping," and descriptions of blood and gore. Through these descriptions, the tour is able to arouse emotion in the tourist: shock, horror, revulsion. The performance tour's descriptive use of language creates a space where the taboo of death is inspected through a morbid imagery (Stone, 2009: 173).

The experience on the tour shapes the grim and the macabre into an entertaining story, purposefully creating a disquieting experience for the tourist, where their stories expose the tragedies of the city's history (Pile, 2005: 174). By focusing on death rather than the afterlife, the performance tour confronts the emotional aspect of death in a safe space, where the violence and traumas of the past and present are revealed (ibid: 163). Most interestingly, ghosts are not the main attraction on a performance tour. Rather, spectres are inexplicably entwined with Edinburgh's gruesome past – indeed, they are considered evidence of it. Ghosts are presented as part of the macabre, a product of a tragic history: "You will have a memorable glimpse into life, death and grisly entertainment before descending into the famously haunted Blair Street Underground Vaults. Visit where the ghosts of Edinburgh's past still haunt her present..." ("Ghosts and Ghouls", n.d.). Stone notes that ghost tourism is what arises when "narratives of

fear and the taboo are extracted and packaged up as fun, amusement, and entertainment and, ultimately, exploited for mercantile advantage (2009: 169). Perhaps just as notably, connecting stories of execution and torture with ghost stories has the double effect of both acknowledging death and dying, and confronting personal beliefs in the afterlife, even from a fun and entertaining perspective.

The structure of the performance tour is reflective of some of John Urry's ideas of interdependent mobilities (2007). The first is characterised by *physical travel*, where tourists are moved within the landscape. In this instance, movement is through the physical city of Edinburgh, where the surrounding past buildings contributes to the atmosphere of storytelling and the urban setting is presented as a *deathscape*. The physical act of migration is motivated by their participation in the spectacle of death. The city becomes a backdrop for the various "stages" where tourists are able to observe and listen to stories pertaining to execution or torture.

Perhaps more significant on performance tours than *physical travel* is Urry's idea of *imaginative travel*, where tourists recreate the scenes guides describe within their own mental pictures. The imaginings are enhanced by the geography of the city, which forces participants to envision a past cityscape and culture which there is little remaining evidence of in the present space. Chris Wilbert and Rikke Hansen refer to this as *performative articulation*, where the distinctions between modernity and the mental representations of the past space blur or break down (2009: 188). The tourist experience is almost entirely generated through their own mental interpretations and experiences. These personal memories are reinforced by movement through the city, in an imagined visualisation of the place, and finally bolstered by the melodramatic performance of the guides (Dale and Robinson, 2011: 212). Edinburgh comes to life for the

tourist by way of their representational and mental realities which fill in the gaps where the modern city and its historical past intersect. The tourist's physical movement through the city is made more significant by their imagined journey. The mental pilgrimage of the tourist merges the formation between the past space and the present space, reinforced through the feelings and emotions that rise from the tour performances. This forces the tourist to conjure what Michael Mayerfeld Bell refers to as the *ghosts of place*, images of past historical residents who contributed to the phenomenology of a location that continues to be reflected in how the community is experienced by visitors (1997: 828). The spectral aspect of the city is then propagated by the tourist; the tour becomes a mental odyssey as well as a physical one. All of this is deliberately encouraged within the context of a performance ghost tour. Below is one such descriptive example of those who lived in the vaults:

Imagine what it would have been like in 18th century down here in the vaults. The bridge was not created to be watertight, and this being Edinburgh it rained quite often. Water seeped through the stones and the conditions down here worsened. Soon the legal traders moved out; when they moved out, the nasty people moved in. There were criminal gangs down here, murderers down here, poor desperate people escaping the Edinburgh weather. There were body snatchers who used the place to store the corpses they intended to sell . . . the Edinburgh vaults were home to not very good people, indeed . . .

The tragicomic language used during the tour is integral to constructing a vivid past landscape, a mental picture of the criminal underbelly of Edinburgh life. Though the physical evidence of its past has long since vanished, guides evoke vibrant images of the past, forcing tourists to mentally recreate them and entwine them with their own experiences and associations between images (Lippard, 1999: 126). While historical accounts of the tour are successful in creating the imagery of past calamities, ghost stories are what unquestionably seize the imagination; and makes the seemingly invisible visible (Gordon, 1997: 199). It is unmistakably plain how the tour forces the individual to process their own feelings, by reconstructing the

Edinburgh landscape (and its ghosts) through the filter of their own beliefs, cultural background, and personal experiences. This phenomenon begins by the manner in which tours acknowledge and confront the taboo of death through storytelling. Narratives of fear, gore and torture are simple tactics used to ramp-up the experience, where the opulent urban landscape is the sum of its dark past (Stone, 2009: 168).

Perhaps just as significant is how the tour unilaterally solidifies the notion of death as other, as well as reinforcing this viewpoint through the use of ghost stories. Tony Seaton (2009) argues that this is a purposeful otherness, whereby sites of death within the realm of dark tourism are perceived as sacred spaces, entirely separated from a past profane world (85). One could argue that performance tours both embrace and break otherness. Otherness is broken by the tour's use of profane spaces to stage live re-enactments and recreations of scenes of death through storytelling and audience participation. Death is therefore presented as entertainment – something solely within the realm of the profane – and further acknowledged by presenting an historical Edinburgh in which death and torture was unquestionably commonplace. In this sense, the tour story creates a past/present dynamic in their tales of the Mercat Cross. They vividly describe the historical Edinburgh mob that took profound pleasure in watching the public execution of criminals, an image made more conspicuous as the present tourists recreate the spectacle. The urban landscape with the mob represents the profane, where the taboo of death has been completely shattered, and is then rewoven into a spectacle for the benefit of the tour audience.

In contrast, the otherness of death is embraced and preserved through the use of ghost stories. Ghost stories are primarily detailed within the vaults, which has been bestowed the

distinction of being a sacred space through the use of candlelight; an emphasis on thresholds; their use as a temple for spells and witchcraft (in the case of the Auld Reekie vaults); and in the use of spiritualist mediums who can communicate with the renowned spirits.⁴⁶ The interplay between profane and sacred imagery creates an intersection of the past and present, and in which the realm of the living and the dead are forever linked. The landscape created for the tourist, then, is primarily imaginative in that tourists are encouraged to visualise both a historical place and the past residents which now are purported to haunt it.

The Edinburgh Mob: The Role of the Tourist and the Public Spectacle of Torture Scenes

It's the 17th century here in the city of Edinburgh, and you are the Edinburgh mob . . .

With the setting made clear, the role tourists are to play is communicated at the very start of the walk: they given the role of the “Edinburgh Mob,” in reference to the crowds that gathered at public spectacles of punishment to boo, hiss, and throw food at criminals punished at the Mercat Cross. The story of the two men who were tortured at the stone relic is re-enacted for the tourist audiences; two volunteers are chosen to be the criminals and replay the scene to the amusement and entertainment of their peers. The cat o’ nine tails that would have been used for the historic torture is a plastic recreation, pulled out by the guide as she recounts the story to the

⁴⁶ Topics discussed in Chapters 1 and 4, respectively.

crowd. The audience is instructed to count as the guide – in the role of torturer – playfully lashes the two volunteers lightly with the whip, twenty times in total at the count of the other tourists. *As the Edinburgh mob, your counts only grow louder as the men scream. Each scream draws cheers; each bout of silence draws boos and hisses.*

As the counts from the crowd grow louder, those passing by on the street stop to listen. The torture scene becomes a performance acted out for public consumption. Stone (2009) describes the tours as having “strategically deployed taboo subjects and commercially exploited macabre and tragic history . . . Nihilistic narratives of fear, death, horror, and violence . . . are celebrated and (re)created through mimesis, kitsch and pastiche representations” (185). In the case of performance tours, the unique experience offers a very casual look at death – not just through stories of the paranormal, but in the interplay between fun and the macabre, death and torture, living and dead.

This creates an environment whereby the tourist is not solely viewing the spectacle; they become part of creating it. Fellow tourists eagerly snap photos of the action, and film the spectacle to share with their friends and family. It is significant that performance tours are partially structured around the play, participation of the tourist, and the reaction from their friends and family in the audience. This paradigm constructs an active role for the tourist, a reflection of Chris Rojek’s argument that “most tourists feel they have not fully absorbed a sight until they stand before it, see it, and take a photograph to record the moment” (1997: 58). By recording the performance, they capture the memory and unique experience of participating in street theatre, and being a key part of the walk itself. This is a break in the traditional type of commercial entertainment where tourists are passive observers who follow the guide from

location to location. Videos and snapshots of the performance become something different among the standard holiday photographs, a contrast to what Michael Haldrup and Jonas Larsen state in their description of vacation photography, that it is “part of the ‘theatre’ that enables modern people to enact and produce their desired togetherness, wholeness and intimacy” (2006: 283). Photos of tourist activity on performance tour document the unexpected – the tourist’s role as part of the spectacle – and the novelty of breaking away from the usual staged, intended snapshot.

Photography and video shots are a way for tourists to internalise and make sense of the unfamiliar space created by the walks. Larsen (2012) argues that tourist photography is an “embodied and creative performance ‘full of life’ that produces memories, social relations and places”. The use of photography and video during the ghost walks gives the participant the ability to relive that moment repetitiously within their own lives. In this instance, the camera is what Alfred Gell refers to as “magical technology” which “consists of representing the technical domain in enchanted technology form” (1994: 59). Photo-taking — the act of production — becomes a key mechanism to *social* production within tourist space. Through photography and performance, the tour is shared and remembered as a unique experience, made more significant through positive interactions with other tourists. This *communitas* is fleeting, with the only commonality between individuals is that they shared the ghost walk. However, photography and video creates permanent memories of these fleeting interactions and human bonding through the performance.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ I will elaborate more on this point later in the chapter.

The tourist also plays a part in contextualising the location for others as well, in the sense that the performance becomes a kind of street theatre: “. . . such acts rarely take place on a single stage, but happen in the interplay between several different stages on which cultural memories are played out, thereby shaping the meaning-making processes at play within these walks” (Wilbert and Hansen, 2009: 197). The act of participation is one method by which Mercat Tours markets their walks: “The best way to enjoy our grim, grisly and ghostly past is to hear it as our ghoulish ancestors...the infamous ‘Edinburgh mob’ loved the ‘entertainment’ of blood, guts and gore.” (“Ghosts and Ghouls”, n.d.). These macabre visuals are a unique way the tour is packaged and sold. Personal experiences allow tourists the ability to fill in the mental and informational gaps presented by tourist imagery. The overall experience of being part of the public performance influences the way tourists not only identify with a place, but recreate it mentally.

The Tourist Experience As a Rite of Passage

The ritualistic aspects of tourism parallel certain rights of passage. Mobility (as discussed earlier), becomes a break from homogeneity, the mundane. The surroundings are a liminal world of past/present spaces made more significant by the act of performance, where the migration through the city and the vaults are a “constant movement between ordinary and sacred places”, which include ritual behaviour of *communitas* (Franklin, 2003: 150). Van Gennep (1960) asserts that there are three phases to the rights of passage that are closely connected. In separation (preliminal phase), the individual is disconnected from their conventional, familiar environment to

undergo trials or ceremonies as part of a ritual. Next is the transition phase (liminal), in which the individual is considered to be in an *in-between* state; they are not part of the society they once belonged to, yet they have not been reintegrated back into their familiar home society. The last phase is reincorporation (post-liminal), in which the person is reintegrated into their home society, changed by the experience of transition. They either resume their former cultural role, or accept a new one depending on the significance and intention of their transitory experience.

Victor Turner appropriated Van Gennep's pre-liminal/liminal/post-liminal phases in his book *The Ritual Process* (1969) to apply to a pilgrimage, and later to performance in *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982). He describes the phases of initiation as a physical journey, a "parallel passage in space, a geographical movement from one place to the other" (25). For Turner, the liminal process involves both "episodes in sacred space-time" as well as "subversive and ludic events" (ibid: 27). Erik Cohen and Chaim Noy (2005) note that Turner's descriptions of initiation share many similarities to tourism, in that tourism is reflective of both the performative and journeying processes of transition. The tourist leaves the familiarity of their home (pre-liminal), and commences travel to an unfamiliar environment (liminal), surrounded by those experiencing the same transitory experience (*communitas*), and return home to be reincorporated into their own familiar society (post-liminal). Cohen and Noy posit that in order for the rite of passage to be effective, it "has to be physically accomplished in the strangeness of the host environment. . ." (256).

In keeping with Cohen's idea of tourism as an initiation event, I would argue that performance tours can represent their own liminal transition and rite of passage within the overall tourist experience. For the tourist, the familiar, preliminal space is their place of stay

(hotel, hostel, or bed and breakfast), which is symbolic of a home space (pre-liminal). While travelling, tourists bring items that are familiar with them, their clothing and certain objects considered vital to their every day mundane experience. Their lodging becomes a safe home base within unfamiliar territory. They travel to an unfamiliar environment to commence the walking tour. The liminal experience commences with the significant act of walking through the city; then proceeding into the underground vault. This migration mirrors the liminal elements as described by Turner through 1) physical movement; 2) historical ambiance of an unfamiliar city; and 3) by internalising tales of scandalous past experiences which are verbally relayed throughout the tour.

Pile references the phantasmagoria of a city and describes the act of manoeuvring through the crowded streets and the means by which it “invokes the importance not only of what can be seen, of the experience of the immediate, but also of life beyond the immediately visible or tangible” (2005: 3). Through the tour’s interworking of a past-present dynamic, tourists are compelled to visualise, mentally reconstruct, and imagine the stories told on the tour. This process is transitional in that it creates a symbiotic relationship between the realms of the living, the tourist, and that of the dead. Turner’s idea of liminality within subversive events plays out when the participant is encouraged to become part of the “Edinburgh Mob”, which entails participating in a shared theatre structure. Playing the role of the mob is an organised *communitas*, an opportunity of for tourists to experience the past coming to life through group performance. More than that, it creates a situation whereby persons are forced to regard their own feelings about death and an afterlife as they internalise ghost stories.

Turner’s second idea of the liminal phase (sacred time-space) is reflected by the movement into the vaults. The threshold into the vaults marks a tonal shift within the tour

structure, where the audience sheds its previous role as “Edinburgh Mob”. The vaults act as another threshold, a continuing liminal state of the initiatory process. It represents a boundary that Piret Pungas and Ester Vosu (2012) describes as a “hybrid environment” (88), which is due to its status as an in-between place where history/modernity and living/dead are both emphasised by the guides.

The postliminal phase of the tourist’s journey begins upon exiting the vaults. The tourist is returned to the aboveground city, back into its ordinary everydayness without. Their journey becomes regrounded within their place-of-stay as the symbolism of home. While this aspect of the initiatory process is a short one, photography and videography are vital aspects reliving the liminal environment. Photos and video are a souvenir symbolic of the journey, a method used to connect the tourist with the experience and memories of a location. Robinson and Picard (2009) note the “auratic power” captured moments possess, and that they are a specific object which “encapsulate[s] the power and mystical energies associated with places, people, or presences and to transport [the tourist] from one place to the other” (21). Photographs and video taken on performance tours have the power of capturing the sense of *communitas* built through group performance. When looked at or replayed at a time in the future, they can take a tourist back to their transitory experience. There is a sense of “magic” to photographs because the object itself is liminal; it is a window to a specific place, time, and setting – a memory captured and able to be replayed at will. In this sense, it “captures the spirit of a place . . . imbue[d] with the power of the original place visited” (ibid: 11). Picard and Robinson argue that the enchanted quality of the photograph is a means through which “technology is able to transport some essence of a place to another without losing its material authenticity” (ibid). Photography is a means through which tourists can perpetually consume and mentally replay their liminal journey.

Perspectives on Authenticity

I. Discussions of Authenticity and How Paranormal Events Emphasise Authenticity of Emotion

A dominant theme in tourist literature is the concept of *authenticity*, which is the construction of the tourist environment through recognisable elements of the culture they are visiting. This idea is particularly significant to aspects of dark tourism (and ghost tourism by extension) thanks to how the notion of authenticity addresses the potentially problematic commercialisation of a place where death and tragedy occurred in the past. However, authenticity is a broad term that encompasses a number of different subjects. John Urry wrote that “the search for authenticity is too simple a foundation for explaining contemporary tourism. There are multiple discourses and processes of the ‘authentic’” (1990: 11). Discussions of authenticity and tourism have certainly come a long way from Daniel Boorstin’s arguments that tourism thrived on “inauthentic, contrived attractions” and that tourists “gullibly [enjoy] the ‘pseudo-events’ and [disregard] the real world outside” (Boorstin cited in Urry 1990, 10). However, authenticity is a subject which frequently comes up in literature for paranormal tours (Inglis and Homes, 2003; Stone, 2009; Hill, 2011), especially with regards for its propensity for kitsch and spectacle. I would be remiss if I did not address authenticity in a chapter on tours as

performance, particularly when Scottish otherness is propagated the tour's entwining of the capital's history with ghost stories. For this section, I intend to address authenticity in terms of tour structure, and tourist motivation.

For ghost tours, performance certainly brings an element of artificiality to its representation of history; the walk is a staged event which is highly dramatic and purposely scripted as such. However, solely focusing on the entertainment tours overlooks the personal emotions and fear responses that arise from ghost stories. Even performance tours have moments that evoke emotion, such as what this tourist describes:

The sense of history in the underground vaults was palpable and as Rob described how hundreds of people were packed in as the fire above slowly baked them I could almost feel the bodies crushing against me despite there being nobody close by (Merritt, 2012).⁴⁸

Annette Hill (2011) describes ghost tours as *sensory journeys*, an experience which the tourist is forced to confront in semi-darkness, lit only by candlelight, while listening to stories pertaining to mass death, murder, and hauntings. Hill regards this aspect of the ghost tour to be significant due to its emphasis upon personal emotions, and in how it stresses the importance of a more individual, unique experience (101). Ghost tours apply to her idea of the “double articulation” of authenticity (112), that it is both material and symbolic: material is evident through personal testimonials of tourist experiences within the vaults, and symbolic of the doubt that comes with claims made within the context of tour performance.

It could be argued that Hill's assertion of double articulation perfectly exemplifies Urry's claims of just how ambiguous authenticity is. With respect to ghost tours, I find that Ning Wang's (1999) nuanced distinction of authentic ideas to be significant to the emotive and

⁴⁸ Quoted verbatim.

performative contrasts within ghost tours. Wang differentiates authenticity into two separate, distinct categories: the tourist experience (which encompasses their personal experiences and feelings), and the tour itself. This distinction was also noted by Handler and Saxton, who argue that authenticity is an aspect “in which individuals feel themselves to be in touch both with a ‘real’ world and with their ‘real’ selves” (1988: 243). The authors further expand upon this idea in regards to performance, which they believe could create an “authenticity of experience” (ibid: 245).

Although performance tours are comprised of dramatically staged historical events hosted purely for entertainment purposes: these restrictive elements should not be considered exclusive criteria for branding any commodity as *inauthentic*. The inauthentic view of performance tours is noted in Stone’s (2009) analysis of ghost tours and dungeon events. While he acknowledges that they “cast light on otherwise unseen (taboo) subjects” such as death and the macabre, they also celebrate these concepts through “mimesis, kitsch and pastiche representations”. Along the same lines, Emma McEvoy argues that “[ghost tours lay] no claim to any idea of authenticity whatsoever . . . [it does] not pledge ghosts; although it revels in bloody torture scenes.....in fact the only person to ask ‘when do we see the ghosts?’ was a five-year-old boy” (2014: 484).

However, McEvoy’s claims of the inauthentic nature of ghost tours do not take into consideration that ghost tours highly suggest that paranormal experiences are not only possible, but that past experiences within the tour locations are evidence of this authenticity:

An encounter with the poltergeist is the highlight of the tour, with hundreds of people claiming to have been attacked by the entity. The MacKenzie Poltergeist is now regarded as the best documented supernatural case of all time and the tour has become equally famous – the subject of books as well as scores of television documentaries, newspaper articles and websites. (“City of the Dead Haunted Graveyard Tour”, n.d.).

Hill notes that the success of the paranormal suggests a “strong narrative of spirits and magic in society.” (2011: 1). Her observations exemplify the reasons tour advertisements leave tourists open to the suggestion that paranormal activity is not only possible, but has happened to them: “I have a unknown scratch on my arm i did feel a hotspot in the tomb at the graveyard and something also touched me do you think it was the poltergeist?” (Crawford, 2012).⁴⁹ The paranormal industry heavily relies on tourist testimonials like these, word-of-mouth posts that authenticate sites as haunted.⁵⁰ Cohen (1988) cites the importance of the tourist’s role in considering authenticity, as well as how they make sense of the site within the context of their own experiences and beliefs (116). Certainly, the elements of amusement, entertainment and spectacle ought to be addressed in a discussion of authenticity. However, ghost tours still prompt tourists to examine death through their use of spectacle.

Believer events, which I will discuss in more depth later in this thesis, approach these topics from an even more sombre standpoint that is intended to rouse emotion and sensory experience. Of particular importance is tourist “self-evaluation”, described as examining one’s own beliefs concerning death and the afterlife after experiencing disquieting macabre displays and performances. Hill (2011) claims that within the context of paranormal beliefs “authenticity is often articulated as true to the self and personal experience...paranormal belief [are] instinctive interpretations of inexplicable phenomena” (114). Within group contexts, individuals may be less likely to share strange personal experiences with other vault participants unless the others are more likeminded individuals (ghost believers). However when participants physically

⁴⁹ Quoted verbatim.

⁵⁰ The subject of word-of-mouth (WOM) is discussed further in Chapter 6.

feel spirits within the vault atmosphere; they are significantly more likely to verbally express their experiences to other participants regardless of the group's overall beliefs (Buell, 2010).

McEvoy's analysis of ghost walks exemplifies the precarious nature of discussing authenticity with this tour-type: it is easy to overlook the many idiosyncratic varieties of ghost tours by grouping them together as a singular, encompassing type. There are ghost tours as well as other events which encourage intense personal introspection, in which tourists believe they have encountered spirits. In other events, tourists actively seek to engage with the supernatural and prove the existence of ghosts.⁵¹ In both respects, participants may experience unusual, disquieting emotions which encourage them to contextualise the supernatural within their own lives. Tony Seaton's (1996) thoughts on what he calls *thanatourism* suggest that this type of tourism is a behavioural phenomenon, which is made significant by visitor motivation rather than the characteristics of the tour itself. Along the same lines, Britta Knudsen and Anne Waade describe authenticity as "something experienced through the body, through performance . . . authenticity becomes a feeling you can achieve. In tourism authenticity is a feeling you can experience in relation to a place" (2010: 5) Therefore, authenticity with regards to ghost walks should foremostly consider how the tourist experiences the event, and in the feelings it provokes.

⁵¹ I detail these other event types in Chapters 4 and 5.

II. Subverting Authenticity

While my above arguments make clear that I disagree with McEvoy's (2014) arguments that performance tours completely lack authenticity, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the way they also *subvert* ideas of authenticity. In discussions of authenticity, the traditional analysis involves the tourist journey as seeking out authentic ("real"), culturally significant attractions. Performance tours present a unique subversion of traditional ideas of authenticity for two primary reasons: 1) people co-perform and co-produce their individual and collective experiences and 2) authenticity on ghost walks are entirely created and controlled by the tourist.

The paranormal industry regards authenticity as being an element which is entirely dependent upon the thoughts and feelings generated by the tourist themselves. Sensory journeys, as noted by Classen (1993), concern the legitimacy of heightened emotional responses. On ghost tours, the sensory journey is generated by tourists; their feelings are further catalysed by personal beliefs, which can be solidified and verified within the tour. Sue Jennings notes that "ritual, drama, and theatre are all means of trying to describe the various forms of larger-than-life representations involving dominant cultural symbols....and changes in role, in a designated space apart." (1995: 23). An example of the dominant cultural symbols associated with ghost walks are torture, macabre, death, drama, and views of the afterlife. The "fun" and "entertainment" aspects are ways in which tours acknowledge the seriousness of these particular cultural topics which previously were considered taboo.

The subversion of authenticity is presented in the way performance tours present death and the macabre as fun for the tourist, in a deliberate, conspicuous break from authenticity. Stone (2009) refers to these types of events as an "amalgamation of kitsch artistic commodity and

playful mirth” (173). These aspects of performance tours describe what Bryman (1999) refers to as the *Disneyization* of tourism attractions. Crispin Dale and Neil Robinson explain that the Disneyization in tourism “acknowledges that wider society has become increasingly commercialised and orientated towards experiences that draw upon animation and recreation” (2011: 208). Edinburgh ghost tours advertise their performance walks around the unique experience of re-enacting macabre and death, and the commercialisation of the paranormal through ghost stories. The staged performances of death and torture represent a break from the homogeneity of the tourist experience as well as an interruption from authenticity. They encapsulate the idea of Disneyization in how tourists gleefully pay for and participate in a performative re-enactment of a macabre Edinburgh. The performance tour is strictly built around the appeal of this theatrical framework. As one guide told me: *This tour is meant to be an entertaining bit of horror before supper. We tell the tales and try to get a few screams and scares out. If we don't, that's what the fun is for.*

The ways in which performance tours present death is a deliberate nod to inauthenticity, which is also significant in how the tour is initially framed for the tourist. The moment the guide pulls out the plastic cat o' nine tails is an intentional anachronism, as is the performance which follows. The performance is a feature meant to evoke emotion within the tourist, a “sense of shock, horror and revulsion” but where “unsafe ideas of taboo may be inspected up close up through a morbid gaze” (Stone, 2009: 173) Part of the unique experience of the tour is in how visitors participate in this anachronistic performance. The tour offers an opportunity to deviate from the tourist's own planned journey to participate in a street performance for strangers. In doing so, it creates that sense of *communitas* which Turner describes as an “active opposition to

social structure, as an alternative and more ‘liberated’ way of being socially human . . .” (1982: 51).

The performance is also an active opposition from authenticity. After all, the company's own descriptions of the ghost walk promise fun and entertainment, and are a “presentation not of actual history with its sober facts and figures, but of a deliberately grotesque and exaggerated account of the past” (Inglis and Homes, 2003: 59). Despite the fun and entertainment that these tours provide, they confront topics which are considered to be taboo. However, performance tours discuss death in a way which is a metaphorical and temporal distance from where it happened; there is no conspicuous evidence of death. Rather, death is an aspect of the performative, where tourists are able to consume and act out macabre events while “acting as receptacles of ‘highly charged’ ideas” (Stone, 2009: 189). Indeed, performance tours are advertised as a dark sort of fun, attracting visitors seeking the entertainment of the macabre. As McEvoy states, “Gothic tourists are indeed embodied creatures. They expect to encounter place as performance, and often to perform within it” (2014: 483).

III. Hauntings as a Form of Authenticity

Ghost tours offer a different look at authenticity that I feel is equally important to address: hauntings as a fundamental aspect of heritage. Death is deliberately and purposely framed on performance tours in two ways: through death narratives (public executions and torture) and through discussions of hauntings. Not only is the subject de-sequestered and

dispelled as a taboo, the *act* of death and torture is presented as a spectacle through the torturous scenes played out in street theatre. Through performance and storytelling, death is confronted, staged, performed and recreated. Tony Seaton (1996) refers to such events as *thanatopic presentations* and suggests that “contemplation[s] of death” can make death “a highly normal and present element in everyday life” (237). While performance tours contain ghost stories, spectres are presented as a feature amid the cityscape, a connection between historical Edinburgh and its present everydayness.

Narratives involving public execution and torture are what inevitably lead to a discussion of Edinburgh as an uncanny city of spectres which still haunt its present inhabitants. In this sense, ghosts are presented as a feature of Edinburgh, a key aspect of its cultural heritage: “It’s really no surprise we’ve such a haunting legacy lingering upon our town... With true stories of gruesome punishment and unsettled spirits, we’ll give you a flavour of life, and death, in Old Edinburgh” (“Ghostly Underground”, n.d.). Carrie Clanton notes that “ghosts are utilised in a secular way by British tourists and heritage industries, supporting claims of historical authenticity and the right to heritage status” (Clanton 2007: 1). The locations utilised on ghost tours are significant due to their historical importance. However, the sites are presented to tourists within the context of paranormal narratives, and with the conviction that past Edinburgh residents continue to play a role within modern, physical spaces through hauntings. John Sabol argues that ghost tourism is a special form of heritage tourism in that “it is an integration... and an immersion into a past where a ghostly presence continues to ‘live’. This is a search for authenticity” (Sabol 2009: 4). Although the ancient buildings are certainly utilised as an atmospheric backdrop for ghost stories, the past and present cityscape is entwined with the paranormal. Indeed, the presence of a haunting validates the site’s historical authenticity: “the

places where ghosts are held to live out their spectral non-lives are constructed as being authentic through the very presence of the ghost, which operates as a hallmark of the archaic nature of the locale in question” (Inglis and Homes, 2003: 56). Ghosts and heritage are further connected through advertisements and official Scottish tourism literature; Scotland.org even has a list of “Spooky Places to Visit in Scotland” (2012) connects spectres to Scottish history:

Scotland’s murky past involved clan battles, hundreds of years of war with our near neighbour England and the siege of grim looking castles in almost every part of the country. Stories were told and traditions established. There are tales of ghosts, many of whom were said to be the spirits of real people who died in tragic or horrific circumstances. Of apparitions that appear at certain times of the night, or certain periods of the year – perhaps when they were murdered. And of strange, eerie sounds that pierce the chilled Scottish air. The hauntings seem to have no set boundaries. Ghosts have been reported on bleak roads, in old theatres and ancient graveyards.

The purposeful, descriptive recreation of an historical Edinburgh and its peoples is juxtaposed against its modern presence, where citizens of the past remain interactive within the present city through hauntings. Ancient relics and buildings throughout Old Town are a conspicuous representation of the past cityscape, while the tourist role as the “Edinburgh Mob” is symbolic of its historic past through the act of spectacle. Together, they visually and emotionally immerse visitors into the narrative of the uncanny, where the spirits of the dead are considered to be ever present within the streets and vaults of the city.

The Desequestering of Death

Perhaps just as significant is how death becomes part of the public discourse through performance tours. McEvoy notes that these tours are notable because of their communal aspect:

“In contrast to many other modes of Gothic consumption, the experience of the Gothic tourist . . . tends to be communal, and the tourists closely bonded together” (ibid, 484). Part of that communal bonding is through the performance of death and acting as the “Edinburgh Mob.” In discussing visitor motivation and participation on these tours, I think it is important to address that some tourists are eager for dark experiences. Annette Hill (2011) attributes this desire as similar to adrenaline-seekers, who find fun in experiencing the heightened emotion that comes with fear. Seaton (1996) argues that people desire a closeness with death and “travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death” (240). He parses these types of travel into five different categories: visiting death sites for either individuals or mass deaths; being a spectator at public enactments of death; viewing symbolic representations of death; memorial sites; and to witness performances of death (ibid). He notes that performance tours are a continuance of a “thanatopic tradition”, a contemplation with death that plays out in public spectacles. Biographer James Boswell once reflected on his own fascination with public hangings and wrote about his own attendance, stating: “I behold the various effects of the near approach of death, according to the various tempers of the unhappy sufferers, and by studying them I learn to quiet and fortify my own mind” (Boswell in Pottle, 1951: 345). In Boswell’s time, death was common and visible, as well as utterly familiar to those who were among the throng at a public execution – the very historical period tourists act out in performance tours.

In contrast to Boswell’s experiences where death is a very public and common occurrence, Stone and Sharpley (2008) note that there is a modern sequestration of death. Where it was once both visible and communal, death has become an aspect of private life, where there is “increased uneasiness over the boundaries between the corporeal bodies of the living and the

dead” (Turner, 1991: 229). The performance tour not only breaks down the social barriers that maintain an absent/visible dynamic of death, it compartmentalises it in a way that is recreated and performed by the tourist for the benefit of other tourists. Within these performances are three crucial parts that parallel social role-playing: the performers (those re-enacting scenes of death); the performed to (the other tourists on the walk); and those passing by who may glance at the show but neither observe nor perform (Goffman, 1959: 144). Those participating in these roles are witness to the de-sequestration of death in a public spectacle, presented for laughs and entertainment. As Stone and Sharpley note, “. . . dark tourism allows the re-conceptualisation of death and mortality into forms that stimulate something other than primordial terror and dread” (2008: 585-586). Through performance tours create an ongoing dialogue where death is removed from the realm of taboo and brought back into the social dialogue. In this manner, tourists can contemplate mortality and deconstruct (and construct) their own beliefs of finitude.

The role of the ghost story should also be acknowledged in the context of the de-sequestration of death. Gordon (1997) writes about the importance of hauntings, that “to study social life, one must confront the ghostly aspects of it” (7). She also notes that studying ghosts and hauntings confronts unsettling social ideas and beliefs of death and dying (23). The narratives presented on the performance tour are an active way of interacting with death, as audience members play the roles of deceased Edinburgh residents. Performance tours provide an interaction between different aspects of Edinburgh’s past and its folklore, where the dead are juxtaposed with loss, trauma and injustice (Pile, 2005: 162). The performance aspect is a commentary on death, dying, and the macabre ghost stories acknowledge how these themes connect to an afterlife. Through theatre, tourists can indulge their curiosity with deaths and

hauntings in an atmosphere that is not only socially accommodating to morbid fascinations, but celebrating of them.

Conclusion

As Stone and Sharpley argue, the de-sequestration of mortality brings “death into public discourse” where it becomes a “communal commodity upon which to gaze.” Performance tours are distinct in that they confront death as entertainment, spectacle, and performance. Ghosts become a feature in the creation of a macabre past space, an aspect of the city’s landscape that authenticates heritage sites. A significant aspect of performance tours is in how themes of initiation play out within the structure. While other tours certainly have many parallels with rites of passage, as well, performance tours incorporate Victor Turner’s (1969) ideas on the performative quality involved within *communitas*. Turner notes that initiation is marked by both sacred and subversive events, which play out on the performance tour through the incorporation of both performance and the crossing of a threshold into the ghostly vaults. This is a process which both breaks and embraces certain ideas of authenticity. While traditional approaches to authenticity focus on the site itself in how culture, history, and heritage are presented to tourists, it is equally important to consider the emotional impact of these sites. Though performance tours already subvert authenticity by the way in which they present history (through the lens of the macabre), the inclusion of hauntings has the capability of evoking emotion within the tourist.

The sensory journey undergone by the tourist is vital when considering the paranormal, especially the ways in which tours encourage contextualising mortality and death within our own lives.

CHAPTER 4

The Mediumship: Spirit Communication and Creating a Ghostly Landscape

The mediumship is among the most covert, though largely influential, aspects of Edinburgh's ghost culture. Despite their importance to ghost investigations, it was not until I had been in the field for a number of months that I was able to acquaint myself with those in the mediumship and actually see them put their skills to use. I came to understand that they represent an aspect of spiritual commoditisation that is not widely advertised to the casual tourist. Meetings with mediums are very quietly made public on rare occasions through tourist companies in Edinburgh, but spaces can only be reserved over the internet. Mediums will not participate in any of the everyday walking tours; those are meant to appeal to visitors seeking quick ghost tours as opposed to an evening with the spirits. As a medium named Mary (vignette three, below) once told me, *we're not here for entertainment. We're here to tell you all what's what.*

Instead, their abilities and expertise remain reserved for visitors already deeply entrenched in ghost culture: the more serious hobbyists, professional ghost hunters, and their followers. In that regard, mediums play a significant role in aiding ghost hunters in their explorations of haunted places, and some further market their skills to those already within the ghost culture to help them get in touch with their lost loved ones.

Based on my observations, interviews, and interactions with different mediums, I began to catalogue their abilities as well as how they interacted with both haunted spaces and the

tourists attending events. Every medium had different abilities and ways of communicating with spirits, and they each had their skills manifest at different times throughout their lives. Lenore, a medium with the Spiritualist Church of Edinburgh, claimed that most of the mediums she knew generally had their abilities manifest in childhood, but never in the same way. Some claimed they always had it. Others said it was a gift passed through their family for generations. Most had it show up after severe emotional or physical trauma, and a few claimed they simply woke up with it one day. The mediums I spoke with who belonged to the Spiritualist Church believed in the Christian God and regarded their abilities as a gift granted by the divine to both guide them and allow them to offer help to those who cannot personally communicate with the other side. As Lenore says: *We are picked by God to communicate with those in the spirit world and help deliver their messages to the living.*

A medium's status and influence in Edinburgh's ghost culture is driven, ultimately, by their ability to create effective links between the spirits haunting a place or person, and in conveying messages that make sense in a personal or historic context. To gain their reputation, a potential medium will go through training under a qualified superior, one well-known within the ghost culture. As they train, their status within the community grows as they are able to make *successful* connections between the spirit world and that of the living. A medium's ability to effectively communicate with spirits is how investigators vet those they hire to work in paranormal investigations, and becomes the reason people in the Spiritualist community continuously return to reconnect with deceased loved ones.

Not all mediums have the same roles within Edinburgh's ghost community. I have interacted with two types during my fieldwork: those who participate in paranormal

investigations in the field (they become an essential part of ghost investigation groups, who travel throughout the country on their explorations), and those who communicate with spirits for private, paid functions. I have found many in the latter line of work to be involved with the Spiritualist Church. The Edinburgh Spiritualist Church fundamentally follows the basic tenants of Christianity, but where it differs is in the focused belief that uncertainty toward death creates spiritual malaise and discomfort. By actively conjuring spirits, Spiritualism offers “empirical evidence of a tangible life after death, [is] able to account for, bind, or control the last and most feared frontier – death – thereby giving [people] a sense of control over the shifting reality of the here and now” (Williams-Hogan, 2013: 64). Members of the Spiritualist Church consisted of mediums, sensitives, and people without the ability to sense spirits at all, but are seeking answers about the afterlife. In contrast, many of the mediums who participated in ghost investigations did not belong to the Spiritualist Church at all, but followed Pagan practices. Pagan mediums believed themselves to be blessed by the Goddess.⁵² Though the mediums I spoke with did not necessarily belong to the same religion, they held many similarities in regards to their abilities. The core belief for both groups is that in being chosen (by possessing the gifts of a medium) it is their duty and responsibility to fulfil their purpose and offer advice to the living through visions from spirits on the other side.

Though the differences in a medium’s role and abilities are apparent in the vignettes that I detail in this chapter, the most distinct contrast between mediums is in their methods. The

⁵² Interestingly, I did not meet any mediums who identified as atheist. Even those who considered themselves non-religious believed their gift to be granted by a higher power.

mediums with the Spiritualist Church⁵³ tended to approach spirit communication from a more personal standpoint. The communication is about families, uniting loved ones, and reassuring the living that a spiritual connection exists on the other side and will resume after death. Mediums of this type are aware of potential future events, as dictated to them by the person's spirit family.

The mediums involved in paranormal investigations⁵⁴ participated in vigils organised by investigators in haunted spaces. Their role was to indicate which rooms had the most paranormal activity and to communicate with spirits who have not – or who have been unable to – cross over. The way they practice mediumship does not involve putting individuals in touch with a spirit family or lost loved ones. Their approach is often in combination with the other tools of ghost investigations.⁵⁵

The difference between these two types of medium practices is quite distinct: 1) involves a form of spirit communication in front of an audience; the *medium* communicates with and interprets messages given by spirits; 2) combines both spirit communication (through the medium) and scientific applications (ghost investigation tools). While the ghost hunting aspect of a vigil is described and analysed more in depth in the next chapter, I am combining these two types of mediumship techniques in this chapter because they both seek a common goal: spirit communication for the benefit of paying customers.

⁵³ My interviews with the mediums belonging to the Spiritualist Church were less involved than with Pagan mediums. The Spiritualist Church dictates a certain level of religious inclusiveness that I was unable to intrude upon unless I became a member. I saw a few use their abilities (the first vignette in this chapter), but the others would have required more payment.

⁵⁴ Often those who participated in investigations were Pagan or non-religious mediums.

⁵⁵ Detailed in Chapter 5.

Spirit Communication with Lenore: Creating the Emotional Link Between the Living and the Dead

After some months of living in Edinburgh, I had spent a large portion of my time focusing my research on the city's ghost tours. Then I saw the first public advertisement for spirit communication in the vaults: it was to be moderated by a medium, with only a set number of spaces available for those looking to attend. For a fee, private vigils (without mediums) can be arranged at any time with the ghost tour companies, but it is a rare occasion indeed when spirit communication with a medium becomes open to the public.

On a particularly cold September night, I attended the advertised meeting. It was the first time I had ever sought out a medium in Edinburgh, and I knew very little about the mediumship and how involved it was in the more serious aspects of ghost investigations. At the time, I went out of sheer curiosity – after all, it was an aspect of ghost culture that I had yet to experience. Even after months of research, it had simply not occurred to me to include mediums in my fieldwork, as I had been concentrating more strictly on Edinburgh's walking tours. However, as any anthropologist in the field is aware, interests in research shift or evolve with time and experience. I was determined to explore different aspect of ghost culture, as well as break from the repetition of walking tours.

Admittedly, I had many preconceived ideas of what spirit communication would entail. Before that first meeting, my background knowledge on the subject had been limited to my

research on the history of Spiritualism from the 19th and early 20th centuries. I could not help but picture the Victorian-era séance, and the aggrandised photographs and advertisements of floating furniture and tipping tables.⁵⁶ My readings on the practices (and in many cases, deceptions) of Victorian era mediums had biased my opinion of the present-day medium before I had even spoken with one. Of course, those were sensationalised publications and quite far from the real thing, or at least what I experienced that night.

The meeting room was in a vault just below street level in Cowgate, Edinburgh. It smelled musty, as if the rainwater had seeped into the bricks it was built out of. The walls were covered in tapestries, hung loosely by pins that depicted various floral designs. Fake spider-webbing, the kind one might purchase around Halloween, had been spread thinly around the electric candelabras hanging throughout the room. The temperature in there was brisk, the air slightly damp. Candles had been placed on each table, and firelight flickered in the glass holders.

I took my seat next to a young couple who were whispering among themselves. Our group, eight in total, was an eclectic mix of young and old, male and female. A lone gentleman took a seat quietly beside me; him and me the only two singles in the room. The two elderly gentlewomen on the far side of the room looked alike enough to be sisters. A middle aged woman sat with a younger man across from me. And to my left, two very young women – perhaps my age, or possibly younger – sat huddled together for warmth.

The medium entered the room and introduced herself. I do not know what I had expected her to look like; perhaps dressed in a cloak, as the tour employees always are. On the tour circuit,

⁵⁶ See: Chapter 1.

any event can go one of two ways: a dramatisation, put on for the entertainment and fun of the customers – which are generally marked by costumes and use of vivid speech and imagery; or an utterly serious exploration into spiritualism and ghost investigation, meant to appeal to believers and hobbyists, respectively. The medium – Lenore, she requested I call her – was dressed casually in jeans and a sweatshirt, a pink knitted scarf hanging loosely around her neck. She was confident and soft-spoken as she chatted with the tour employees in the mere minutes we had before the event began.

There was nothing about her manner of dress which indicated this meeting was to be an outright performance for our amusement. I believe this is an important distinction I should make for this thesis, as one of the first things I realised was that I had misinterpreted this event beforehand. I had expected it to resemble some of the walking tours in its dramatic theatrics. This marked contrast to the performance tours was the same for all of my meetings with mediums, and for every vigil I frequented: the attendees were not there for the theatre. These were individuals who had not purchased their places on a whim, but had booked sometimes months in advance, and the meetings always filled within a few days of being announced.

That is why, as I sat in the room with the others, I had the immediate, uncomfortable sense – one I still struggle to describe – that everyone had a very personal reason to be there.⁵⁷ Perhaps it was because they all waited with such blatant expectation. The emotions in the room were serious, far more sober than what I had come to expect from an event provided by a tour company. I felt, rather keenly, as if I did not belong. No one there acknowledged my presence or

⁵⁷ Though I had not had the time beforehand to ask. However, as the medium conducted her personal readings, my assumptions were confirmed.

noticed me in any particular way; it was simply an awareness, and an immediate sense, that everyone else was there to communicate with someone they had lost. There was a shared camaraderie there – after all, belief in spirituality thrives in part from bereavement, which becomes intensified in a group setting (Hazelgrove, 2000: 13). People who gather to communicate with spirits are there for more than just performance, but to obtain answers from the person they lost, if that person's spirit lives on, and whether they will be reunited in an afterlife (Korom, 2013).

Everyone there was connected by loss and grief, and through the mutual desire to make contact with the other side for reconnection with a loved one. It became a narrative space for shared memories of the dead, and a communal affirmation of life beyond death. As Lenore said, *I am here to give you guys the messages, not the other way around, and to give evidence of survival from this life to the next.*

Lenore later told me about how she came to be a medium. She had been working as a medium for more than 20 years, *not as a baby in the crib like many others, but from a young age.* She claimed it was like a lightning bolt for her, that she eventually had to accept in her heart that she was a medium, and that the spirit world was there. *It opens up so many doors, it's unbelievable. I could just see everything more clearly, connect with people in a way I had never been able to before.* From then on, mediumship had been her primary employment, and she now works for the Spiritualist Church. The majority of her time is spent communicating with the spirit world and conveying their messages to living friends and relatives. Lenore senses entire spirit families, sometimes even distant relatives. They tell her of their living memories, and sometimes give her symbolic visions of potential future events.

Her first message was for the two gentlewomen sitting across from me; she spoke directly to one of the women, who wore a red jumper:

There is a gentleman who just came in for you from the spirit world. He is walking about the vaults holding a pocket watch, and he keeps checking his pocket watch. This gentleman was a timekeeper when he was living. The watch is quite detailed, with really nice little carvings on it. And I feel like there is something significant to the watch. Do you understand what I've given you? The woman nodded. *There is a living family connection to this watch. I see it – if you were to face a dresser in a bedroom, it would be in the top drawer, or in the second drawer on the right hand side. This is something you can look into . . . Is there a link in Canada?* He was from Canada. *Was he in the services, as well? Because he just did a solute there.* The woman nodded again. *He just looked up and he's smiling at you. There is a lot of love he's giving you from the spirit world. Not all of your family got to say goodbye to this man. And that was sadness on its own. He is saying that it's not the last memories that count, but the memories before that that were important. Did you not have some old photographs out recently?* The woman indicated yes. *He is saying that he was in some of those photographs. He's saying what a rare night that was, and he remembers it like it was yesterday.*

I was surprised at how sad the woman was, that she immediately looked to be on the verge of tears, but did not cry. What Lenore created in her spiritual readings is a form of metaphysical deathscape, visions that tie the living to memories and objects left by the dead which have apparently been carried over into an afterlife. Deathscapes are used in ghost tourism to draw attention and meanings to a space and its former inhabitants, but Lenore is recreating it in the form of a mental space, evoking emotions and deeper memories to stir an intensity of

emotion (Maddrell and Sidaway, 2010). The meaning of Lenore's messages, and the symbols and places she describes, are anchored to the living person. Sometimes the messages she delivered were incorrect in some way, or not understood by the person she was speaking with, but there was a theme to her messages: the spirits almost always had an object with them, something significant to their living selves. Lenore's descriptions of meaningful objects triggered the most emotional responses from people in the room, such as when she connected to a spirit looking to communicate with the woman sitting next to me:

There is a man here with you, and he's been a bit impatient this whole time, arguing with me to get to you. This man has charisma, a wicked sense of humour. He would be from your father's side. And when he passed into the spirit world, the whole family was devastated. It wasn't something he was expecting either, and he wants me to tell you that. It was very sudden. This man would have had a false leg. Does that sound familiar to you? My grandfather had a false leg. I see him clicking it off, putting it to the side of him, and clicking it back on again. And he used to do that quite a lot, didn't he? To get the noise and to get people's attention. Do you know a story about something being hidden in that leg? My dad told me he used to hide his toys in there. He's just loving this. And he did love to tease people terribly about his false leg and had a lot of fun with it. He's saying that it did cause him a bit of discomfort where the leg connected. He would say that it chafed, and the height wasn't quite right, so he walked with a limp. There was some debate over whether it should go with him, wasn't there? The woman nodded. I honestly don't know if it did or it didn't, but that's irrelevant. He is telling me that he has both legs now. Because when the physical part of the body is missing, the part of the soul remains, and that's what continues on in the spirit world.

It may be entirely possible that the women Lenore so accurately conveyed messages to were plants put in the room to lend credence and authenticity to her visions. It may also be possible that Lenore is exceptionally adept at reading people, observing the intensity of their reactions to her statements and then formulates guesses and hypotheses on the relationships between the deceased and the audience member (Turner 1974: 240). Perhaps I should note, for disclosure, that when Lenore read for me, she was astonishingly accurate about my ancestral roots, if not for the fact that I have never lost a relative close to me. She immediately sensed my strong connections to the United States, specifically the West. An interpretation that is entirely true, as I am from California and have family that range from Idaho into the Pacific Coast states. For further disclosure: at this point, I had not spoken to Lenore at all. Indeed, I had not spoken to anyone there – not the employees, or any of the other attendees. My ticket had been acquired over the internet using a Scottish bank card, so no personal details had been provided.

While it can be easy for a sceptic such as myself to speculate on this, I will not doubt or attempt to disprove Lenore's – or any other medium – visions here. In writing about the mediumship and the visions presented by the mediums in this chapter, my intent is simply to explore the anthropological scope, functions, and themes they convey. Lenore's visions, for instance, all included a familial link to the spirit world. Through her visions, Lenore attempted to recreate a sense of kinship, one which had potentially been severed by death. If gravestones and cemeteries are symbols of the finality of death (Francis, Kellaher, Neophytou, 2005: 177), then spirit communication eliminates finality and replaces it with *possibility*: the possibility that one's kin lingers on a bridge between life and death, simply waiting for their family to join them. Even if Lenore's visions wavered to something inexplicit and unclear (*I see a young man waiting in the spirit world for you . . .*), she establishes an easy way for people to fill any gaps with their

own memories and their own interpretations. This allow for an ongoing relationship between the living and the dead, one that is reinforced and restructured and entirely conveyed through those memories (Francis, Kellaher, Neophytou, 2005: 177).

In Lenore's vision for me, she saw an older man, one attempting to spread a blanket about my shoulders. The blanket was of rough material, overused and dirty. It matched his appearance – that of an old, weathered man who had clearly worked out of door his entire life. I considered the way objects played such an important role in her visions: the blanket for me, the pocket watch for the woman in the red jumper, and the false leg for the woman sitting across from me. They were objects and symbols representing the former life of the deceased, something significant about who they were. The visions formed a metaphysical link between the dead and their living kin, promoting the idea that the living are protected and looked after by a spirit family. This is reflective of the Spiritualist Church's beliefs on the nature of the afterlife, that "the passing into the next world [is] merely a gradual diminishing of the old early life and a slow awakening into something new" (Byrne, 2010: 85). The *Spiritualist* (1869) claimed that when a spirit awakes into consciousness, it arrives to an assemblage of family and friends who were waiting on the other side (*Spiritualist* quoted in *ibid*).

In Lenore's metaphysical landscape, a product of the Spiritualist Church's tenants, one's family of spirits are there to protect those they love from evil (including evil spirits) and guide them until they meet again in an afterlife. Spirits do not linger out of being unable to cross over, but because they are waiting for their living family to join them. This is a stark contrast to views of the other mediums I share in this chapter, who speak of spirits trapped between worlds – those who are either unaware of death, or who interact with (and occasionally harm) the living.

Lenore's interpretation follows an idea of spiritual rebirth, one where a family exists in the profane and is later reborn in the land of the sacred (Eliade, 1987: 196). Death becomes not just about finality, but a shedding of what Mircea Eliade calls the *profane condition*. Rather than a cessation of existence, death is a form of rebirth. In Spiritualism, there is the idea that dying is an end to ignorance, bodily compulsions and lack of control. When one dies, they are reborn into freedom, a blissful experience of awareness, of an ultimate, transcendent reality of liberation. In that landscape, a body can become whole (the spirit who had regained the use of both of his legs), and they shed what is unnecessary for spirithood. Death is an emergence into the sacred, a form of initiation into a greater, more divine condition. According to Lenore, in that afterlife is a family, living in an exalted state of existence where they are aware of the past, present, and future, and where they simply wait for the rebirth of their living kin.

On Vigils: Their Connection to Ancient Traditions and Sacred Time, Liminal and Liminoid Experiences

A vigil is an event hosted by Edinburgh's tour companies that begins at midnight and runs until 5-6AM. It is advertised as aiming to observe and record paranormal activity, both with the aid of ghost investigation gadgets⁵⁸ and under the guidance of a medium to interpret any messages or spiritual presence. Vigils in the vaults occur in the weeks around both October 31

⁵⁸ See: Chapter 5.

and May 1, a schedule that ties it distinctly to Celtic and superstitious ideas surrounding those particular dates.

Halloween is referred to in Celtic traditions as *Sham-in*, meaning Baal's Fire. It is a significant date in Celtic legends as a night when people attempted to make contact with the spirits of the dead (Napier, 1879: 175). It was believed that spirits had the ability on that night to visit their old earthly haunts, their friends and family (ibid). A similar legend existed about the first of May, when people visited the graves of their loved ones and offered gifts to the spirits. Halloween also marked the date for the beginning of winter in the ancient Celtic calendar, a time when the veils between the spirit world and the living world thinned, and the dead had the ability to make contact with the living (Muir, 1997: 78).

In Celtic beliefs, the spirits of the dead – both good and bad – were released on these nights. Sometimes they would arrive as ghosts, sometimes as hobgoblins, black cats, fairies, or demons to wreak vengeance on any person who wronged them in life (Muir, 1997: 78). If the spirits were not appeased and placated with offerings, they would haunt the living throughout the next year (Napier 1879: 176).

According to European folk belief, midnight also had its own significance and connection to the supernatural. Midnight on and around Halloween was associated with the powers of witchcraft, the devil, and the release of evil spirits (Turner, 1969: 183). This “sacred time,” to use a phrase from Eliade, exists outside the profane, and outside the everyday life. It interrupts the flow of non-sacred time, something that is necessary to connect with supernatural (or divine) power in a religious act (Eliade, 1987: 69). Eliade describes sacred time as something being infinitely recoverable, infinitely repeatable, in which participants can find the *same* sacred time

in each festival or event, year after year, and century after century. The time itself neither changes nor is exhausted. Despite the difference in form of ritual between the ancient Celts and now, the idea of a sacred time tied to supernatural occurrences still endures and is, perhaps, even reinvented.

One could argue that a vigil hosted by a tour company is simply part of a commercial experience and nothing to do with ancient folk belief. However, there is still an awareness shown in the advertisements for how Halloween and May 1st are ritualistically linked with the supernatural:

Around this time, the spirits are scarier, the vaults are spookier, and our guides are more demonic than ever, ready to take you on an unforgettable journey into Edinburgh's ghostly underworld . . . We run a variety of different tours to suit different ages and expectations from afternoon to the very darkest hours before midnight. Whether you are a brave soul or a scardey cat, we have a tour to help get you into the spirit of Hallowe'en. ("Halloween", n.d.)

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of a Halloween vigil is how it wavers between what Turner describes as a *liminal experience*, and what he refers to as liminoid phenomena (Turner, 1982: 55). Insofar as being liminal, the vaults exist as a threshold, a landscape through which spirits become real and interactive with the living. The state of in-between-ness in the vaults is defined by its history and by the ghosts that linger there. During the vigils, mediums are in a constant state of liminality just by their sheer abilities: "Mediums [are] thus doubly liminal figures, traversing two worlds, literally mediating a space between the living and the dead . . ." (McGarry, 2008: 28). This idea also reflects Giorgio Agamben's idea of the *homo sacer* (1998), the *sacred man*. The *homo sacer* possesses sovereign power between life and death. They are both human and divine, both of this world and not of it.

By holding the vigils on Halloween and May 1st, the tour companies are grounding the event in religious symbolism that shares a common intellectual and emotional meaning for the members of the group – what Durkheim referred to as a *collective representation*. Midnight being a liminal, sacred time when the spirits of the dead (who are liminal creatures themselves) cross the veils between worlds and (re)enter the realm of the profane. Vigils are deliberately cyclical in that they are observed at the same time each year, and seek to create a communal experience by investigating ghosts with the ultimate goal of a successful paranormal experience.

Yet the vigils have characteristics of a liminoid experience, as well. After all, vigils run by the tour companies commoditise making contact with the spirit world; the vigil itself is paid for by visitors. While the event has all the symbolism of what should be a traditionally liminal experience – sacred time and dates; an attempt at connection with liminal creatures; the creating of a metaphysical landscape – they are still the remains of folkloric beliefs framed for the tourist experience. In the liminoid experience, Turner argues that the difference is in *choice*. Unlike the ritual experience, something that can be attended or avoided, the liminoid experience can be watched at will (Turner, 1982:43). For all the seriousness in tone of the vigil, it is still about choice and entertainment because it exists as a commodity, a commercialisation of spirituality and of sacred time. Thus, the liminal and liminoid coexist within the same structure: the group as tourists — liminoid individuals who are attending for a fee (and entertainment, to a degree) — and the event as a portal into the liminal world.

A Vigil with Danny: Creating a Sensory Ghost Space

A few days before Halloween was the first vigil I had ever attended. While the walking tours offer some exploration of the vaults, it is restricted to a rather rigid time scale. The vigil is five hours long, beginning at midnight. A tour guide leads a group of sixteen of us into the same room Lenore held her meeting. The room had become dramatically more theatrical than the last time I had seen it, decorated in more synthetic Halloween spider-webbing than when I met with Lenore. The lights were brighter and a refreshment table had been set up at the back of the room, with teas and instant coffees to choose from. Unlike at Lenore's meeting, there were no candles on the table, nothing to create a sense of mood. We were simply to use the place to store our belongings between time spent in the vaults further underground.

We all settled down at our respective tables. Some of the other guests had brought backpacks filled with bags of food, energy drinks, and boxes of ghost investigation gadgets. As the ghost investigation aspect of the vigil is detailed further in Chapter 5, for now I shall focus on Danny, the medium. Danny was tall and thin, with thick black framed glasses that sat ever so slightly at the edge of his nose. He had been a member of the Scottish Ghost Investigators for three years, lending out his services as spiritual medium during their investigations. While the ghost investigators had their technology to track, record and detect the possible presence of spirit activity, Danny's job was to indicate which places in a location may yield the highest amount of paranormal phenomena, and, if possible, interpret any messages from the spirits. *I have a look around to get a sense of things. There's no use in spending time in a room no spirit is likely to enter.*

For the sake of time and space during the vigil, we were split into two groups: Danny would take eight people to communicate with the spirits, using his abilities to aid the process; and John, the ghost investigator, would take the other eight and use the ghost investigation gadgets. Halfway through the night, we switched. My group was picked to go with Danny first, and we were delegated to explore the set of vaults that were the farthest in. We were accompanied by one of the tour company's guides, who was there to offer any historical perspective to Danny's visions.

As we started down the stone staircase, farther below street level, the guide blew out the candles. We were left in near complete darkness, except for the dim, green light that emanated from the exit signs. The lack of light was for a specific purpose: to sharpen our other senses in the presence of spirits. In ghost investigations, sight is considered to unreliable. Shadows and candlelight can all too easily form moving shapes that appear quite ghostly at first glance. Investigations rely quite heavily on non-visual senses: sound (most commonly in the form of ghostly whispers, objects being thrown, footsteps); feel (a tap on the shoulder, a hard shove, someone's hand being held, breathing on the back of one's neck, a sudden temperature change); scent (in the vaults, people have smelled smoke, oysters, the scent of someone's breath just over their shoulder); and, more rarely, unusual tastes or a sudden dryness in one's mouth. However, senses are considered only one aspect of the overall experience – *feelings* are given incredible importance. Danny considers the emotional state to be equally as vital to what one experiences through their senses: *The senses are physical, but what you feel gives you a better idea of a spirit's intent. In the dark, you learn to trust your feelings more.*

The vaults, being so far under the street level, had such little light to allow my eyes to adjust. I was acutely aware of how uneven the stone floor was, worn down by how many people had trod on it over the years. My group shuffled towards the first vault, our hands flat on the walls for support. In that level of darkness, it is exceptionally easy for the senses to become overloaded. I was very aware of nine other patterns of breathing, the swishes of fabric our clothes made – how startlingly loud both were in such an echoing chamber. Even a single sensory deprivation made the walls seem closer and vast at the same time. The vaults are not just dark, but so starkly quiet at that time of night. The pubs on street level had emptied for the night. The occasional *whoosh* of cars could be overheard, but little else from the outside.

We began our communication with spirits in the largest of the vaults, where the most spiritual activity is said to take place. The place is cavernous and tall. Once two separate rooms on top of one another, the upper vault caved in at some point in history. The only indication if it having been there is a door along the wall that would have once been its entrance, but is now a good seven feet from the ground floor. At the back of the vault, water collects and drips from the roof, hitting the floor with a soft tapping sound. The green glow of the exit sign gave me some ability to see as we gathered in the centre of the room, but only just.

Danny told us of his past experiences in the room:

Of all the rooms in the vaults, this is the one that affects me the most. There are particular spots in the room that you may be drawn to, that attract different spirits. There is definitely a feeling of being watched here. All the times I've been in the vaults, this is the one I've sensed the most presences in, and one time I almost passed out in here. That's how strong a reaction my reaction has been to it in the past. I always get disoriented in this place, a little lost.

When we came in, I immediately saw a man in the door there. He won't let me look at him straight on, only out of the corner of my eye. I can't make out any of his features; only a

silhouette. I'm not sensing that he means us any harm, just that he intends to watch. That's one thing I've noticed about a lot of spirits down here. They just want to watch us come through, not hurt us.

Danny's abilities as a medium manifest in a direct form: he sees and interacts with spirits that haunt a certain space, and can see the "psychic impressions" the past has left on a space.

Places like these have history. People's deaths have left impressions in the stones here, their emotions and their lives still linger. I see parts of history, points in time that still remain here. The people whose lives shaped the history [of the vaults].

Danny's visions often yield two different types of spiritual presence which reflects those told on the ghost tour: spectres that are unaware of our presence and those that are not. The unaware continue to exist as they would have in their own respective time periods. Each of them is confined to their own separate spaces, with objects that would have held some significance to them in life. As unaware as they are of us, these types of spirits are also oblivious of any other spirits that may be present. *It's like nothing else exists for them. They're still living in their own time periods, in their own lives, as if they had never died.* In this particular vault, Danny senses an old man pacing back and forth in the space where the floor for the upper room would have once been. The gentleman has never been known to try and communicate with visitors in any of the times Danny has visited the vaults. Spirits of this type reside in pockets of liminal space and time, where they live in the spirit world in a normative fashion, as if they were still a part of the profane condition. In a sense, they are doubly liminal: between life and death, and existing between two historical points. Their space is a self-contained transitory period between the living world and the afterlife.

However, even this type of spirit has to undergo its own rite of passage into an eventual awareness. To achieve this in ghost investigations, mediums may use what John Sabol refers to

as a “discard technology,” (Sabol, 2007: 115) a type of trigger object used to make a spirit aware of their own death. Danny says, *We wake them up and try to get them to pass on when we can.* For mediums, making a spirit become aware is a part of their responsibility for being granted their abilities. In order for the spirit to transition into a proper afterlife it must wake up and become aware of the fact that it is no longer in the realm of the living. A ghost investigator without any training in the mediumship is unable to use discard technology properly; it has to be used by a medium with skill in navigating between the worlds. The more complex the self-contained landscape created by the ghost, the more difficult it becomes to make them self-aware.

The silhouetted man that Danny sensed in the doorway, however, is aware of visitors. Danny attempts to speak with him – *Would you like to tell us who you are? Would you like to give us a message?* – but the watching spirit never responds. There is also a little boy and a dog, who waver between awareness and unawareness. They chase each other through the vaults as if only cognisant of their own spaces in time, and yet they can be prompted into interacting with the living by a *liminal object*, used to trigger a spirit’s response. The object allows for the ghost investigator to transition into the socio-cultural world of the ghosts (Sabol, 2007: 115). The spirit is meant to identify with the object, react to it, and separate themselves from their own haunt period. Spirits of this type usually become more cognisant around Halloween or May 1st, when the veils on both sides – spirit world and living world – are thin enough for both the living and the dead to become more aware of each other. Around these dates, the little boy has been known to grab the hand of someone he perceives as a mother figure, and the dog will brush up against people’s legs.

Danny's medium abilities also manifest in the ability to see the past of a place, the records of the invisible, what he calls, "significant impressions in time." This contrasts with Lenore's ability to see places, which are only shown to her by spirits in order to communicate specific messages. What Danny sees in his impressions are not necessarily just spirits trapped between worlds, but events as they happened, the feel of a place, the emotions of it. His vision in the next vault was of strong, stout men drinking and eating oysters, tossing the shells to the ground. The room he sees in his mind is dimly lit, packed full of intoxicated men. *The scent here is pungent. It's like the sweat and candles and seafood, and it's overwhelming. Really, so strong that I actually feel a bit ill right now. It's making my eyes sting.* The guide explains that the strong odour could come from the candles, which would have been comprised of fish oil and animal fat. As soon as we leave and move into another vault, Danny notes that the odour has dissipated.

The next vault is full of chairs belonging to the tour company, lined along the walls and stacked on top of each other. The tour guide is quick to point out that this vault has never been used in tours and exists primarily for storage; the extra furniture is there for larger events. Danny shakes his head; he has another impression of the vault. *It would have been used for another kind of storage once. I see bodies in here. Would there be any reason for bodies to be in here?*

According to the guide, there is a rumour that body snatchers⁵⁹ may have once brought bodies into the vaults and kept them there before selling them to the medical school. It is not something that has been proven by any accounts in the historical record, but the historical record suggests body snatchers would have needed a safe place nearby to keep their corpses before

⁵⁹ Specifically referencing Burke and Hare.

selling them. There would have been nothing to prove that particular vault to be used at all for that purpose. However, the guide notes: *the vault does exit directly into Niddry Street, which is only a few hundred meters from the medical school. So there is a possibility that body snatchers would have met their clientele on Niddry Street, and used the vaults nearest to the street for easy access in their dealings.*

Danny proposes we stay in the vault and communicate with the spirits there to see if they might lend perspective to his vision of the coffins. The ten of us settle into the small room, sitting on the cold stone floor. Two tourists in the group have electromagnetic frequency meters with them. One EMF machine sits at the back of the vault, and the other is placed in the middle of our group to see if there was any discrepancy in their readings. The goal was to use the devices to prompt spirits in the room into answering simple sets of questions (*yes or no*), while Danny attempted to interpret more complex answers.

Both devices begin the session with a single green light blinking, indicative of low electromagnetic frequency. We sit quietly as Danny asks any lingering spirits to communicate using the metres.

If there's anybody in here, if you're with us or watching us, and you may have stayed in these walls or worked in these walls, can you let us know if you're here? Touch us, or tap the wall, or make the lights turn on? A second light on the machine turns on, a yellow light. *Can you make three lights come on?* A third light turns on – orange. *Can you make four lights come on?*

When nothing happens, Danny repeats the questions, but only the three lights remain lit. We wait, but nothing else happens. Danny asks the guide: *How much do you know about this room?*

The guide did not know much about the room at all. The history of some of the vaults is not particularly well-known, or even well-documented. Those who lived down in the spaces would have been primarily illiterate, so their accounts would not have been put forth into the public sphere. What information historians have managed to garner about the vaults come from the few accounts that do exist, or from objects left behind when the vaults were reopened in the 1980s. In this vault, all they found were dark glass bottles, an indication that the room may have been used for storage and not much else.

The reason I ask is because I'm sensing someone in here. Two presences, one stronger than the other, but the weaker one might just be passing through. For the stronger one, if you're male, can you make the lights go again? Three of the lights turn on and a fourth one flickers.

I'm picking up a name now, someone with a history in these walls and it keeps coming up. The name John Murphy. That's a name that's drawn to this room. There is a lot of spirits that pass through these walls, and I still pick up on others coming through, as well. They don't linger, and they're not interested in interacting with us just now. But there's still that name John Murphy that keeps coming strong, that has a strong association with this place.

Also in this room, I keep getting an association with death. I keep seeing the dead linger here for a day, or two days. That may be the body snatcher association coming up again or something else, but that's what I keep seeing. I have this image of a body laying out here for a few days at a time; different bodies, like it keeps happening.

While the names “Burke and Hare” did not come up in the conversation, the possible association with the two most notorious body snatchers in Edinburgh is one that the tour company plays up for its more sensational walking tours. As the vigils put more emphasis on

investigation than entertainment, the tour guide was there to put Danny's visions into an historic perspective. If what Danny claimed in his visions was unverifiable, the guide disclosed that. His knowledge of the vaults history is a means of authentication. In this regard, the vigil has three important aspects that separate it from a regular ghost tour: historical perspective (provided by the guide), scientific perspective (provided by the gadgets brought in to detect ghosts), and a spiritual perspective (provided by the medium).

The spiritual landscape, or ghost space, within the vaults is tied to its history, to the emotional and personal events that once happened there:

[a place] haunts us in the sense that they force us – perhaps against our will, perhaps occasionally – to recognise the lives of those who have gone (before). In this sense, the physicality of the [place] itself shimmers with the ghostliness as it becomes a mutable and durable place of memory (Pile, 2005: 162).

Through mediumship, Danny is able to tap into the collective memory of a place and the people who once inhabited the vaults. The vaults, as a tourist location, are so deeply linked with a dark history of poverty and plague, a seedy underground in which death was all too common. Its ghost space becomes reflective of that history, what Steve Pile calls an “emotional geography,” where the social history of a place is deeply connected to its hauntings, and through its metaphysical “impressions.”

Thus, Danny is able to create a metaphysical landscape of history, the spirits that exist between worlds, and death. Bodies have a significant meaning to the imagery he has created, as symbolic of a tumultuous history in which the dead were commodities, dug up and sold for a fee. He creates a landscape where spirits ever-linger, unaware of their transitions into an afterlife. Spirits become tied to their physical bodies, which reflect their profane lives as they once

existed. The body lingers even after death, a part of the metaphysical landscape Danny has created for the vaults.

A Vigil with Mary: Sensory Landscapes, Shamanism, and Spirit Vessels

My vigil with Mary was a year after I met Danny. She reminded me immediately of Lenore, the same quiet nature, the same reverence for the mediumship: *This is my calling. I knew it from the time I was little that this is what I should do with my life.* Unlike Danny, Mary did not attend ghost investigations very frequently, and unlike Lenore, she did not belong to the Spiritualist Church. She considered herself a private medium-for-hire, who travelled to make house calls to cleanse private homes of spirits. Mediumship was not her primary occupation, but it was one she felt the most connection to. She was still in training in the mediumship, and had agreed to do the Halloween vigil to build her reputation within the spiritual community. The last time she went into the vaults, she refused to communicate with the spirits. *I kept myself closed off tight as a drum the last time; I didn't want any spirits talking to me then.*

I was surprised to hear that her abilities were could be muted at will. In my interviews with Danny and Lenore, both were very clear that their abilities were active all the time. As Lenore said, *It was like a switch inside me. It flipped on one day and I could never flip it back off, even if I wanted.* So present were Lenore and Danny's abilities that they maintain a constant state of spirit connectedness. Mary's visions simply did not work the same way. *I see glimpses*

into the past. I can sense things and get a feel for the spirits in the room. Sometimes it's visual and sometimes it's instinct.

My group with Mary explored the same vaults as I had with Danny. Again, all the candles had been snuffed out. The vaults were quiet, and so were the streets above us. The air was heavier that night, musty from the smoke machines the tour company uses to create a ghostly atmosphere on the Halloween walking tours. Mary has us gather in a circle, asking that we press our shoulders together so the circle would be unbroken. *What we do here is call on the spirits in this place to talk to us, and not all of them may want us here. This circle offers us protection from any that might try to do us harm.*

Mary asks us to breathe deep and focus to clear our mind of anything that might prevent our ability to perceive a spirit's message. Her approach to spirit communication is different from Lenore's and Danny's, heavy with ritual symbolism. She asked us to hold hands if we were comfortable doing so, claiming that while many spirits simply want to deliver messages to living people, there are some that are dangerous and driven to vengeful acts of violence out of resentment for the living. Mary considers the vaults to be a place of concentrated spirit activity, so haunted that it attracts wandering spirits who may not have died there at all. By calling out to the spirits and inviting them to communicate and interact with us, she believed we could open ourselves up to vengeful spirits or Poltergeists who seek to do us harm. *Sometime the not-so-good spirits like to wait for us to make contact. I haven't seen them hurt anybody yet, but they can cause quite a fright.*

By staying in a circle and linking hands (or being pressed shoulder to shoulder), a spiritual barrier is created to protect the group from harm.

Now, I'm not doing this to alarm anyone, or make you feel like you're in danger, but there is a man in this room. I can make out his silhouette just there in the doorway. For now, he's just watching, but I am getting the feeling that he's not happy we're here. This is his space, he feels we're invading it. And he's lurking just there to let us know we're not welcome.

The circle is a vital part of a transitory experience, something that grounds the people in the room firmly to the realm of the living while keeping them in contact with the realm of the dead. Eliade wrote about the experience of being transcendent and wholly aware of an eternal reality where the souls of the dead dwell (Eliade, 1987: 118), but in Mary's vigil tourists are both aware of that reality and yet separate from it. By maintaining that separation, tourists are protected from harmful spirits and yet put in an in-between state where we are still open to messages from other spirits.

In that sense, the vigil space mirrors a ritual space, which Emile Durkheim defined as a space which directly addresses the sacred. While the vigil may not be a ritual in its most exacting form – which consists of formality, fixity, a repetition (Bell, 1992: 92) – I would argue that the way a vigil is conducted (with all of its ritual symbolism and activities, such as the circle) is constructed in a way that is highly ritualised. The persistent aspects of ritual are clear in the way communicating with the world of the spirit is both initiated and warded: the circle of protection, the use of candlelight, and the conjuring of spirits. The imagery is certainly indicative of the structure of witchcraft and séance. As Catherine Bell says, “Ritualisation is embedded within the dynamics of the body defined within a symbolically structured environment” (ibid) The circle Mary asked us to form was a part of that structure, as is the idea of visual deprivation in order to make one more receptive to spirit communication.

For spirit communication, Mary uses a digital voice recorder. She asks spirits questions and pauses to wait as their answers are captured within the device. Spectral presence is clear to her without the recording, but she notes that listening to the EVP (electronic voice phenomena) is for our benefit, in case the messages were directly addressed to one of the people in the circle. *If there's anyone here or listening and you would like to give us a message, speak into the recorder.* After a few seconds she turns it off. *Now I know we got something there. I heard a whisper and felt a breath just over my shoulder.*

She plays the recording and a whisper of what sounds like, *Hello*, filters through the white noise on the digital recorder. She encourages us to ask questions into the recorder, which is then played back for any possible answers from a spirit. This is a technique I detail further in Chapter 5, one used by ghost investigators to create a dialogue between the dead and the living, a digital proof of their existence. I am mentioning it briefly in this chapter as the auditory and synaesthetic landscape is how Mary presents the ghost world through her visions. As she claims:

Every person has the potential to be sensitive enough to sense ghosts; it's just about putting them in the right environment and mood to do it. If you do feel something, don't be shy about saying so. There's no shame in admitting you feel something. You're supposed to come here to try to feel something.

By these recorded sound bites of ghostly voices, we, as participants, become more firmly entrenched in a paranormal landscape. Every new sound, every breath felt, every taste, and every shadow figure is a potential aspect of that landscape. Attendees take what Constance Classen describes as “sensory journeys,” in which they are able to think about the senses, think through them, and use that as a way of interacting with spirits (Classen, 1993: 9). Therefore attendees are no longer were observers waiting for a medium to make contact with a spirit, but an active participants in spirit communication. The vigil, in that sense, is a spiritual journey as well as a

sensory one. Mary notes that being in the dark and critically using the other senses awakens people's potential for paranormal sensitivity. Through spirit communication, attendees attempt to experience something that is truly liminal and, ultimately, transformative. It becomes a passage, a transcendent initiatory experience from the profane to the sacred (Eliade, 1987: 181).

Mary initiated with the ghost space around us in a way that shows an intuitive connection with spirits. She senses their nearness, their intentions, and sometimes the way they would have lived. Mary's visions involved the senses; like Danny, she smelled strong odours from visions of the past, and could smell the smoke of the burning candles. However, her visions included an emotional connection to those scents that were absent in the way Danny expressed his visions. The smoky smell came from a distinct feeling of malevolence in the vaults, from the spirit who watched us from the shadows. *I'm feeling him just in that other room now and he isn't at all happy with us tromping through his home. He's getting angrier and the smoke taste gets stronger.*

In a ghost space, particularly strong spirits are able to change the aural landscape of a place, the way that place feels to a medium. Suddenly the "feel" of the room can become negative or melancholy, and can affect the medium's moods. Mary felt intense anger when the shadow spirit was around. He critically altered her emotional connection to the room, making it so intensely negative that she wanted to leave. She speaks very matter-of-factly, but with a hint of unease in the tone of her voice:

We're not welcome here, and I'm doing my best to block him out. For a second there he was trying to grab at me and I smelled his breath, which is just this incredibly strong smoke and rot there. He's telling me to get us out and he's really beginning to influence me in an unpleasant way. I can just feel his rage, and it is so intense. He's just watching now but I get the sense that he's not going to keep still for much longer. And when that happens, it's not going to be easy to shut myself against him then. So perhaps it's best we move to another room.

Mary is able to feel the spirit on an emotional and ultimately physical level. It was an embodiment of the spectre, however brief – not necessarily a “possession”, but an intense physical interaction with the spirit world (Eliade, 1964: 5). Mary’s abilities mirror a traditional sense of shamanism: “[The goal of a shaman] is to interact with the spirit world for the benefit of those in the material world.” (Townsend, 1997: 431). Thus, Mary serves not only as a link between the spirit world and that of the living, but also as a vessel. Spirits speak through her, just as they would a shaman. Her role as a liminal being is altered in that she exists between what Townsend describes as “two realities:” the “material reality,” which is the profane, and the “spiritual reality,” where the souls of the dead exist. In becoming a vessel for the emotions of the spirit world, she enters a state of in-between-ness where she becomes a part of the spiritual reality on a more physical level.

As Mary discusses the feelings the malevolent spirit evokes, a few others within the group responded that they suddenly felt cold. One girl stated, *I just suddenly felt a chill up my arms and it didn’t feel at all good. I didn’t feel right.* Another claimed, *I think I just felt a breath on the back of my neck there. Really warm and uncomfortable.* John Sabol notes how a haunted space takes on its own metaphysical personality and reality, shaped by the spirit: “. . . interactions within haunted spaces can influence feelings, moods, and associations without a spirit being physically “tuned-in” (in a psychic sense)” (Sabol, 2007: 76). The ghostly landscape changes into something dark and foreboding, with a sense of danger real to those sensing what they believe to be spirit activity. Mary no longer exists as a bridge between one world and the next, but a guide contextualising and reframing the spirit world for tourists.

Conclusion

As Mircea Eliade wrote, “There is a sacred space . . . and hence a strong, significant space; there are other spaces that are not sacred and so are without structure or consistency, amorphous.” (Eliade, 1987: 20) The vaults as a profane space are something alterable, a place in which pockets of liminality and sacredness and spirituality coexist. While visitors may enter into a liminal period there for a short while, they may never transcend beyond the profane until death. In contrast, mediums exist as transcendent, liminal creatures able to commune with and walk among the two worlds, as messengers for the dead, as guides for the living, and as vessels for spiritual interactions. Mediums create transcendent landscapes through which those existing in the profane space may walk, however briefly, among the spiritual space.

In Edinburgh’s ghost culture, mediums waver between liminal and liminoid ways of being. Their ability to communicate with spirits as a compulsive need (that never turns off) keeps them in a permanent state of liminality. Yet they also market that ability as a commodity to anyone willing to pay for it. However, the success of that commercialism has taken hold in Edinburgh. The diversity of the mediumship there shows that ways of communicating with spirits is not uniform. It is a creation of many different spiritual landscapes, from the auditory, to the sensory, to the connection of kin and spiritual rebirth. It is within those landscapes that past and present interact. The vaults are a window through which the other world is visible, interactive, and entirely linked with the history of the space. Medium visions become places through which the sacred and the profane interact. They create ghost spaces in which the dead are not simply dead, but exist in another place and time, another state of in-between-ness. To

Lenore, those spirits are waiting, watching, and protecting their families until they can be rejoined in death. To Danny, some spirits are in their own pockets of history, replaying and reliving as if they had never died at all. To Mary, spirits are interactive creatures able to change the landscape and moods of the living people around them. Every medium I interacted with in Edinburgh had a different idea of life after death, different visions of the liminal space beyond. However, they all attempt to show the living that there is some significance there, a rebirth or existence that is still not entirely separate from the living.

CHAPTER 5

The Commercialisation of Ghost Hunting, and How Tourism Has Affected Scotland's Ghost Culture

Between the rise of tourism and the popularity of Spiritualism was a shift in how ghosts were culturally perceived in Scotland – and with it, how the supernatural became commoditised. Spirits have long been as much a part of Scotland's folklore as the faeries and the monsters. In folktales, they are creatures that force humans to confront their own mortality, and exact moral judgement upon the living. One of the most notable works on Highland superstitions is William Grant Stewart's *The Popular Superstitions and Festive Amusements of the Highlanders of Scotland* (1823), which narrated different types of ghosts and ghost legends from before the Enlightenment. *Popular Superstitions* chronicled tales of spectres haunting Scottish lochs, castles, and streets, and sometimes the spirits would exact vengeance or harm on those they knew in life. Stewart noted that spectres could often be "ill-natured and cruel, and cared not a spittle for woman or child" (ibid: 6). Legends of spectres often resembled stories of demons or witches or faeries; they were perceived by those in Stewart's accounts as more like monsters than those who were once living humans.

The popularity of Spiritualism created the perfect balance between storytelling, performance, scientific investigation and a wide attempt to make spirits more accessible to the living. Rather than being relegated to mere folktales, spirits became investigated and summoned

by people seeking answers about life after death. Having approached this topic from an historical perspective,⁶⁰ this chapter will continue the discussion of ghost events outside of the walks⁶¹ and their use of scientific tools and investigative techniques to record and capture spirits on film. Edinburgh's contemporary ghost culture revives the Victorian-era desire to utilise technology to prove that when people die, a spark of them still lives on elsewhere, on some other plane of existence. Contemporary belief in ghosts has become, in part, entwined with the burden of proof and seeking out the paranormal deliberately. Ghost hunters and investigators combine their paranormal beliefs with the scientific desire for evidence of hauntings, an outlook that is both reflected and propagated through commercial ghost endeavours and on popular television shows.⁶²

As I became more entrenched in Edinburgh's ghost culture and Spiritualist communities, I could not ignore that ghost investigations had become just as much a part of the commercialisation of hauntings as the walking tours themselves. Indeed, *investigating* ghosts – that is, the attempt to prove or indicate spiritual presence via the use of certain scientific instruments – has even been introduced into some of the walking tours. Tourists are encouraged by tour companies to bring along items that have become mainstays of ghost investigations: from cameras to digital recorders to electromagnetic frequency (EMF) metres (which are occasionally even provided on certain tours) and digital voice recorders. Tourism itself has shaped and affected the investigatory sphere in Edinburgh into a multifaceted community striving and competing for locations to investigate the paranormal. On the surface, their goal is simple: to use

⁶⁰ See: Chapter 1.

⁶¹ That began with Chapter 4, on the mediumship.

⁶² Television shows and other media will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 6.

various tools as tactics of validation which both indicate and record spiritual presences.

However, like many aspects of ghost culture in Edinburgh, the incorporation of investigative techniques into the tour circuit shows a significant shift in how the supernatural is consumed by tourists. In this chapter, I will compare and contrast two different types of ghost investigators (commercial and independent). This discussion includes the use of hunts as a tourist draw, the similarities and differences in structure between commercial and independent investigations, and how investigation signifies a shift in how people – including tourists – experience ghost stories.

Sharing a Space with Tourists: How the Tourist Industry Has Impacted Paranormal Investigation

The Edinburgh vaults under South Bridge have been a place of interest to investigators since they were rediscovered. However, they have always been privately owned – by Norrie Rowan in the 80s, then leased by various tour companies after that. Three tour companies conduct their businesses in the vaults presently. The vaults have almost always been used in a commercial capacity, first by the tour companies as an atmospheric place to tell ghost stories about the old Edinburgh above, and later to include history walks, as well (Geddes, n.d., 38). One of the guides for Mercat tours, Amanda, told me in an interview that the focus of their tours changed when visitors began to have their own experiences within the vaults. The company learned more about the history of the rooms, using whatever information it had managed to

cobble together from historical records, accounts, and artefacts discovered in the vaults. Amanda said it was the unexplained phenomena (footsteps, voices, scents) and increased tourist claims of hauntings that inspired Mercat to centre their tours on the combination of history and ghost stories.

The South Bridge vaults are now widely regarded as being one of the most haunted places in the UK (some sources say in Europe), a reputation garnered from investigations and the sheer number of paranormal encounters claimed by tourists. In Edinburgh, they have something of a reputation among ghost investigators as being highly coveted for investigations, but as a difficult place to conduct independent research. Aside from the vaults Mercat uses – which are among the more famous and historically intact – the underground vaults have all been broken up and bought by independent companies⁶³, leaving each of the spaces now legally owned. Tourist interest has driven up the price to rent out the vaults for private functions, leaving the independent ghost investigators – who make little or no money from their work – unable to rent the space for exploration without paying a tidy sum.

As a result of Edinburgh's ghost tour industry, there exists some resentment between independent investigators – those who consider themselves to be on scientific missions to prove that a form of life after death exists, and spirits are a part of it – and those they call “wannabes” and “sell outs” (as in, those who conduct commercial investigations paid for either by tourists or by corporate entities, such as television networks). This hierarchy of knowledge and expertise is further reflected in independent investigators' views of the validity of the research performed by commercial ghost hunters. Douglas, the first independent investigator who agreed to speak with

⁶³ Both tour companies and various pubs.

me, stated: *Why should anyone believe that shite? They're in it for the money. They have to make a place look haunted or their customers will know they're frauds.*

Douglas's investigation team travels throughout the UK and Europe during certain parts of the year, and spends the rest working and saving money. Our interviews began during his working months, when he performed odd jobs as a contractor. I found his posts on an internet forum completely by chance while scouring the internet for any events scheduled in the city. Sometimes events are quietly announced on ghost hunting or tourism sites, which I checked often. One section of this particular forum on UK urban exploration⁶⁴ was for explorers who doubled as ghost investigators. Douglas was an active forum user, posting photographs of the abandoned buildings that he had investigated to find ghosts. When he mentioned planning some explorations in the area before travelling to England, I messaged him privately and introduced myself, asking if he would allow me to interview him. After a few messages exchanged, he agreed to meet with me.

Douglas was only a few years older than myself, and became interested in ghost investigations after spending many years exploring abandoned buildings and, he says, *experiencing some pretty weird shit*. Indeed, many of the urban explorers on the forum become ghost investigators after their own personal encounters with unexplained phenomena while in the field. He was open and friendly when we first met, though he admitted he had been caught completely off-guard by my message because he assumed I worked in tourism. *I almost told you*

⁶⁴ I have been asked not to share the name of this forum. After asking those on the forums for interviews, they only agreed to speak with me on the condition that I not divulge any identifying information about the community and its participants. The members largely investigate condemned and guarded buildings without permission, and they worry that if authorities know about their activities, it might make future investigations more difficult to conduct.

to fuck off, to be honest, he said. His sentiment towards tourism is one shared in the community of independent ghost investigators, including those on the forums that he frequents to share tales. Their reasons were always the same: tourism detracts from legitimate scientific investigation. It puts investigators in competition with one another, where the groups that make money from tourists are given access to locations that independent researchers are not.

When a location is labelled as potentially haunted⁶⁵, a ghost investigator's goal is to conduct research to either verify stories of unexplained phenomenon or dispel them as some perfectly earthly cause all together. However, ghost sightings have the unintended consequence of creating a commercial gimmick used to attract tourists seeking their own personal paranormal experiences. Drawing in tourists with supernatural claims is also used by hotels, castles, and even pubs throughout Scotland (indeed, many places in the United Kingdom). These places combine history and the paranormal – creating a link between the living and the dead – and has become the framework for modern tourism in Scotland (Walter, 2009: 43). According to Douglas:

The tourists and amateurs . . . the ghost hunters . . . swoop in, and the private companies take notice. Suddenly the place is bought and we have to pay to get into a place to do what we've always done.

The location becomes commercialised, with events packaged for the tourist experience. The potential to make money on ghost stories formulates the identity of a site, both its historic context and its present one. These places are defined – as historic places are – by past events and the people that lived there, but in ghost culture, their identity becomes increasingly connected to

⁶⁵ In the case of the vaults, there are now hundreds of claims of ghost sightings and spiritual activity.

the stories and paranormal accounts passed along by previous visitors and tourist companies (White, 2013: 233).

Douglas has not been investigating the paranormal long enough to remember what it was like before tour companies overtook nearly all of the South Bridge vaults, even those that had not been bought up by Mercat. Currently, a majority of the vaults are managed by three of the largest ghost tour companies in Edinburgh: Mercat Tours, City of the Dead Tours, and Auld Reekie Tours. The rest are owned by pubs on Niddry Street, at least one in conjunction with Auld Reekie Tours. Even the Banshee Labyrinth, one of the pubs that built its venue into the vaults on Niddry Street, uses the supernatural as a unique tourist draw:

Wherever you choose to sit back, relax and enjoy your drink, remember to be very careful. Many have placed their drink down simply to watch it slide straight off the table and smash against a wall as if thrown by an unseen force! (“Welcome to the Banshee Labyrinth”, n.d. para. 2)

Douglas’s predecessors, those who have been conducting paranormal investigations in the UK for decades, were more easily able to receive permission from the owners of the vaults. As I heard it from Amanda, the tour guide, even Mercat once brought independent paranormal investigators to the location to explore the claims of ghostly activity. Investigators came out of interest in investigating a largely untouched and preserved location from Edinburgh’s more gruesome past. Word spread through the city, aided by television coverage (and later, online interest) which focused on claims of paranormal activity. The historically intact nature of the vaults also made it a novelty to the public during a time when there was an increased fascination with ghosts and the paranormal.

Ghost stories and investigations eventually became a popular premise for television shows. Networks sent ghost hunters to various locations around the world to capture paranormal phenomena on camera or in audio recordings. *Most Haunted*, a successful ghost hunting show in the UK, was just one of the first to send its team into the Edinburgh vaults. Others followed. Douglas claims television shows were the beginning of the end for independent ghost investigators looking to conduct their research in the vaults for little or no money.

They were doing tours before that fucking show, but afterward the tourists came to see the place and even more came after that. Now if you want to get in and set up your stuff, make the money you lost on rental back, you either take the tourists with you, or pay a damned fortune to rent it for the night on your own.

What Douglas describes is the nature of commercial ghost hunt: it combines the storytelling of walking tours with scientific instruments to capture evidence of the paranormal. The tourist takes part in an organised event that adopts aspects of investigations and reframes them for the tourist experience – effectively widening the appeal of the ghost hunt (Hill, 2011: 89).

During my fieldwork, I went on a number of these ghost hunts, many of them with John, a commercial ghost investigator who occasionally works in conjunction with Edinburgh's tourist companies. John worked as an independent investigator in the past, but now earns both income and access to exclusive locations by taking both amateur ghost hunters and tourists along on structured hunts. In doing so, he earns back the money he paid to rent out the location, and makes extra income to use for travel to the next investigation site. John identifies the contradiction commercial ghost hunters face: the acknowledgment that tourism perpetuates the mainstream view of investigations as being a pseudoscience, contrasted with the need to make money in order to conduct legitimate scientific investigation. *That's just the way it's done now.*

Businesses buy up these places, and you have to adapt to keep doing what you love, even if some people don't take it seriously. There's money in tourism.

Indeed, the money making aspect of ghost stories is also reflected in how researchers label themselves within the community. The terms *ghost hunter* versus *ghost investigator* has spurred passionate debate from those, like Douglas, who consider investigations to be serious scientific work. While the distinction between the two terms is by no means universal to those within the ghost culture, it places a vast importance on the *intent* of people participating in investigations. *Ghost hunting* is for those who seek out ghosts as an entertaining, novel experience, which also includes those who organise and lead these investigations for commercial gains. As Owen Davies describes it, the ghost hunt is packaged for the tourist experience by creating a connection between the tourist, the location, and the spirits that haunt it (2007: 90). Through storytelling⁶⁶, the commercial ghost hunt deliberately frames and creates an environment of influence, one in which tourists have an *expectation* that paranormal activity will occur. Such anticipation makes scientific data easily influenced and the collected recordings susceptible to inaccuracies. *Ghost investigation* is for scientists researching paranormal phenomena. Their goal is not solely to prove the existence of ghosts in a location, but also seek to *disprove* claims that a location is haunted: “. . . scientifically speaking, a ‘haunting’ is only an hypothesis to be tested through experiment. The formal model of testing, universal in science, is that of falsification.” (Ruickbie, 2013: 77)

In an investigation, finding evidence of a legitimate haunting is just as important as discovering logical, earthly explanations for claims of spectral activity. This is in stark contrast to

⁶⁶ Which includes both the history of the vaults and accounts of past visitor experiences.

the way the paranormal has become commercialised for ghost hunts, which presents ghost stories as absolutely true: “[book if you like . . .] entertaining storytelling – except they’re not just stories – it’s all horrifyingly real!” (“Halloween Vaults”, n.d. para. 1)

While I have used these terms interchangeably in the other chapters of this thesis, I have adopted Douglas’s distinction between ghost hunters and ghost investigators for this chapter. To clarify: *ghost hunter* and *ghost hunts/hunting* will be used in reference to those paying to attend investigations as well as those who run commercial investigations, and to any commercial tours I attended. *Ghost investigator* is a term for those who run their own independent paranormal research without the participation of tourists. They stress that the participation of tourists – and their expectations upon arrival in a haunted space – risks their data being misrepresented and not being taken seriously in the scientific community. *Validation* as legitimate scientific research is their optimum goal.

Tourism in the Investigatory Space: Ghost Investigations and Ghost Hunting,

Comparisons and Methods, Beliefs and Intent

My fieldwork on the scientific study of the paranormal was primarily through commercial ghost hunts. Ghost hunts were created and framed around the inclusion of tourists, and thus were structured for the participation of more people than independent investigations. Ghost hunts were also often advertised on the internet and even through tour company websites,

so it was relatively easy to become acquainted with those organising and participating in paranormal events in the community.

My first experiences on ghost hunts were with John, the leader of a team who primarily run ghost hunts through tour companies in UK. By the end of my first year of research, I had attended over a dozen commercial hunts, at least half of them with John. In contrast, it took a great deal of effort and time spent within the community before independent ghost investigators allowed me to accompany them on their investigations. They have inclusive, tight-knit groups and often do not include new members unless they have proven themselves – the test being the infiltration and chronicling of abandoned sites on a regular basis. Like Douglas, independent investigators were hesitant to speak to me when I mentioned that my research was, in part, on tourism. I had been immersed in the community for a year and a half when I first interviewed Douglas, and it would be another three months before Douglas introduced me to Ben, the leader of another independent investigation group. Ben was adamant that I include ghost investigations in my research.

Tourists don't just make it hard for us to do our jobs . . . they make this about competition. Those that sell out to tourists can get access to the best places because the rest of us have to spend our own money. So if we're on the skint, we have to find our own places.

The independent investigation community has been forced to reinvent the nature of their ghost investigations to keep a distance from tourists. In doing so, their research now covers the abandoned, derelict, and forgotten buildings in the countryside and cities all over the country. After some months of speaking with independent investigators and personally attending their explorations, I was able to properly compare and contrast the difference between investigations and commercial hunts. While their tools and beliefs about ghosts are the same, commercial and

independent investigation methods have diverged to accommodate and adapt to the ever-growing tourist landscape: the former by including tourists, and the latter by seeking derelict and abandoned buildings that are free from the influence of tourism.

Similarities in Beliefs and Methods Between Ghost Hunters and Ghost Investigators

I. The Idea of the “Pure” Space

Where independent and commercial schools of thought merge is the idea of hunting in and exploring in a *pure space*, something I heard spoken about often in Edinburgh’s ghost culture. Pure spaces are valued for their authenticity; in the paranormal community, they are referred to as *time capsules*. Their ghostly landscapes are believed to be unaltered by modern additions to the building and structure that might affect how spirits interact with and communicate in a place. In this sense, spatial purity is about maintaining its status as “other”, an in-between-place that is part of the world yet wholly separate from it (Eliade, 1987: 25). The South Bridge vaults, for example, are considered by both John and Douglas to be a pure space. The rooms have been relatively unaltered by modernity, making the location a relic, a rare treasure for ghost investigators. Since being rediscovered, tour companies have not sought to modernise them, leaving them in exactly the same condition as they existed when they were

sealed off in the 1800s; indeed, part of their appeal is in how atmospheric they are as historical places.

On a different spectrum of purity, as defined by ghost investigators, are buildings that are in use, such as castles, but have kept their classic look and architecture so they remain the same as they were while the spectres were living. The buildings Douglas conducts his investigations in are also considered pure because they have been left to decay rather than been effectively altered. The appeal of a pure space has to do with its *psychic echoes*, created by past events and the people who lived there, the social and cultural circumstances that make up its history (Hill, 2009: 101). I spoke about the psychic echoes briefly in Chapter 4 in the context of medium visions, but the same idea holds true for the collective memory of a place. Ghost stories are linked with a location's history and context, framing the emotional state of those visiting around the potential for paranormal occurrences with little anachronistic influence (ibid: 95). When a place is changed, modernised, or added to, its spatial identity is considered altered. The effect is a less immersive environment for those visiting and a disruption for the spirits that inhabit it. In investigation, disruptions in the spatial environment can create difficulties interpreting the messages spirits attempt to give through any medium conveying the message. The pure space acts as a boundary between worlds, a threshold as Eliade (1987: 25) describes:

The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds – and at the same time the paradoxical place where those two worlds communicate, where passage from the profane world to the sacred world becomes possible.

A pure space is wholly liminal, a place of communication between the living and the dead. In maintaining its purity, the place continues to evoke a sense of otherness in its present form, what Chantal Laws (2013: 110) describes as, “explicitly linked to a reflection on death.” The

unchanged location remains firmly tied to its past, where in contrast to a modernised space, and its history remains firmly *visible*. Meanwhile its past inhabitants are remembered through stories of hauntings. Spatial purity is an environment in which the ghost space – the realm in which ghosts reside – is in perfect stasis with the realm of the living. Ghost investigators and hunters believe this allows a spirit’s message to slip through to the living with less difficulty, as their interaction with the space remains the same as it did when they were still alive.

II. Ghost Investigation Gear and Perceiving the Ghost Space With the Aid of Technology

Every team has their own preference for the tools they use on investigations, with some items being deemed more important than others. Certain items were present on every investigation I attended, regardless of whether it was commercial or independent. However, the item’s purpose and use differed between groups.⁶⁷

Perhaps the most common item used was the camera. There was a great deal of importance placed on capturing and documenting with both still cameras and digital camcorders (night vision capability was essential). Digital SLRs were used by independent investigators to document the location rather than to record spirits on film. Instead, night vision cameras were used to capture spirit movement on film, most often flying orbs, or moving shadows. On commercial hunts in the South Bridge vaults, tourists are encouraged to bring their own cameras or camcorders – something I saw on hunts run by both the tour companies and by ghost hunters.

⁶⁷ I will explain this in more detail in the commercial/independent investigation vignettes later in the chapter.

Indeed, companies even asked that tourists send them any images of note to add to their ever-growing archive of images.



Figure 6: One of the hallways in the vault, with an orb -- one of the believed manifestations of ghosts on film -- in the centre.

As Robinson and Picard (2009: 20) note, photographs are a narrative device – a form of storytelling framed by the tourist – that is passed around to family and friends. With the popularity of social media, photographic narratives have gone beyond the scope of the immediate family to be shared on sites like Facebook and Trip Advisor. The photograph is confirmation and evidence of a tourist's *own* ghost story, one that can be consumed and shared perpetually via the

internet.⁶⁸ Photographs are both a means of authenticating an experience and verifying the haunted nature of a location. In the case of commercial ghost investigations, photographs are shared by tour companies and ghost hunters on their websites to attract new visitors. This has the double effect of both entwining the location's identity with its hauntings, and appealing to tourists who are seeking their own unique experiences.

The camera is also every bit as essential to the independent ghost investigator as it is to the tourist. Indeed, I would argue that in the investigatory space, a ghost investigator is just as much a tourist as those who pay to attend a ghost hunt. The photographs they take all tell a story; the tale of a place, its decay, its current state of existence. In a ghost investigation, the photograph is reflective of the living world, the documentation of the location, the experience. It becomes another form of authenticity, representing evidence of the possessor's participation in an event during a specific time and place (Costa, 2010: 44). Photography in ghost tourism also offers something different from the usual tourist snapshot: the possibility of spirits hidden in images. Spirit photography forces the tourist to look carefully at photographs, to pay attention to details that they might not regard so closely in the traditional holiday snapshot, where every orb or streak of light has the potential to be a spirit. The photograph has the dual role of being both a tool of investigation and an object of investigation itself.

⁶⁸ More on this in Chapter 6.



Figure 7: Another view of the vaults.

The second most common item used on investigations was the digital audio recorder. In both independent investigations and ghost hunts, the digital audio recorder is kept running from the start of the investigation through to the end. Modern digital recorders can pick up a dynamic range of audio, some of which might not be within the immediate auditory range. In investigations, they are used to document Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP), as ghost investigators believe that spirit voices are on the very low end of what can be picked up by a digital recorder. I documented the difference between how the recorder is used on the two different investigation types, but the overall goal is to elicit a vocal response from any spirits lingering in a room. The digital recorder is meant to pick up voices from both spirits who are

aware of an investigator's presence and spirits who still reside in their own spaces of time. Investigators ask questions into the recorder, to prompt any aware spirits to respond either directly to the question, or to reference any of the people in the room by name or description.

The stronger the response from a spirit, the stronger the resulting electromagnetic frequency in a room. Electromagnetic frequency is detected by EMF metres, which are the third most common tool in a ghost investigator's arsenal. Most rooms operate at a low frequency which would barely register on the device. A spike in the EMF reading is meant to be a sign of some paranormal activity; any increase in the frequency indicates the strength of the spirit's presence. Investigators also use EMF metres to indicate the extent to which the worlds of the living and the dead overlap; a persistently high reading in a certain room (without technological interference) is evidence that the veil between realms is thinnest there. John Sabol (2007: 104) describes these locations as a "haunt space", a location that possesses enough meaning to the spirits there to prompt a manifestation, a recordable response the ghost makes in the physical world. Ghost investigators believe that the higher the EMF reading, the more likely the presence of paranormal phenomena, which corresponds to a stronger link between the living world and the ghost space. In this case, a stronger response is considered to be indicative of a spirit that is aware of the living world and seeks to send a message. Lower electronic frequency readings are considered to be spirits who are unaware of the living world, but still interact with it in the places where the worlds overlap. These results in technology are considered to be what Sabol refers to as "behavioural manifestations," spirits interacting with technology either deliberately or unintentionally; it is up to the investigator to figure out which (2007: 72).

While other tools were utilised to sense the strength of spirit presence, these three were the most essential. EMF readers were used to indicate a physical presence, and the camera/recorder combination is meant to catch a glimpse of the spirit's manifestation in the physical world. Ultimately, these tools serve an important purpose in Edinburgh's ghost culture, as they believe that what we see with our own eyes is unreliable, limited to the sights and sounds of our own plane of existence. The ghost space is considered present alongside our world, but living people are largely unable to experience it. Sometimes the overlap can exist strongly enough in a place so as to be seen by the naked eye (such as the ghost sightings in the vaults), but most of the time, technology is required to glimpse it. Technology is used in ghost hunting for where human senses fail.

III. The Combination of Science and Myth, Reinterpreting Ghost Stories

Ghost investigation, tourism, and the use of technology to record spectral manifestations have created a fascinating convergence of science and myth, technology and ghost stories. Historically, ghost mythology and stories have always presented ghosts as the symbolic past confronting the present. As Inglis and Holmes (2003) state, "The ghost comes literally to represent the bursting forth of the past into the contemporary world, where inhabitants of the present are forcefully reminded that escape from the call of history is impossible" (55). Ghost investigations connect a place's spatial identity with its history and its spirits, where ghosts are believed to reside in a continued, looping past space that interacts with the present. It could also

be argued that ghosts in stories are literal representations of the inevitability of death, there to confront the living. They are associated with a number of ritualistic and folkloric elements⁶⁹, notably ritualistic ideas surrounding sacred time, sacred (“pure”) space, and passages between worlds. The sacred time most associated with ghosts in Edinburgh is Halloween, when ghost tour companies and ghost hunters make more income than at any other time in the year. Halloween night was said to be when spirits came out to haunt the living, and it was believed they would appear in “bodily shape” (Bamford as cited in Rogers, 2002: 31). These are folkloric ideas that have become associated with spirits in modern day, still utilised in contemporary investigation – indeed, they *frame* the investigatory space. The understanding of the ghost space as being parallel to our world but able to overlap at pivotal places, times, and points of the year were not only important to past ghost mythology, but continue to be the very ideas which contemporary ghost hunters believe constitutes a haunt space. Grant Stewart noted that these times and places possess a special quality, where the “natural coldness and jealousy which generally subsist between the human species and their supernatural neighbours, are changed into perfect harmony and benevolence (1823: 228). While these beliefs about ghosts still persist in Edinburgh’s ghost culture, technology has been incorporated into the contemporary ghost story.

While supernatural interaction with technology is not a recent creation – after all, spirit photography has been around since the 19th century – contemporary ghost investigation has tailored spirit mythology to the responses they see in the field. Ghosts have always been creatures associated with human senses and feelings: fear, hair standing on end, a sudden burst of cold. Annette Hill (2011: 105) speaks of the *emotional geography* to hauntings, arguing that

⁶⁹ Mentioned in Chapter 1 and described further in Chapter 4.

people engage with spirits and spiritualism on an emotional level because they are forced to look beyond the surface, to look beyond life. The technological aspects to a ghost hunt add several other dimensions to the ghost myth. It attempts to distance ghost lore from its emotional geography in order to present it as legitimate, scientific investigation. I would never dream of arguing that the scientific rebranding of the ghost myth is without its emotional connection to mortality and ideas of life after death. After all, by the very nature of the ghost hunt, investigators are forced to confront their own ideological and social ideas of death and dying – and these can be incredibly personal and feeling based. However, there is also a complexity of belief among ghost investigators, one that Harvey J. Irwin argues is “marked by various degrees of endorsement between the poles of extreme scepticism and extreme gullibility” (2009: 17). I recall one of my interviews with Douglas, when I asked him if he believed in ghosts. After he answered to the affirmative, I asked him if he thought his belief affected his research. *Of course I’ve thought about it, and I don’t know. All I can keep doing is gathering all the evidence I can and hope it proves something.* Douglas’s answer made me think often on the burden of proof. Ghost stories, simply by belonging to folklore, are often viewed through the perspective of personal belief. Both investigations and commercial hunts force the individual to consider ghosts through the filter of their own experiences, to analyse and differentiate the explainable from the unexplainable. However, since the post-Enlightenment age, ghost belief and investigations into the unexplained and supernatural have become associated with the burden of evidence, the scientific method. From the influence of the post-Enlightenment age, ghosts are investigated through ever-changing technologies. They have been shifted out of the realm of mythology to that which must be tested and proven – a practice that has extended to how the supernatural is packaged for tourists.

A Commercial Investigation with John: Spending a Night in the South Bridge Vaults

The commercial tour brings together people from all over, from holiday tourists, to people who already reside in Edinburgh. John has been organising commercial ghost hunts for the last five years – some he plans on his own, though most are through tour companies around the UK. Several times a year, he runs hunts in the vaults with Mercat Tours; twice during the week of Halloween, which is when I accompanied him on my first commercial tour. The hunts he organises for Mercat are required to be well-coordinated, with every hour meticulously planned in advance to frame the experience for tourists. The scientific aspect of investigation, of course, is secondary to giving tourists an experience carefully packaged and worth their time and money. John Urry (1990: 38) describes this as the consequence of the tourist industry: service is just another part of the “product”. On ghost hunts, part of the package tourists purchase is the paranormal experience, which by its nature is rare and elusive. As Inglis and Holmes (2003) state, “. . . Ghosts do not make reliable employees . . . a standing joke among Scottish tourism officials is that ‘real’ ghosts are liable not to turn up ‘on cue’, when a party of tourists is being guided around the putatively ‘haunted’ locale” (57). However, Mercat’s website disclaimer for ghost investigations presents paranormal activity in the vaults as a likelihood instead of an anomaly:

Mercat Tours accepts no responsibility for the effects of paranormal activity in the Vaults. You enter the Vaults at your own risk. You are reminded that the supernatural is an erratic phenomenon and can cause extreme emotional reactions. You have been warned! (“Halloween Vaults Vigil”, 2013, para. 6)

A connection to the haunted space must be established in the investigation, either by implying that paranormal phenomena is happening, or by creating the anticipation that a ghostly encounter is a distinct possibility. The purpose of a commercial ghost investigation is to appeal to people's emotions and feelings in the space, rather than their desire for scientific proof (Hill, 2009: 89). In the end, a successful ghost investigation gives both the ghost hunter and the tour company more business (and *success* in a commercial ghost hunt is entirely dependent upon tourists feeling as though the investigation was successful in creating a paranormal link), and the boost in business gives commercial ghost hunters the income and opportunity to perform their own legitimate investigations between tourist events. While Douglas is derisive toward commercial ghost hunts, John defends his decision to make money from investigations:

Some people think it means we're not serious about investigating, and that's fine. They have their day jobs and take their teams in on the weekends, and think that way of working is better than ours. But I don't do this part time. They're not better than me because they don't make money from it.

Those in the commercial hunting business consider their work necessary. John once told me that new investigators he interacts with in the community became interested in researching ghosts while attending their first commercial investigation. From his perspective, ghost hunts provide experience to those who may very well be the next generation of investigators. Those who participate in commercial events are a different crowd from Douglas's independent investigation community (urban explorers⁷⁰), and even those who attend walking tours. These visitors are not taking part in ghost hunts solely for the entertainment – and while some are tourists, they are looking for something more immersive than a simple ghost walk. After all, investigations take a great deal of time, lasting five hours at minimum (often past midnight),

⁷⁰ I will describe urban exploration in the next section of this chapter.

which is far more time and effort than most tourists would spend solely for entertainment's sake. While I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that some come along for the aspect of fun, most do come looking to experience the paranormal: "The economics of ghost hunting as a business are secondary to the primary personal, emotional and psychological aspects of these cultural practices" (Hill, 2009: 98). In fact, those who attend ghost hunts are often deeply interested in the supernatural. Those I spoke with regularly participated in these types of events, and are its primary customers. They pay handsomely (up to fifty pounds or more) for the privilege of being included on organised ghost hunts.

The hunt is formulated with that monetary value in mind; it is a structured exploration intended to offer tourists a peek at the resources available to a commercial ghost hunter. The package includes access to an exclusive venue (like the vaults), and is aided by someone from the mediumship (a highly valued, expensive asset in the community). Every aspect of the commercial ghost hunt is intended to make tourists feel as though they have received their money's worth. While Douglas frequently described his independent investigations as "dull", Chris is aware that there is little allowance for boredom on the commercial ghost hunt; an unstructured investigation begets dissatisfied customers. Importance must *always* be placed on customer expectation, as success in the tourist industry is generated through word-of-mouth (WOM) and good online reviews (Pradeep, 2008). For ghost tours, they're also used as a form of verification that the site is authentically haunted.⁷¹

While a commercial hunt is every bit as structured as a walking tour, the tourist's function is greatly changed. During walking tours, a tourist's role can shift between passive

⁷¹ WOM and online verification of haunted sites is explained further in Chapter 6.

participation (listening to stories) to active participation (becoming a part of the spectacle⁷², as well as using EMF meters provided by the tour company). However, their presence is still largely inactive, as the purpose of the tour is primarily for *guides* to entertain.

In contrast, tourists become incredibly active participants during ghost hunts. Storytelling is still a part of the hunt's structure, but it is there to create a framework for the investigation – namely, to describe the ghosts sighted in the vaults by previous visitors. By reflecting on death and the past stories of a place, the stories are meant to evoke an immediate sense of supernatural otherness, forcing the tourist to confront their own spiritual beliefs (Laws, 2013: 111). Ghost hunts directly link the history of the vaults with the spirits which are believed to inhabit it, effectively establishing the location as a haunted space to visitors. This has the double effect of creating an evolving historical identity through ghost encounters. The ghost stories are a form of rebranding that firmly links the historic past with the supernatural, formulating the framework for how ghost investigation is packaged for the tourist experience.

Before the hunt begins, visitors are given a tour of the vaults. The guide regales us with the same ghost stories as those told on the walking tours: Mr. Boots; the female spectre who resents women of childbearing age; the little boy and the dog; the kindly Cobbler who conducted his business in the vaults. No one has their gadgets out during the walk-through, not even their cameras. Visitors are passive participants during this part of the hunt, playing the role of the tourist as if we were simply attending another walking tour. The candles are all lit and flickering as we walk from room to room. The vaults are silent, not even the *swish* of cars overhead on the South Bridge. It is after midnight now, closer to one o' clock, as we make our rounds through the

⁷² Described in Chapter 3.

vaults. Some of us shiver from the brisk October air, the cold that even seeps into the underground. The stories are nothing I have not heard many times before, but the after-hours silence of the city creates a still, almost unbearably quiet atmosphere on a ghost hunt that is a stark contrast to the walking tours. The effect is an incredibly dramatic, chilling atmosphere that makes me feel as though I am listening to the stories for the first time.

After the tour, we are asked to gather our gear to begin the exploration in the lower vaults. The tour guide has blown out all the candles while we were busy, so the vaults have all been plunged into extreme darkness. The hallways are not easy to navigate through blind, with uneven floors and occasional jutting rocks. We have to place our hands on the walls to guide us from room to room. The deprivation of the visual sense creates an enhancement of the haptic, forcing tourists to rely on senses beyond the visual. This creates an environment where thoughts and feelings are brought to the fore, what Classen refers to as “sensory journeys” (1993: 7). The hunt becomes about feelings, emotions and responses to the dark environment.

I carry an EMF metre John provided for me. The light flickers from green to yellow, a common indication of little or no activity. Next to me, a man carries a digital camcorder, the night vision filter already on. In keeping with the overall structured environment of the commercial tour, we are split into two groups – one group is led by the medium, the other by John. On this hunt, I go with John first. He leads us into the back of the vaults to a room that was once a residence for the landlord. It is the only room in the vaults with an obvious space for a bed, as well as a fire pit in the corner. As we move to stand in a circle, the woman across from me holds out her own EMF metre for everyone to see. Both show two lights (green and yellow) with the third (orange) light flickering on and off, which on ghost hunts indicates a faint spiritual

presence in the room. John retrieves his digital audio recorder from his backpack to document any EVP; mine has already been recording for well over an hour. We are instructed to each take a turn speaking into the microphone to ask one question for any spirits in the room to answer. We each ask our questions, pausing briefly afterward to give a spirit time to respond. *Did you die down here? Where are you now? What is your name? Did you live down here?*

John claims this part of the hunt is like speaking through a window, that communication between the living world and the spirit world can be muffled on both sides. Our investigation took place on Halloween, when the ghost hunting community believes the veils between the worlds of the living and the dead are thinnest, making communication between the two clearer. John plays back the recording. To the question: *did you die down here?* What sounds like a faint *yes* filters through the hiss of noise. We ask another round of questions, and occasionally what sounds like a voice will filter through the audio – some could have been interpreted as answers, and others resembled muffled words. Later, I would play back my own recordings and listen for the same patterns of noise. In the interest of disclosure, I could never recreate the same answers that we heard through John's recorder, and what he played to us in the vaults does not sound at all like what my own recorder picked up.

However, my research is not to speculate the validity of the recordings or the possible explanations for them, only to relay the importance recordings have within the ghost community: as messages from the other side, an indication that life continues after death. The very act of passing the recording device between the participants creates a connective space, in which the spirit world becomes connected to the human world through recorded messages. There is a dual result in this, where the world of the living is firmly defined as being in opposition to the spirit

world (but they are able to connect), but the spirit world is also recognisable and reflective of the living world (through human-like voices on audio) (Larsen, 2008: 15).

For the tourist, the recordings create another sense of validity, something to add to their own repertoire of spiritual experiences. On the same night spent in the vaults, I sat in one of the rooms with two men around my age. We were in the white room, rumoured to be where Mr. Boots once lived and where his ghost still lingers. Our EMF metres were in the middle of the room, flickering between green and yellow and orange. One of the men commented on the recordings – *they freaked me out*. I could not help but ask, *Do either of you believe in ghosts?* John always asked the same question at the beginning of his hunts, requesting that people to give a show of hands if they believed. I was always the only one who never raised my hand. After my first investigation, I sought any opportunity to ask the question to those on ghost hunts myself, to see what people would be willing to share. While opportunities for conversation within the context of hunts were rare due to the highly organised nature of the event, some people had stories to tell, from the slightest encounters – voices, touches, feelings – to sightings of their own.

In this particular instance, both of the men in the room with me told me they did. So I asked the question I always did in follow up: *have either of you ever seen a ghost?* One of them immediately looked uncomfortable, as if I had asked something quite personal. But, like all the others, was willing to share his story with me.

When I was little, we lived in a house near Inverness. An old one that always seemed cold. When I was six, and I turned off all the lights and got into bed, I'd see a shadow figure standing at the bed post. Not doing anything . . . just standing there. Sometimes I'd turn off the lights, and he'd be near the door, or the closet, just never moving. I started to go to sleep with the light on, but my mum would come in and turn it off again, and he'd be back, just watching. I thought I was

just imagining him at first, but it was such a clear figure in the dark . . . I couldn't figure out how anything in my room would be able to cast a shadow like that, that wasn't in the same place every night. I could feel its eyes on me, too. It just watched me.

The commercial ghost hunt creates a space in which storytelling and ghost stories are given prominence, where people are able to share their own experiences to like-minded individuals. It is a social atmosphere, where the feelings provoked by the haunt space prompt visitors to make sense of their own beliefs of life after death. As Annette Hill (2011) notes, "On a ghost hunt people are more than passive recipients of their physical surroundings, using their senses to touch and mingle with emotional and psychological matters" (101). The tourist's response to their physical surroundings becomes intertwined with their past experiences, and storytelling is a part of that. Reflected in the ghost hunt's storytelling response is Victor Turner's idea of *plural reflexivity*, the ways in which a community or group of people "tries to scrutinise, portray, understand, and then act on itself" (1982: 75). Turner makes the distinction between self-reflection (an inward thought process), and a *reflexive* response, which is prompted by an outside event that encourages more self-awareness. The reflexive response is inspired by communication between individuals, and by sharing common interests that encourage re-thinking and re-contextualising beliefs and memories. Turner notes that when members of a community are united by common understanding, "the contents of group experiences . . . are replicated, dismembered, remembered, refashioned, and mutely or vocally made meaningful" (1985: 298). Paranormal investigator Ryan Buell discusses the comradeship between those who believe they have encountered the paranormal in his book *Paranormal State: My Journey into the Unknown*. He discusses the taboo of paranormal beliefs, that "People are afraid to talk about their experiences for fear of being judged . . . [it] deeply affect[s] them on an emotional and mental level. Some of those who came to us were relieved just to have someone listen" (Buell and

Petrucha, 2010: 6). The ghost hunt is a way of validating the unexplainable in the lives of the participants. As much as it is an investigatory space, it is also one that incorporates the experiences of each tourist's personal stories with the paranormal. While the tourist's sensory journey is paramount, the ghost hunting tools offer another level of validation and bonding between participants. If a tourist claims they are experiencing something, their feelings are confirmed either by the tools or the other participants. The shared narrative of experience on commercial tours is a spontaneous *communitas* (Turner, 1969). Through stories, tourists form a new, different sense of togetherness, in which members project their own memories, feelings and ideologies, which are shared between participants (Jack and Phipps, 2005: 104). The commercial investigation is an environment in which meaning is generated and shared, reflected on, and becomes a part of the social experience.

Independent Investigation with Douglas: The Roles of the Team, Sensitives, and
Spending the Night in an Abandoned Hospital

Many of my early interviews with Douglas included a number of conversations about the structure of his investigations, and how they differed from the commercial tourism I had grown accustomed to seeing. As Douglas told me:

We don't care if anyone's having a good time, if they're not bored, because that's not the point. There are plenty of times our investigations produced nothing . . . And we sit there

all night in the dark not hearing or seeing anything. What do you think tourists would say if an investigation they spent money on went that way?

For Douglas's team, intention is paramount, and they place the priority of scientific research above all. The first investigation I accompanied Douglas's team on was a visit to an abandoned hospital. They have asked me not to disclose which one and where, as the hospital has been fenced off and deemed unsafe to enter. We drove off the main highway and onto a single track dirt road surrounded by tall grass. There were four of us in the tiny car, the rest of the team in another car behind us. The young woman sitting in the passenger's seat, Lily, navigated. The man sitting next to me, Adam, checked his camera bags for the essentials: three extra battery packs in case of fail, several different lenses, a hotshoe flash, and two small night vision camcorders also in case of fail. *The camera always keeps running*, Adam said. *You never want to get there and find out you don't have any battery life left.*

The independent ghost investigation, as practiced by those like Douglas, emphasises the importance of documentation in the field, creating an alternative reason for exploring a location other than to find evidence for ghosts. There is a narrative to the photographs produced by Douglas's team, of places with long histories, left to decay and ruin. Those who decide to become independent ghost investigators often guard their locations, revealing them only to a select number of people. Like Douglas, many often participate in urban exploration (or *urbex*, for short), the practice of recreationally exploring built environments. Douglas's group refers to themselves as *ruinistas*, meaning they prefer to explore ruined and abandoned buildings (also called DERP: Derelict and Ruined Places) over those in current use. They chronicle their efforts in online urban exploration forums, which is where they all initially became acquainted with the members of their team.

Due to the nature of their investigations, independent investigators are hesitant to speak about their experiences to those who have not participated in urban exploration. While some groups will obtain entry to places with permission, many also enter without proper authorisation, so exclusivity is their first safeguard against being caught. A number of the buildings that Douglas explores for investigations – like the hospital we visited that night – are abandoned or condemned, places that are potentially unsound. Some are guarded by private security (called *seccas*), so those trusted individuals they tell about a place include methods of getting in or out without being detected. Investigators like Douglas separate what they do from commercial investigations by one very essential difference: they are not solely there to investigate paranormal phenomena, but to document the *place*, as well. They seek to take photos of the decay, the artefacts remaining, and the interior. In their investigations, they are especially concerned with leaving a place exactly as they found it, so as not to interrupt it as a ghost space. As Douglas explained, when a company caters primarily to tourism, documentation and reverence for the place is cast aside, with the tourist experience being given priority. *The features of a place are just as important as the ghosts. When we go in, we pay just as much attention to both. It's better that way.* In the independent investigation community, sites are meant to be preserved. The community is committed to archiving and keeping a record of places that have simply been left to crumble and fall to ruin, forgotten and uncared for. The ghosts are a part of this record, its history and its modern identity.

It was after dark when we finally parked and approached the hospital. I could see the large brick building looming in the night, the fencing high and completely surrounding it. It was late September, so the air was crisp with the start of autumn. Leaves crunched under our feet, so loud in the still, quiet surroundings. Douglas's second request was that I not disclose what

happened next – how we got into the building – to protect it from vandals. I also recognised this part of the investigation as a test for *me*. If I had not gone inside, any contacts within the ghost investigation community would have been cut off, as exploring abandoned dwellings is what gives them the ability to investigate. Tourism has forced them to adapt: by mixing urban exploration with investigation when many others have decided to turn to commercial hunting in order to avoid the dangers of entering abandoned places. So I went with them into the hospital, the interior so dark that I could barely see even with a torch. It was an eerie place, every sound coming from somewhere I could not identify. I had been instructed before the investigation to accompany Douglas and Lily to cover the rooms on the east end of the hospital. In the light of the torch, I could not help but admire the stained-glass windows still standing as we made our way through the rooms. The hospital was drafty, cold. Rain pattered through the many holes in the roof as we made our way to the east wing.

The way independent investigators and commercial hunters ran their groups were remarkably different, from my experience. Douglas once told me that he requires a level of trust between everyone in the team. *You don't want to be in a dark building with people you don't know or don't trust.* There is also a great deal of importance placed on knowing the personalities of each member of the team, that they are able to remain calm throughout the investigation. When teams go to locations, they spend an entire night there – sometimes several nights – and each member has a certain job. Douglas never invites strangers along because cohesion is paramount in independent investigations, and everyone must be aware of what role they have prior to attending. There was another notable difference between independent investigations and commercial ghost hunts: Douglas did not have a medium on his team. When I mentioned that every commercial hunt I had attended included one, he explained that mediums were ever only

available if they were paid to come along (which never happens in independent investigations). Due to the rarity of their skill, they are able to request pay for their services, which is unaffordable for those who make little or no money on investigations.

However, Douglas always has at least one *sensitive* on his team. He explained that there is a spectrum of extrasensory abilities, and on the far end of the spectrum are those who qualify for the mediumship. Mediums have the ability to see into the ghost space, interact with spirits, or describe past and future events. A certain set of skills are required to earn the label of *medium*, a rarity because their abilities are either something one is born with, or a gift earned through a trigger event.⁷³ On the complete opposite end of the spectrum from mediums are those with a complete inability to sense the spirit realm. Douglas believes that most people fall somewhere in the middle, but *sensitives* are more in tune with their skill. Their reasoning for this is that, on some level, this life prepares us for the day we cross over into our next life in the spirit world. When sensitive people encounter spirits, they catch a glimpse of what life is like in the ghost space. The spirit world is considered an extension of our human lives, a passing place between this life and the next. To be sensitive is to have some awareness – some ability to *glimpse* – the ghost space by capturing fleeting voices, smells, touches, or even awareness of spiritual presence.

Because mediums are so rare for independent ghost investigators to work with, there is particular importance placed on sensitivity within the community. Despite the fact that they believe most people are sensitive, it is not common to find those who are either in tune with their abilities, or who can maintain calm when in the field (and this is also why a medium's skill is so

⁷³ See: Chapter 4.

prized – because those in the community have accepted and honed their abilities). However, sensitives can be useful because of their ability to sense paranormal activity, making it easier to direct the rest of the team to rooms or places within a location worth spending time on, and disregard the rest. Sensitives give the team the ability to utilise their time better, and to direct cameras and digital recorders to where a sensitive indicates. Their skill also attracts spirits. As Douglas explained to me, people with the gift – no matter how strong or weak – are beacons for spirits seeking to communicate with the living.

Lily, who navigated us to the hospital, was the team's sensitive. She was girl in her mid-twenties who had also come into ghost investigation by way of urban exploration. Her brothers took her along to abandoned places in the dark, where she learned to appreciate the photography and decay of old, derelict buildings. *I could always sense things when they took me to places, images and things. I've always had the gift.* I asked her how her sensitivity worked. *It's . . . about feelings, emotions. I can sense presences, sometimes hear or see things. If there's nothing there, we document the place and go. It's never a waste.*

In the hospital, Lily was drawn to the conservatory, a derelict room with paint peeling from the ceiling. The walls were coloured mint green, and the hardwood floors smelled damp and musty. Douglas set up the camera and began to roll the audio while Lily explored the room. *I definitely feel something here, especially. It's not coming on strong, but it's there.* The EMF metre reading was flickering between the green, yellow, and orange lights, which indicated spiritual presence. The night vision camera showed nothing unusual on its screen, so Douglas decided to use the digital voice recorder to see if he could pick up any EVP. *If there's any spirit in this room that would like to say something, please speak into the recorder.* Douglas went around the room

and asked questions aloud to prompt spirit response, the same as on a commercial investigation. However, Douglas never paused his questioning to play back and listen as John had done on his ghost hunt. He explained, *I clean the recording up and take a listen then. Don't want to risk any of the background noise interfering with the audio.*

A stark difference between the independent ghost investigation and the commercial ghost hunt was lack of immediate feedback. When John passed his recorder in the circle and requested that each participant ask a question, he turned the investigation from the scientific sphere and into a social one. The question game was for the benefit of the tourists, creating an immediate sense of an effective investigation through direct evidence of a haunting. Douglas's investigation, in contrast, is not a particularly social environment, nor is it meant to be. *Our investigations aren't really all that fun, he said. You know? You sit around in the dark and hope something happens. Sometimes it does, sometimes you're there until the sun comes up and haven't got a thing.* The camera and the audio recorder did not capture anything worthwhile that night in the hospital.

Five hours into our investigation, at sunrise, Douglas and his team made the rounds and began to photograph the space. They captured the peeling, cracked ceilings of the conservatory, the old radio still left standing. There were old books piled high in one of the rooms, the pages wet and torn. Ferns grew in the once sound corridors and the early sun shone through the checkered pink stained glass windows. This was where Douglas's investigations converged from commercial ghost hunts, by turning photography into the activity that ultimately united the investigation as a social activity. His team shared images and took photographs of each other within the space. It did not escape my attention that this greatly resembled a tourist activity. As

Elizabeth Edwards (1996: 201) notes, “Photography . . . mirrors the tourist experience in which fragments are incorporated into a unified experience . . . which from beginning to end, revolves around images.” Insofar as it was a ghost investigation, it was also an experience united through the fragmented medium of photography.

Conclusion

As different as commercial and independent investigations are, they ultimately had a unifying emphasis on storytelling: ghost hunters tell the story of the ghosts, and independent investigators tell the story of the place. Both incorporate a unique blending of ghost mythology – ideas of sacred spaces and hidden worlds – and technology to create new ghost lore for a modern society. Those stories ultimately become intertwined with the history of the spaces investigators research, and are then adapted and altered to carefully frame the paranormal experience for tourists. Ghost stories have become a part of the spatial identity of haunted places, just as important as its history. Both are utilised on commercial ghost investigations, creating an environment where the tourist experiences a sensory journey, where they engage with the space on an emotional and physical level. Their stories are posted on the tour company and ghost hunting websites, and the more they add, the more credence is lent to the vault’s reputation as one of the most haunted locations in Europe.

The drawback is that these spaces – considered “pure” spaces where the living and the dead meet – have been taken over by the commercial tourist industry, leaving independent ghost

researchers to adapt by finding their own spaces. They now chronicle their research in abandoned buildings, the forgotten and discarded places that have been left standing. Their stories – the history of the place and the people who once resided there – are now told through the photographs of the researchers brave enough to enter. Both types of investigation create a unique experience that incorporates the spatial narrative of a place, a purposeful exploration that connects history with the present.

CHAPTER 6

Ghosts in Popular Culture: Online Paranormal Communities, and the Rise of the Televised Ghost Hunt

The paranormal has reached a wide, mainstream audience through television and media, proliferating interest in ghosts and spirits across nations. The fascination with the paranormal in popular culture has only increased in the last decade, with movies, shows, and documentaries confronting and reinterpreting the meaning of death and the afterlife. As Deonna Sayed states, “the paranormal is now cool, and to be associated with it gives one a feeling that they are part of a larger media culture” (2011: 191). The popularity of these media outlets both reflects and continues to generate enthusiasm for all things supernatural, and the success of Edinburgh’s ghost tours⁷⁴ is demonstrative of a collective fascination with death.

An ever-growing number of television shows are filmed around the “reality” of ghost hunts and people’s everyday encounters with the supernatural. These shows have been enthusiastically embraced by television viewers, and their popularity has brought ghost investigations and stories to an ever-growing audience. People are becoming actively engaged with the supernatural through different forms of media, from television to the Internet. An increase of paranormal elements in popular culture has spurred online communities of people who eagerly participate in conversations about televised ghost hunts. Forum posts consist of members contrasting what they see on television with their own experiences. As Annette Hill

⁷⁴ Including dark tourist sites in general.

argues, “the paranormal as it is experienced within popular culture involves seeing an audience not as spectators or viewers but as participants” (2011: 2). The keen interests in ghost hunts and paranormal tourism indicates a social and cultural interest in the unexplained. Through media, viewers and consumers are more easily able to share experiences and bond with others through a mutual beliefs and experiences.

Burgeoning enthusiasm for the paranormal is reflected in tourism, as well. Commercial events are framed around hunts “as seen on TV”, and their success demonstrates a growing cultural desire for unique, supernatural experiences. However, not all participants within ghost culture approve of the mounting interest spurred by its visibility in popular culture. Ghost investigators in particular have expressed their ire toward this new contingent of “amateur ghost hunters” descending upon locations *en masse* and causing those spaces to become commercialised and expensive to investigate. Many of them attribute this recent surge to the popularity of TV shows that turn the supernatural and ghost hunting into a spectacle for the audience. In an article in *The Guardian* entitled *How Britain Became a Nation of Ghost Hunters*, Rachel Dixon wrote:

Television is credited with bringing the paranormal into the mainstream, from America's *Ghost Hunters* to Britain's *Most Haunted*. On the latter, spooky experiences happen to 'ordinary' people, from cameramen and makeup artists to members of the public. This, says [parapsychologist Dr Ciaran] O'Keeffe, ‘has made an interest in the supernatural more socially acceptable.’ (Dixon, 2009).

The increasing number of citizen ghost hunters has received some backlash from ghost investigators, who argue that television shows display an exaggerated account of investigations and create unrealistic expectations of what occurs in the field. Roger Clarke notes that “the modern ghost hunt is in search of sensation. These days, the TV show is king when it comes to

the ghost hunt; it has a classless, speedy, problem-solving quality that appeals to the modern mind” (2012: 34). Ghost hunting on television elicits a quick emotional response; the recorded events (captured in *documentary style* with hand-held camcorders) have been speeded up and spliced together so events seemingly happen at a rapid pace. The effect is a swift increase in fear and anxiety in the viewer. Dr Leo Ruickbie sums up the style as, “Turn out the lights and run around in the dark, scaring the pants off yourself and hopefully your audience, seems to be the general formula” (2013: 29).

The commercial paranormal industry has adopted the quick, sensationalist ghost hunt for their walking tours. These tours appeal to what Hill (2011) refers to as “armchair ghost hunters”, those seeking paranormal experiences largely through entertainment means. However, there are aspects of the commercial ghost industry⁷⁵ that reflect a wider cultural interest in seeking out ghosts and attempting to prove that they exist within and alongside our everyday lives. These individuals aim to share their own personal encounters with the paranormal – a desire reflected in popular television shows that emphasise emotional, personal confrontations with spectres.⁷⁶ Supernatural television shows are demonstrative of the anecdotal nature of ghost belief, coupled with the social process of telling ghost stories and exchanging theories with others. This communal aspect of storytelling has been vitalised by online communities, in which our increasingly digitalised society has become accustomed to revealing private moments and makes

⁷⁵ Vigils and events with mediums.

⁷⁶ *My Ghost Story* is a prime example I discuss later in this chapter.

no exception to their encounters with the spectral. The Internet has created a vast forum in which people can discuss, debate, and exchange tales with other believers and sceptics alike.⁷⁷

Despite the amount of research performed on dark tourism and ghosts in the media, there is a distinct lack of material how increased paranormal exposure has affected both commercial ghost culture and societal attitudes towards the paranormal. This chapter seeks to fill the gaps in research and discuss a wider ghost culture both outside and inside Edinburgh. The increased visibility of the supernatural within popular culture is reflective of an expanding cultural interest in ghosts – from ghost hunting to ghost stories – that are mirrored within the commercial ghost industry in Edinburgh. As Hill (2011) states, “Cultural engagement with paranormal matters is about social relations where a sense of self intertwines closely with that of others.” People not only seek out these experiences based on the sensationalist depictions on TV, but it is becoming more common to engage with and share these beliefs with others online.

My Ghost Story: A Personal Narrative of the Supernatural

“Warning! What you are about to see are haunted events encountered by real people.

Some may find it disturbing” –My Ghost Story (Phillips and Ayalon, 2013)

⁷⁷ Specific online communities will be discussed more in-depth later in this chapter. My main example is r/Paranormal, a community on Reddit where users share experiences, beliefs, and paranormal theories with other members.

My Ghost Story is an American television show on the Biography Channel. The basis of the show is centred on the eyewitness accounts and testimonials of people's personal experiences with the supernatural. The show is told in a narrative format, with the subject seated against a black screen as they relate their story, voicing over occasional dramatisations with actors. *My Ghost Story* deserves a notable mention in this chapter because it was the original inspiration for this thesis. I had watched paranormal accounts on television before, and several ghost hunting reality shows had been well established for several years. However, the personal nature of *My Ghost Story* – the vignette style, and the way it addressed belief in the afterlife through the structure of oral narrative – was a marked contrast to the sensationalised, gritty camera work of ghost hunting shows. *My Ghost Story* represents the personal and individualised nature of paranormal experiences. As Avery Gordon states, “. . . we are a part of the story, for better or worse: the ghost must speak *to me* in some way sometimes similar to, sometimes distinct from how it may be speaking to others” (1997: 24). While the stories documented in the show have similarities with one another in regards to spirit manifestations, the narration aspects of the show demonstrate that the nature of hauntings are, at their core, anecdotal (“*my ghost story*”) and personal.

The popularity of *My Ghost Story* demonstrates a public interest in these stories. Its wide viewership has even prompted similar styled shows, including a spinoff entitled *My Celebrity Ghost Story* in which celebrities detail their personal experiences with the supernatural for the TV audience. While the idea of celebrities describing their own spectral encounters is the perfect example of the occasional kitschy nature of how the supernatural is packaged for the consumer, it also attempts to lend credence to universality of the ghost narrative. Celebrity endorsements

create an even broader form of visibility for the personal ghost story by presenting it as a common experience, shared by both every day individuals and famous ones.

This broad outlook continues outside of the Biography Channel; oral narrative structure has been used on other shows such as *Paranormal Witness* on Syfy, and *The Haunted* on Animal Planet (recounting ghost stories involving animals), which also seek to tell the ghost story from the perspective of *everyday people*. The style is particularly notable on Syfy's *Stranded*, which features both paranormal believers and sceptics "stranded" together at potentially haunted locations. The style of the show includes first person, hand-held night vision cameras to chronicle the participants' first-hand accounts and reactions (primarily fear responses) through video as the events occur.

The increasing number of shows broadcasting this style of ghost stories – involving the personal nature of the paranormal – displays a growing acceptance of these types of experiences. Normalisation is represented and exemplified in these shows through the anecdotes of both celebrities and non-actors, every day people who have had paranormal encounters within their own lives. Hill (2011) states, "As paranormal ideas and beliefs become part of popular culture they change meaning. The extraordinary transforms into something more ordinary" (37). By airing dialogues of people's personal confrontations with ghosts, television networks create an increased exposure to paranormal belief. Narratives are then presented alongside popular culture references and style (such as the camera work on ghost hunts, very reminiscent of the 1999 cult classic *The Blair Witch Project*), an association that is internalised by the viewer. Mainstream ideas about the paranormal are, therefore, largely established through the perspective of media.

Just as significant is the role public and televised ghost stories play in acknowledging death and dying in the mainstream. Clive Seale (1998) posits that modern society is “death denying”, and that the belief in spirits represents a refusal of contemporary culture to accept the finitude of death. However, there is a long history of ghost lore and storytelling from generations before our contemporary culture; the ghost story has been a part of expressing and sharing belief for centuries. Owen Davies (2007) chronicled ghost belief going back 500 years and cites the media’s continued coverage of supernatural stories as the reason they maintain ongoing relevancy (246). He goes on to state that ghosts “pervade our consciousness . . . they are still with us in what we watch read and hear; they are engrained in our language” (249). The personal narrative is not a new aspect of ghost culture – indeed, spiritualist culture during the Victorian age made it commonplace to discuss belief in ghosts both in public and in private, trusted circles.

However, the public and televised ghost story in our technological era creates a new, dynamic, and interactive dimension to the personal narrative that has never been previously available to past generations. The media’s ongoing use of supernatural elements for both scripted television and non-fiction shows has the dual effect of spreading belief and perpetuating dialogues about the paranormal. The popularity of shows like *My Ghost Story* and even the success of Edinburgh ghost tours is a testament to the wide appeal of the supernatural, a belief that is not defined or limited by religious dogma. Paranormal television shows are significant because they depict a rising trend in the shared, public narrative. The anecdotal paranormal narrative is the most enduring aspect of paranormal culture, one that persists in large part due to popular culture.

Commercial ghost events mirror this interest in personal anecdotes within the event structure. I wrote briefly in Chapter 5 about how the emotional geography on tours is fuelled by narrative – including stories of outside experiences that motivated members to seek out hunts in the first place. One of the first questions asked on a commercial ghost investigation is, “Has anyone here ever experienced the paranormal personally?” Many people who attend raise their hands. The social atmosphere on certain events is structured around prompting and sharing personal experience. That personal ghost stories do not operate under the burden of proof within the commercial community is an aspect derided by those like Douglas, who seek unquestionable evidence of the supernatural. Ghost investigators stress the importance of proving spectral presence through the scientific method, and any personal feelings are overshadowed by the need to verify events as they occur. Douglas once told me, “Experiences prove nothing. We can’t test feelings. That’s why we have our gear.” In contrast, individual ghost stories (such as those encouraged through television and commercial hunts) emphasise sorting out and communicating encounters rather than proving they happened:

Within personal stories of hauntings . . . there is a focus on the individual who provides a compelling narrative of experience as evidence. In this context, the paranormal becomes a symbol for popular solipsism, a form of knowledge that prioritises personal existence. (Hill, 2011: 272).

The increasing emergence of public venues to share ghost stories – such as the online communities, television, and commercial ghost hunts – reflects a desire to forge social connections through paranormal encounters. Despite objections from ghost investigators, the emotional aspect of these narratives produces meaningful dialogue between people who share beliefs and stories. Tour companies even encourage discussion by asking tourists to post their reviews and experiences to the Internet. Online posts are seen by other people who have attended

ghost tours, who then contribute their own stories via social media websites. The Internet has become an active venue for people seeking to discuss their paranormal encounters, which creates a sustained, ongoing dialogue that allows a contingent of believers to speak about, consume, and debate their experiences (Davies, 2007: 248). Online communities incite people make sense of their beliefs surrounding death and the afterlife through discussion and participation. In the case of tour companies, forums and storytelling perpetuates a continued, constantly evolving authentication of tourist spots as haunted.

Deonna Sayed argues that one's personal experience with the supernatural "becomes a story that translates meaning in society which filters the experience through language and symbols communicated" (Sayed, 2011: 11). Many of the most recognisable aspects of ghost stories, from their manifestations to their behaviour (especially poltergeists) have become a part of mainstream social consciousness due to their prevalence in media. When individuals share their personal narratives in public spaces (such as the Internet), their audience processes the story through an intersubjective practice of meaning-making that is filtered through their own insights and memories. Often this knowledge comes from popular culture in some form: books, television, movies and online. The ghost story has become prevalent through these mediums, and signifies a change in how paranormal experiences are now consumed. Now they are internalised and elaborated upon in public spaces like social media websites, as well as processed vicariously through television.

It would be an oversight not to discuss the Internet's influence in bringing the paranormal to a worldwide audience. The Internet has created a culture of participation where the once unseen aspects of daily life have become visible through forum posts and social media websites.

The communal nature of website forums is a relatively new aspect of anthropological study; anthropologist Sarah Pink wrote that the “collaborative possibilities that the Internet offers to . . . anthropologists are yet to be explored” (2011: 228). Michael Wesch broached the subject of Internet’s collective nature in “Web 2.0” (2007), in which he referred to Internet venues as a “radically collaborative open-ended ethnography” where people are in a constant process of sharing new materials (Wesch as cited in Pink, 2011).

Online communities have created a public space for people to discuss common interests and personal anecdotes about the paranormal. Douglas’s team is one such example: the discussion over urban exploration and paranormal experiences became the method through which he found likeminded individuals to form his investigation team. He is not the sole investigator who formed his group via online communication, either; indeed, many others I spoke with found nearby contacts through forums, as well.

Paranormal belief is framed, contextualised, and solidified through the abundance of different tales written out by multiple users. By engaging in Internet discussions, William Mitchell argues that people participate in digital environments that are reflective of “the sorts of communities [they] want to have” (1996: 24). Social media transforms the meaning of relationships by creating a communal atmosphere that is fully international, and can be successfully curated by each individual to cater to their own interests, desires, and curiosities. The relative anonymity afforded to Internet users can encourage people to reveal things they may not be inclined to divulge in face-to-face conversations, such as supernatural experiences. Social media is integrative and identity-forming, where the lives of members are framed and projected through photographs, introspection, and personal anecdotes. In the case of paranormal

communities, online interaction and exchanging of ghost stories allows users to both reinforce and solidify their own beliefs.

Johanna Sumiala extends Benedict Anderson's idea of "imaginary communities" to social media sites. She argues that social media's lack of confinement to physical spaces means they are formed through "people's imagination and their imaginary world of experiences" (2013: 40). She goes on to cite Charles Taylor's idea that these types of communities emerge out of how people *imagine* their relationship is with other people and their own surroundings, as well as the aspects that govern those expectations (Taylor as cited in Sumiala, *ibid*: 23). Imaginary thinking has become an influential, crucial aspect of both shaping and perpetuating Internet communities, which are then reinforced by personal introspection and social interaction. As anthropologist Arjun Appadurai states, "The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order" (1996: 31). Through imagined communities, people formulate new identities, relationships, and social interactions on an international level.

Reddit, one of the Internet's largest social networking websites, is an example of the extensive nature of online communication. Reddit is composed of over 200,000 *subreddits*, which are smaller communities formulated around individual interests. They can extend anywhere from hobbies to lifestyles to personal philosophies. The r/Paranormal subreddit boasts over 50,000 users, and the r/ghosts subreddit has over 11,000 users. Both are communities created for users to post their own experiences, photographs, and stories to be read and discussed within the community at large. Posts are tagged meticulously in different categories so users can easily filter between different topics: meta; photo evidence; video evidence; experience;

haunting; advice/discuss; [the paranormal] in the news; investigation; debunked; encounter; findings; unexplained; and other. There is even support offered to those who need to discuss and receive support for their experiences; one user posted a thread entitled, “Feeling alone? Need to talk? Want to actively discuss?” in which she writes:

The goal of this chatroom would be to alleviate stress from waiting for pm's or replies instantly, being able to share and respond much faster and to get to know each other . . . Together we could settle peoples nerves, help research into stories/experiences and all of the normal /r/Paranormal jazz, but way faster. (KakashiFNGRL, 2014).⁷⁸

Forums like r/Paranormal offer a support system, a community in which likeminded individuals can share paranormal encounters with those who understand, empathise, and who often have their own tales to tell. Online discussions even have the potential to create lasting relationships in the physical world, as was the case with Douglas’s team, who met on a forum for urban explorers. Indeed, there are meet ups posted online for fellow amateur ghost hunters to join together and “share mysterious images and hunt the eerie inhabitants of the paranormal realm!” (“Otherside Scotland Paranormal Investigators”, n.d., para. 1). Internet communities create a sense of camaraderie around certain interests, formulating interpersonal connections based on shared passions. Sumiala argues that without the restriction of physical relationships, we “form, transmit, and modify our national imaginations in which we live or have lived, and in which our lives are formed, transmitted and modified by others” (2004: 44). Through online communities, people are able to solidify and validate their beliefs, as well as constantly reaffirm them through extended online interaction.

⁷⁸ Quoted verbatim.

While critics may argue the “realness” of online posts due to the anonymous nature of the Internet, this point ignores the cultural implications of social media spheres, as well as how personal narratives have become globally shared and consumed via online forums. Indeed, Therese Tierney (2013) argues that “Social media is not outside the physical world; on the contrary, it is designed by, and entangled in, physical world social practices.” She goes on to note the mutually constituted nature of physical and social spaces by comparing social media to a “novel form of architecture, which creates opportunities for social interaction and ultimately, the two are intertwined.” (77) Social media also creates a space in which people can interact without judgment of their mutual interests. On r/Paranormal, some people post for reassurance from other believers:

I really had no idea where else to go to for this except the internet because no one would believe me if I brought it up. I've been noticing a lot of strange things happening in my home. My parents go to bed around 10-11 PM no later at all, if anything it's earlier. I tend to stay up all night because of terrible nightmares and the feeling something or someone is watching me. (punkr0cker365, 2013).⁷⁹

For those involved in paranormal communities, participation in online forums both reinforces and verifies beliefs and experiences. Members become intrinsically bonded through storytelling, supernatural encounters and curiosities without fear of judgement. Indeed, it can be argued that online forums reveal the true, essential selves of the people engaging in conversation. Ben Agger refers to this as the “worldliness of selves” (2004: 4), in which people absorb information and join different online communities, as well as engage with popular culture at virtually any time — even on the go. Along the same line of thinking, Eve Shapiro notes that this construction of the self on the Internet is “identity work,” in which individuals “process everyday life and

⁷⁹ Quoted verbatim.

interaction and, in the process, reinforce and contest established personal and identity scripts” (2010: 93). Both have encouraged a new form of personal narrative and storytelling on globally public forums through the imagined communities of the Internet.

Online sharing of paranormal experiences extends to the commercial side, as well. City of the Dead Tours in Edinburgh encourages people to message them and share their encounters – and even send photos of injuries believed to be caused by the South Bridge Entity (the malevolent spirit that haunts their set of vaults). Their website boasts: “The period between the first recorded sightings in 1999 and the present, have seen over 450 documented ‘attacks’ in the Black Mausoleum and Covenanters Prison. Of these attacks, an astonishing 140 have caused the witness to collapse” (“The Mackenzie Poltergeist”, n.d. para. 5). Their Facebook page also shares tourist stories written on other websites around the Internet: formal reviews; blog entries written by those who say they were attacked by the South Bridge entity; and Facebook users who claim to have sensed a ghostly presence while in the vaults. Online posts, photographs, and conversations are utilised to bolster the tour’s reputation and create an ongoing dialogue about supernatural activity in the vaults. Discussing the tour via different websites only add to the numerous personal narratives that have become incorporated into the company’s storytelling script. Tour companies post tourist photographs and anecdotes on their websites and even include them on their tours for the benefit of other tourists.⁸⁰

Indeed, tourist stories shared online are self-perpetuating, as conversations are added to with new, different experiences. This shared public narrative is an advantage for companies not

⁸⁰ Mercat includes a collage board of interesting photographs sent to them by tourists. It can be seen in the museum at their offices after the tour is completed.

only looking to generate word-of-mouth buzz about their locations, but that further authenticate their locations as haunted. Online discussions are a continuation of the tourist's experiences beyond the vaults and beyond the physical. Storytelling is a way of interacting with other former tourists who may have similar stories to share.

I am originally from Edinburgh and me and a friend went on the vault tours, at that point i wasnt as erm.....spiritually minded as i am now so it would be frightening now. But i had a child behind me whispering in my ear, also another girl on the tour demanded to be taken back as we heard the guy with the big boots and then someone was holding her hand although there was nobody next to her. I also heard conversations all the way through the tour! (Aniaraven, 2007)

The City of the Dead Tours public Facebook page is rife with personal accounts of the South Bridge entity. Facebook's option for image attachment allows users to upload their own photographs for others to comment on and disclose injuries they say were inflicted while on the tour. In an ongoing conversation on the City of the Dead Tours Facebook wall, one user stated, "Me an 3 pals went yesterday and I had the chills in the second last room! Came home have 4 scratches on my back!" (Kirsty Cairns, 2014). City of the Dead Tours responded: ". . . feel free to send us a pic. We collect them to show to unbelievers . . ." (City of the Dead Tours, 2014). The user followed up with her added experience:

another strange thing was a picture on my camera in the vaults on my phone that was not taken by me. Though I had my phone on me the whole time. It was a selfie but im away in the distance and the flash is on. But my phone cant flash with a selfie. And the girls who were definitely standing beside me at the time where gone from the picture. Very freaky. (ibid)⁸¹

Through Internet discussions, personal narratives have become both flexible and inclusive; other people can comment and contribute, and the original poster (OP) can update with new information. Historically, narratives were conducted in physical social circles, where the

⁸¹ Conversation quoted verbatim.

first part of the above story would have been an oral discussion between individuals. However, the online exchange above exemplifies the fluidity of internet dialogues: stories can be updated, exchanged, and added to through an extended conversation. The nature of the Internet has added a new facet to storytelling in that people can create *continuous* narratives – which individuals share with the awareness that others may not respond. Stories posted on forums or on Facebook have no guarantee of becoming meaningful exchanges – they could very well end up buried by other posts instead. However, this signifies the desire to share unique experiences while *hoping* that other people read it, but regardless of whether they do. Therefore one’s story is written as much for personal introspection as it is for the optimistic expectation that it will be publicly consumed, discussed, and debated. Therese Tierney notes, “[Online exchanges] enable a process of reflexive interaction with the potential to contribute to transformative change.” (2013: 77). The change being both in the form of individuals meaningfully reflecting on their story, but in the hope that it opens a dialogue with others who share similar stories.

Ghost Hunting: The Televised Ghost Hunt and the Changing Role of the Armchair Ghost

Hunter

In an article on *The Guardian* website, Rachel Dixon asks the question, “How did Britain become a nation of ghost hunters?” Citing information from Dr Ciaran O’Keeffe, a parapsychologist for Britain’s TV program *Most Haunted*, she states, “. . . there were 150

amateur ghost groups in Britain in 1999. Now there are 2,500 and counting. Ghostly experiences can be purchased as gifts online, and sales of "ghost-detecting equipment" are soaring" (Dixon, 2009). The rise in ghost hunting is a testament to an increasing cultural fascination with the paranormal, where the demand for authentic ghost hunting and frightening experiences creates more of a supply. Dixon, quoting Fright Night's founder Martin Jeffrey, discusses the "sense of commercialism" that has taken over the paranormal marketplace. The market for these types of experiences is only expanding, fuelled by the increasing visibility of ghosts in popular culture. Even a cursory Internet search for "ghost hunting in Britain" yields thousands of results, and "ghost hunting in Scotland" brings up almost as many. The pages range from professional ghost investigators to amateur ghost hunters to companies hosting weekend "fright fests", a paid-for opportunity for untrained citizens to ghost hunt with experts. In an article on CNN, John Blake writes about, "Why ghost hunters are sexy" and attributes the rise in investigations to a growing acceptance of the paranormal through television:

Paranormal investigators used to be as coy as the ghosts they tried to coax into the open. Many hid their vocation from neighbours and friends because they didn't want to be called kooky. Now they're cool. They speak at corporate events, land book deals and get appearance fees at college lectures and paranormal conferences (Blake, 2013).

The popularity of ghost hunts has created a movement where people are progressively interested in the supernatural and become actively engaged in their own investigations. Sayed notes that "[The paranormal craze] is no longer just about listening to the ghost story; people now desire to be part of the story and attempt to engage the paranormal in meaningful ways" (2011: 36). The desire to have unique experiences is only encouraged by popular culture. Through visual mediums like television, audiences are bombarded with exciting events depicted on shows like *Most Haunted*, and seek to recreate those experiences for themselves. Commercial

ghost hunting for tourists operates as a safe venue for those attempting to encounter and interact with the paranormal. Paid-for events are based on a format that appeals the most to consumers – and consumers are eager for ghost hunts like those they see on television.

While it is expected that these shows are sensationalised and cut to create dramatic tension, audiences both internalise and expect similar experiences in the field. Ruickbie, citing information he received from Noah Voss, a paranormal investigator who sells ghost hunting equipment, states, “According to Voss, [a] big change in demand occurred after *Ghost Hunters* hit US TV screens. ‘Within a year . . . there was a dramatic shift industry wide. People wanted what they saw on that TV show and other programming that followed.’” (2013: 37). While many investigators have little respect for paranormal shows (more than a few I interviewed told me they found them to be “a bit silly”), these shows have only increased in popularity. More and more networks are developing paranormal programmes, seeking to copy the documentary-style format of the televised ghost hunt with their own twist on the subject. From Discovery Channel’s *Ghost Lab* (which uses “fringe science” to offer proof of the existence of ghosts) to Syfy’s *Ghost Hunters* (two plumbers-by-day who hunt the paranormal at night), these shows all share the same premise: to document and attempt to prove potential hauntings around the world.

Annette Hill (2011) attributes the rise in popularity of these shows as people looking “for alternative explanations and ways of perceiving the world. A social trend in paranormal beliefs and practices helped to create a cultural trend in ghost hunting TV” (2011: 68). Despite the unrealistic portrayals of ghost hunting on television shows, Hill claims they open up a dialogue for other avenues of discussion by creating “a symbolic space within which audiences can explore paranormal beliefs and ideas” (2011: 84). Despite audience awareness that programmes

are embellished for entertainment purposes, the ambiguous nature of a “live action” approach to televised ghost hunts forces the audience to become participants. Documentary style camerawork creates an uncertainty around ghost hunting shows, where viewers find it difficult to tell what is real and what is not. The filming style is on par with non-paranormal reality shows, except for the extensive use of night vision camerawork on televised ghost hunts. The grainy, gritty “realness” bolstered by night vision shots, and occasionally even point-of-view hand-held camerawork, only adds to viewer uncertainty surrounding depicted events. The documentary approach to ghost hunts is an intentional blurring of the boundaries between “real” and “entertainment”, deliberately intended to confuse the viewer into deciding how much *they* believe is portrayed honestly. Paul van Dijk argues that the “technically often poor quality boosts [the suggestion of authenticity]. Such amateur productions function as certificates of authenticity, which the television programmer uses to decorate the show that is intended to portray true cuts of the real world” (2000: 51). It is left up to the viewer to decide what aspects of the show have been embellished for the sake of entertainment, and which are deceptive and untrue.

The format of televised ghost hunts also prompts viewers to use their own perspectives, beliefs, and experiences to decide the realness of captured paranormal events. Hill (2011) argues that those who watch ghost hunting shows *want* to believe, and that by being a viewer they “perform several parts at the same time – media critic, soft sceptic, open-minded believer. It is an ethics of self-experimentation where alternative spiritual thinking is played within an entertainment environment” (83). Avery Gordon refers to this intrinsic self-analysis inherent to ghosts and hauntings as being a “structure of feeling we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as transformative recognition” (1997:8). The structure of ghost hunting shows implicitly prompt viewers to examine and draw upon their beliefs, to be self contemplative and

sceptical. Televised ghost hunts create a deliberate atmosphere of ambiguity for the sceptical viewer: as long as those in the audience *want* to believe hauntings are possible, they will continue to tune in and critically analyse and examine the events on the show.

Certain aspects of ghost hunting shows create points of contention within paranormal groups, who debate their accuracy. Hill (2011) refers to these individuals as *armchair ghost hunters*, an active audience who emotionally react to the events on television and share their responses and theories online. The r/Paranormal subreddit – aside from being a place for believers and sceptics to connect – is also popular among armchair ghost hunters who debate the realness of television shows in the genre. Of the Animal Planet show *The Haunted*, one user states: “I watch it more for entertaining my interests in the paranormal than expecting an honest haunting. I’m sure some episodes have some truth to it, but the amount it’s embellished is kind of a turn off” (Boonitz, 2014).

The visibility of ghost hunting in the media has created a rise in armchair ghost hunting. Active viewer participation is formed out of the ambiguous nature of reality television, where people “adopt positions of sceptics and believers, and explore mixed positions of open-minded sceptics and uncertain believers in paranormal phenomena” (Hill, 2011: 87). The nature of ghost hunting shows force people to contextualise televised events through their own experiences and beliefs, which prompt online conversations. Aside from forums like r/Paranormal, the engaging *newsfeed* layout of websites like Twitter motivates people to *live tweet* their favourite shows. Users comment on, debate, and analyse the content of programmes with other viewers via the use of designated *hashtags*. Hashtag use for shows is the most active on nights when an episode premieres, such as with Ghost Adventures: “Don’t care what anyone says! If a spirit says my name

and says run... IM gunna be gone lol #ghostadventures #GhostsOnReally” (Curtis, 2014).⁸²

Another user that same night states: “Zak's gunna have a hissy fit if anymore [video] batterys get drained #ghostsonreally #GhostAdventures” (LaurenHeichouxx, 2014).⁸³ The nature of Twitter creates a *virtual living room* in which friends across distances watch television shows and respond in real time, as the show is happening. Thus, armchair ghost hunting has moved onto the Internet, where people can discuss and debate the facts and fictions of the television show, as well as work through their own theories. Television becomes a type of virtual tourism, allowing for a metaphysical journey for the viewer in which they critically examine their beliefs and come to conclusions based on their analyses.

Emily D. Edwards notes that our ability to engage in these mediated experiences is now commonplace, but despite it, audiences “still find [excitement] in having vicarious adventures through shadowy legends, particularly those about the supernatural that have become replayed, altered, and extended by our media culture” (2005: ix). The popularity of televised ghost hunts is significant, in part, because their success thrives on the imagination of their viewership. The result is a vicarious journey beyond physical limitations, mediated by the imagination and perceptions of the audience. In her writing on human thought processes and mental fantasies, Marina Warner notes that “language and imagination govern ways of thinking, and from that work of cognition follow ways of doing. New means of representing the world have ‘realised’ things that were not possible before except in fantasies” (2006: 353). Through the televised ghost hunts, audiences are instantly (mentally) transported to other locations around the world. Online

⁸² Quoted verbatim.

⁸³ Quoted verbatim.

discussions add to that international reach, allowing users to engage in conversation with those from afar in a shared, meaningful dialogue about belief, scepticism and the narratives presented on television. As one r/Paranormal user stated, “The reactions some of them have when recounting the stories really make me want to believe!” (oryx42, March 2014). Those watching not only want to believe the realness in what they are seeing, they are eager for televised ghost hunts to capture proof on film.

Hill (2011) describes the mentality of the audiences as a “revolving door of scepticism and belief” that “makes people feel there are things which are beyond explanation.” (75). She goes on to note that the emotional investment in ghost hunting shows are propagated through “people waiting for a haunting to happen on camera, and . . . these viewers continue round notions of truth, trust, evidence, and belief. . .” (ibid.: 84). The ambiguous aspects of ghost hunting shows are what prompt the viewership into a self-analysis that oscillates between questioning televised events and solidifying their own paranormal beliefs.

The desire for proving the paranormal can prompt certain audience members into trying to prove the existence of ghosts in their own lives. This viewer for the show *Ghost Adventures* used the Twitter hashtag to state, “Haha I just talked to the dead with flashlights and meters. Scared the crap outta me. Best birthday party ever #GhostAdventures” (Emily, 2014).⁸⁴ Armchair ghost hunting has created a rise in the amateur ghost hunter, those who seek to emulate the scientific methods made popular on TV by formulating their own ghost hunts, complete with the ghost hunting tools they see on television. *BusinessWeek* reported that sales for ghost hunting tools and commercial events showed no signs of slowing down: “Groups of otherwise sensible

⁸⁴ Quoted verbatim.

people paying good money to spend a night in a soon-to-be-closed movie theatre. Folks on the Internet trolling for brass dowsing rods and crystals that ward off negativity. This is the lucrative business end of the paranormal” (BusinessWeek, May 2005).

However, people are also seeking easier methods for detecting the paranormal that are user friendly for those just entering the field of paranormal investigation. Ruickbie’s interview with Voss discussed the rise in citizen ghost hunters who “wanted ‘unintimidating tools’ that were easy to use ‘allowing for no to little learning curve and no specific skill set to operate.’” (Ruickbie, 2013: 37). Among the tools for the uninitiated is the EMF metre – and even that has become streamlined. For the new technological era of mobile phones small enough to be pocketed and carried about through our daily lives, there are ghost hunting apps.

Huffington Post reported on a new iPhone app that emulates the classic EMF metre: “your iPhone can now be used to hunt down ghosts in your attic, basement or crawlspace, thanks to a newly created attachment called Mr. Ghost” (Jason Gilbert, 2012). Mr. Ghost emerged through Kickstarter, an online crowdfunding platform intended to bring proposed ideas to fruition when they are “backed” by citizen donations. Mr. Ghost was a project started with the intended goal of raising a minimum of \$7,000 worth of donations to produce both an app and a detector attachment which plugs into the headphone jack of the phone. In the end, the project received \$35,136 in donations, well over its intended goal. Aaron Rasmussen, the creator of Mr. Ghost, stated in his project proposal that the metre was useful because, “humans can’t help but be curious. Learning about an unseen world in your own home is exciting.” (Rasmussen, 2012). Through the immediacy of the Internet, novel experiences can be easily purchased and consumed. The availability of ghost hunting tools – and the advent of more accessible ways of

both obtaining and tailoring them to inexperienced, citizen ghost hunters – creates new methods of interacting with the paranormal within our own lives.

Perhaps more significantly is how the increase in ghost hunting technology sales is indicative of how the sceptic/believer dynamic plays out in real life. Certainly, the burden of proof is an aspect that both televised ghost hunts and the traditional ghost investigation share, which has become internalised by viewers. That is, what viewers see in the media is another filter for how they interpret the paranormal, and the tools of the ghost hunt have become synonymous with how people now *experience* ghosts.

Another facet that prompts viewer participation is in differentiating fact from fiction in televised ghost hunts. The desire to prove paranormal belief drives people to online forums such as r/Paranormal, and to conduct their own investigations. People *want* to create their own narratives and gather evidence through their own experiences. Increasing interest in the supernatural experience has created a demand not only for ghost hunting tools, but has formed a vibrant commercial ghost industry, which is reflected in Edinburgh. The public's interest in consuming death through ghost stories and hauntings is nothing new, and even commercialisation of hauntings has been around long before the televised ghost hunt. Roger Clarke notes that “The business of ghosts has never been far away from the *business* of ghosts. There always seems to be someone profiting from a good ghost story” (2012: 286). However, ghost hunts as commercial tourist endeavours has only grown in the last decade. Even hotels and bed and breakfasts entertain guests with organised hunts conducted by paranormal experts. Event hosting companies such as Fright Nights – which claims to be the first commercial ghost hunting company that hosted overnight stays at a location – caters to the uninitiated and amateurs:

“Fright Nights [provides] the best ghost hunting experiences to the general public . . . If you have never attended a ghost hunt before, then our ghost hunting nights are ideal for the novice or more experienced attendees” (“Welcome to Fright Nights”, n.d. para. 1). While Fright Nights boasts that it was the first company of its kind, it now has a surge of competition from other commercial ghost hunting ventures seeking to take advantage of increased public interest with their own overnight ghost hunts. Dixon posits that it was the success of *Most Haunted* that “seemed to be a major trigger for the setting up of new ghost-hunting companies” (Dixon, 2009). For those individuals looking for an experience beyond the armchair, Yvette Fielding and Ciaran O’Keefe, the presenters of the show *Most Haunted*, wrote a section in their book that encourages people to seek out commercial ghost investigations before trying it alone:

Generally we don’t encourage people without training or experience to conduct a paranormal investigation. Before you head off, camera in hand, to that haunted cemetery, it really is important that you have some idea of what you are doing, what you need, and what you can expect . . . we also recommend that you contact an established organisation in your local area for information or advice, and also join them on a workshop or investigation, rather than striking out on your own straight away (Fielding and O’Keefe, 2008: 8).

When questioning citizens about ghost hunting and their reasoning for attending events, Ruickbie noted that many had similar answers, such as “interested in simply exploring the unknown” and “helping people, even helping spirits, was also mentioned.” Some people did see the thrill as the main attraction, as well as “doing something different” (Ruickbie, 2013: 33). The excitement of the paranormal is used in advertisements for various events, encouraging people to join for fun, “as seen on TV”. Television has created a highlight reel, where viewers only ever see interesting, entertaining, and exciting experiences, rather than the hours of downtime spent setting up cameras and filming to find proof of ghosts. The ghost investigators I interviewed

while in the field were quite derisive of amateur ghost hunters, who they claimed saw the investigatory experience as “having a laugh with their mates.” As Douglas told me:

I don't want to discourage anyone from joining up and investigating ghosts if they want to. But I have a problem when they join up with people who have no experience, and that's the problem. Anyone can form a group and say they're the real deal, a "ghost investigator," but if they get their ideas from TV shite, they're hurting the rest of us. They're making us look like a joke.

This attitude from ghost investigators has been imposed onto the commercial ghost tours and hunts for reflecting the TV-like experience of quick scares. The *promise* of a paranormal experience like those on television is the method through which many companies advertise their events. This method of advertising is especially effective for places that have been investigated on television, such as the Edinburgh vaults. Rodanthi Tzanelli notes that when tourists watch television, they use their imagination to explore new places and settings at a distance, and that their initial interest in visiting a location starts with a journey that was originally commenced on screen (2007: 3). These *armchair tourists* are similar to armchair ghost hunters in that their interest in certain locations begins with its portrayal on television.

Through the physical experience of ghost hunting, tourists are able to seek out answers to the ambiguous nature of paranormal shows for themselves. Participation allows them to engage with ghost hunting in a new, personal way – while also keeping in mind what they originally witnessed on television shows. Marina Warner notes, “Seeing *and* visualising bring personal consciousness into play and demand active engagement, interpretation, shaping, and not passive receptivity” (2006: 121). People are interested in formulating their own narratives around the paranormal, rather than just passively watching stories played out on the television. This user on Twitter demonstrates how effective ghost hunts are at bringing visitors to televised locations:

“Heading to Portland, Oregon for a vacation! Maybe I'll try to tour some haunted places that the #GhostAdventures crew have been to! #excited” (Beecher, 2014).⁸⁵

Richard Southall wrote about this phenomenon when he visited Moundsville Penitentiary after its feature on MTV's now defunct television show *Fear*. The prison started its own ghost tour, which had attendees “numbered in the thousands” since the episode aired. Southall noted that visitors wanted “to see where the episode of MTV's *Fear* was filmed and to experience their own paranormal encounters” (2003: xxix). The popularity of televised locations points significant interest in seeking out answers pertaining to the supernatural. Popular culture only bolsters the general public's fascination with death, dying and the afterlife by making it more visible through media (Craig and Thompson, 2012: 181). Haunted places have become significant to the tourist gaze because paranormal television shows and ghost hunts act as a form of advertising. The draw itself is in the potential for experiencing ghosts, and in the tourists having the opportunity to construct their own investigations. In ghost hunting, the mundane landscapes of everyday life become altered by an unseen world that is suddenly both made visible and easily accessible to anyone willing to pay. As the interest and prevalence of haunted locations grows, competition for the “most haunted” locale, and any perceived paranormal link only makes the location more desirable to the tourist gaze. John Urry notes that a feedback loop is essential to the tourist's mental construction of a place:

Places are chosen to be gazed upon because there is an anticipation, especially through daydreaming and fantasy . . . Such anticipation is constructed and sustained through a variety of non-tourist practices, such as film, TV, literature, magazines, records and videos, which construct and reinforce that gaze. (1990: 3)

⁸⁵ Quoted verbatim.

The emergence of new and successful television shows that advertise locations and normalise hauntings has enabled the paranormal to be further commercialised. Viewers gaze upon ordinary people encountering the extraordinary and paranormal through television shows and seek that experience for themselves. Perhaps just as significantly, locations that may not have previously been desirable to visit are suddenly appealing due to their connection to televised ghost hunts: abandoned buildings, prisons, cemeteries, and other sites of urban decay. For the ghost tourist, the appeal of a location is entirely dependent upon its potential for a haunting, and for a good personal story.

Conclusion

The visibility of ghosts in popular culture demonstrates a widespread cultural interest in the paranormal. While the televised ghost hunt may present itself as a form of entertainment, viewers become active participants by mentally engaging with the material, and taking part in online discussions that analyse the ambiguity of television shows to evaluate their own beliefs and theories. For other viewers, the next level is in seeking out the paranormal to create their own personal experiences, either through tours or commercial ghost hunts. In seeking out unique experiences, tourists create a structure of participation: from the television, to the physical tour, and later to engaging in online discussions. Commercial ghost hunting companies encourage tourists to continue the tour through a mental journey, by sharing narratives on social media and

forums. Through shared narratives, people consume and debate each other's experiences, what Hill (2011) argues is "mediated realities and personal realities to find out for themselves what they believe or not" (88). The process by which individuals make sense of the unseen world around them is developed, reinforced, and solidified through media outlets.

DISCUSSION

The arguments I have made in this thesis were a culmination of a broad fieldwork experience and a complete shift from my original focus on the storytelling within tours. After I had spent months familiarising myself with the structure, content, and themes of walking tours, I happened upon an advertisement for a night with a medium, hosted by Mercat Tours. At around the same time, I first picked up Annette Hill's *Paranormal Media* (2011), which had only been published after my fieldwork on ghost walks was well under way. It was one of the few full-length academic works which analysed aspects of ghost culture from a contemporary, non-secular perspective. I noted that Hill's chapter on commercial ghost events was an unconventional take on the subject; it focused on the human element, emphasising the emotional geography of tours. I was struck in particular by her description of paranormal events as *sensory journeys*, an environment which attunes individuals to their emotions, beliefs, and the memories of their past experiences. This is especially true of ghost hunting events, where the long hours spent within purposeful darkness has a marked emotional impact. The induced lack of sight creates a deliberate feeling of isolation, where the other senses become heightened. Hill attributes the overall result as being similar to an extreme sport: elevated adrenaline induces an acute fear response which makes people more open to the suggestion that they are encountering the paranormal (2011: 100). Sensory engagement is the focal point of believer events, in that attendees confront their feelings of fear together, as a social and inclusive exercise, in order to fully open themselves up to sensing the world of the dead.

Hill's analysis of ghost hunts inspired me to seek out events beyond ghost tours. When I was presented with the opportunity to sit in at the event hosted by a medium, I made the decision

to attend regardless of my initial trepidation. Despite it being a new experience, I went with the goal of exploring the ways in which contemporary ghost stories and death spectacles played out in other events. I sought to compare the narratives of emerging believer events to the research I had already gathered on ghost tours, intending to offer a broad perspective of paranormal storytelling within commercial culture.

The experience, which I detailed for the first vignette in Chapter 4, changed the direction of my fieldwork and this thesis. I noted the emotional responses of those who interacted with Lenore, the medium, and the different ways in which Spiritualist beliefs had become incorporated into her readings. A fascinating amalgamation of ritualistic imagery, Spiritualism, and ghost folklore framed the event, as well as the way in which Lenore described the spirit world to tourists. More than that, the other attendees did not resemble the crowd of tourists I had grown familiar with in walking tours. Their responses were both poignant and clearly emotionally invested in Lenore's readings. It was the first event I had attended that specifically capitalised on ghost belief, and it changed the way I regarded the paranormal industry.

At that point I had been residing in Edinburgh for almost a year gathering information about the walking tours. The prospect of broadening my research so late into my fieldwork was equal parts exciting and frightening. Though my initial research remained relevant to my overall focus on the commercialisation of ghost culture, I was presented with the intimidating prospect of lengthening my time in the field to investigate the beliefs and practices of a paranormal community of which I was unfamiliar. The new focal point of my thesis itself did not become clear until I had spent some time attending commercial believer events, as well as interacting with individuals who were active within the community. I interviewed a number of mediums,

ghost hunters, and ghost investigators to broaden my knowledge of the paranormal and differing ghost culture beliefs. I collected input on the relationship between popular culture and tourism and participated in a wide range of different events (both commercial and independent). During the latter half of my research, I came to understand that the existing analyses on the commercial paranormal industry – which heavily focused on the theatre and spectacle in walks – had left the cultural framework for the success of ghost tours unaddressed.

Scotland, in particular, represents a microcosm of ghost culture that is entirely unique to this country. While commercial paranormal industries exist elsewhere (notably in the United States, where the Spiritualist movement first gained ground), Scotland's national identity is linked with the paranormal. The landscape became romanticised through the imagery of the Highlands and the “mystical Celt”, which created the basis for the othering of Scottish culture. The spectres prominent in Sir Walter Scott's work and other literature in the 19th century, as well as the rise of Spiritualism during the Victorian era, solidified the commercial appeal of a supernatural Scotland to tourists.

While the popular view of a mystical Scotland created the precedence for the saleability of the paranormal in the country's contemporary tourist industry, it does not explain the success and continued development of the paranormal niche. The most conspicuous reason for the expanse and success of ghost tourism is the growing visibility of the supernatural in popular culture. The use of the spectral on television shows, as well as the continued emergence of new and unusual takes on ghost investigations, is reflective of a wide cultural interest in unexplained phenomena. After all, tourists become interested in visiting new sites based on certain forms of

external suggestion, which includes seeing them on television and the internet. Haunted places featured in television shows see a surge in tourism after the feature (Dixon, 2009).

Media has changed the way tourists experience sites. Though the tourist's journey has long commenced at home (through books and television), the internet has made it possible for tourists to engage with a site on a heretofore unprecedented level. The prevalence of internet reviews, online posts, and photo sharing has extended the tourist's experiences into the digital realm. Their photographs, stories, and personal anecdotes are used by companies to legitimise sites as authentically haunted. Though online sharing, interaction with the paranormal has become an increasingly social activity, through which people's beliefs are debated, supported, and solidified in a communal context. The paranormal industry is successful through an interworking of unique experiences and the emergence of new events which perpetually *re-authenticate* places as haunted. Re-authentication is performed with each new experience and photograph shared through social media. As these stories spread, the sites are made even more visible to potential future visitors.

As the paranormal industry grows to accommodate more tourists, the beliefs, tools, practices, and theories of ghost culture becomes increasingly incorporated into both television shows and commercial events. Therefore, the appropriation of ghost culture is not a singular occurrence: it begins with popular culture until a demand for these experiences builds, and commercial events fill that burgeoning desire for unique experiences. The event becomes framed around what paying customers *expect* to see, which greatly resembles the intense, tension-filled televised ghost hunt.

However, the demand for unusual experiences affects the commercial industry in another way: it creates more opportunities for *believer events*. Ghost walks are the most basic aspect of the commercial paranormal industry; they attract a number of visitors because they are short activities which can be completed in an afternoon. Believer events, in contrast, attract tourists who desire unique experiences, and to become participants on hunts which seek to interact with and prove the existence of the spectral. These events attract people from all over the UK and internationally who spend entire nights in allegedly haunted locations. The increasing number of believer events mirrors an overarching cultural interest in pursuing answers for the unknown and unexplained.

However, the influx of new events and tour companies has created a saturated market. Nowhere is that more apparent than in Edinburgh, where the signs of oversaturation are beginning to show in several ways. Perhaps the most immediate, visible indication is the sheer number of advertised ghost tours on Edinburgh's Royal Mile. In December 2013, the Edinburgh Council responded to complaints about guides standing around with placards and passing leaflets out to passerby's walking down the Mile. In an attempt to lessen the "clutter", the Council has proposed that tour company promoters share the space in Grassmarket, Parliament Square, and Hunter Square. Jan Henderson, owner of City of the Dead Tours, has stated that it would be a "bloodshed". He adds:

At the moment we all work together, we work next to each other and we have an understanding. This could completely destroy that and have us fighting against each other in the street. All of the smaller businesses will completely go out of business as they can't compete with larger companies who have a lot more staff. The council say they want to level the playing field but that's like having a Tesco next to a hot dog stall. It's a lovely idea but, in reality, logistically it's not possible (Henderson quoted in Pickles, 2013).

As of now, tour companies work like something of an extended family of businesses. They each have individual spaces separate from one another, at different sites throughout the city, so the competition is minimised and fair. If the Edinburgh Council goes forward with restricting tour company advertising to three locations, businesses will be forced to innovate the ways in which they appeal to tourists, or they will sink and the bigger companies will be forced to compete with one another.

Competition has become more exacerbated for ghost hunters and investigators, as well. This is evident in the restricted level of accessibility to certain locations. Now wildly popular locations that are allegedly haunted are becoming less open to independent investigators. Instead, they require paid-for access from professional ghost hunters who host money-making events. Independent investigators realise they are on the losing end of this competition; with no money to support their investigations, they are forced to come up with creative ways to investigate. Urban exploration is one option for teams like Douglas's. Another is to seek out places beyond the United Kingdom entirely.

When I last spoke with Douglas, he was planning his first trip to the Netherlands, set to commence in July 2014. *My team's got our tickets*, he told me. *We've got a few contacts there suggesting places to explore. Things are just too intense around here. Kind of feel like we've seen all there is, anyway.* While Douglas could continue to explore abandoned places in Scotland, the increasing commercialism of the paranormal is a source of frustration for him. *Too many ghost hunters, not enough places*, he claims. Many independent investigators like him are beginning to consider Scotland to be a lost cause due to the tourist influence that is turning Scotland's ghost culture increasingly more commercialised.

While tourism has been a main influence in the progressively commercialised nature of allegedly haunted locations, the heightened visibility of paranormal investigations on television has inspired a growing contingent of amateur ghost hunters. For every ghost hunter who is hoping to prove the existence of ghosts through science, there are just as many entering the field seeking money and, yes, fame. The effect is a decreased availability of certain locations within Edinburgh due to the rising demand for new places to investigate. The proliferation of amateur ghost hunters has even become noticeable outside Scotland's own paranormal community. John Blake wrote an article for CNN entitled, "Ghost Hunters Haunted by New Terror: Competition," in which he notes how television has effectively altered the number of hunters within ghost culture:

The allure of fame . . . has done what the forces of darkness could not do -- turn ghost hunters against one another. The stars of some paranormal shows feud over whose show is real or fake. Local ghost-hunting teams refuse to work together because they see each other as business rivals. Some teams refuse to share spooky "evidence" captured on film because they plan to use it as a demo tape for a potential television pilot or a Hollywood movie like "The Conjuring," investigators say (Blake, 2013).

The result in Edinburgh is a ghost culture that is becoming more marketable, and where belief has become a commodity to be exploited.

However, there is another factor to consider, which I have sought to present in this thesis: the increased number of different paranormal events presents a wealth of opportunities for tourists, both believers and sceptics, to engage with the paranormal on their own terms. While the industry in Scotland will almost certainly peak and go into a decline – as it has done before in its history – this recent insurgence of paranormal businesses will only further entwine Scotland with the supernatural.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to present and analyse aspects of Edinburgh's paranormal industry, and to explore certain elements which have been appropriated from an overarching ghost culture. Specific attention was paid to the terminology, beliefs, investigatory tools, and ghost types which companies have incorporated from Spiritualism, ghost culture and folklore, into a packaged experience for tourists. I sought to present the paranormal industry with a firm consideration of these wider cultural influences as a contrast to current anthropological literature which largely examines the spectacle of commercial ghost events. Indeed, I would say that one of my goals in writing this thesis was to challenge the general assumption that commercial ghost events exist solely as a form of entertainment. Rather, the industry is shifting to capitalise on growing paranormal belief. The increasing number of successful ghost hunts and other believer events points to an upsurge in paranormal tourists, who come to Scotland to experience the extraordinary within the country's uncanny landscapes.

The chapters that comprised this thesis were split by two distinctions: Chapters 1 and 6 explore the historical and contemporary context of tourism, with investigating the overarching nature of Scottish national identity and its enduring connection to the uncanny and supernatural; and Chapters 2 through 5 concentrated on fieldwork, which included analyses, participant observations, recordings and interviews, supplemented with internet posts of tourist experiences. This intentional framework in my thesis structure was meant to demonstrate the long history of paranormal belief and tourism in Scotland, and the ways in which it has both endured and evolved into the present digital era.

In a modern age when paranormal tourism has become popular and lucrative in cities across the world, Chapter 1 highlighted how Scotland is a unique case due to its history: namely, that the paranormal and Scottish national identity are inextricably entwined, and this connection has created the basis for its tourist industry. In this chapter, I drew on the larger anthropological discussions of Scottish culture and how the country and its landscapes became connected to the uncanny. The supernatural has its roots in Scottish folklore that was first made popular by English tourists such as Samuel Johnson and later in the works of Sir Walter Scott; their tales of ghosts and the second sight spread outside of Scotland during a Romantic age when ideas of the mystical Celt had taken hold of the British imagination. In the latter half of the 19th century — during the post-Enlightenment — supernatural belief gained new ground in Spiritualism. This section of the chapter discussed how spiritualism and commercialism became linked, as well as how emerging technologies became a vital component in investigating spectres. These spiritualist methods of “experiencing” the supernatural are the basis for Scotland’s contemporary tourist industry.

In Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5, I focused on several different areas of commercial ghost events and how they connect to beliefs in ghost culture, ritual, and overarching anthropological works on tourism. Chapter 2 comprised the bulk of my early fieldwork, where I analysed the structure of walking tours. My foremost interest was in how tour guides constructed a mental image of what I refer to as the *ghost space*, a parallel reality alongside the realm of the living where ghosts reside in their own pocket dimensions of time and place. This *ghost space* is a spacial framework for certain ghost archetypes that I recorded across different tour companies. How these spirits are believed to interact with humans alters the way in which they experience their own *ghost space* — from malevolent spirits who are aware of living humans as they move alongside the *ghost*

space, to unaware spirits who repeat their own daily rituals from their own life. This chapter further discussed where these stories drew from existing Scottish folklore on spectres, as well as from Spiritualism and ghost culture, to establish the context for hauntings in the vaults.

In contrast, Chapter 3 explored the spectacle involved in walking tours. Ghost tours are among the many topics discussed in emerging anthropological literature on *dark tourism*, involving sites that are associated with death. Dark tourism literature I researched for this thesis largely focused on the theatrical nature of ghost tours, and this dissertation would not feel complete if I ignored such a prominent topic. Ghost walks do closely follow the structure of street theatre in that they have tourists take on “roles” and participate in the performance for the amusement of their peers. However, I argued that by overly focusing on the aspect of “play” and using that as a resolute determination of “authenticity”, dark tourism literature neglected the atmospheric, phantasmagorical nature of walking tours. Rather, the storytelling formulates a mental space in which past and present intersect, where the living and the dead interact, and where ghostly experiences are a part of the package sold to tourists.

This is a topic I further investigated in Chapters 4 and 5, by detailing examples of what I refer to as *believer events*, to distinguish them from the walking tours. Believer events are organised with tour companies, and marketed to amateur ghost hunters and paranormal enthusiasts alike rather than the casual tourist. These chapters were divided to devote discussion to two key aspects of believer events: mediumship and investigation.

Chapter 4 detailed three vignettes that focused on those within the mediumship, gifted individuals who can see or sense the ghost space, as well as spirit presence. Mediums are considered to be important within the ghost community, due to their ability to act as a go-

between for investigators — a skill increasingly utilised by tour companies to frame the experience for tourists. However, a medium's interpretation of the spirit world is not homogenous. I explored the difference between how a medium from the Spiritualist church and those who participated on investigations presented the *ghost space* for tourists.

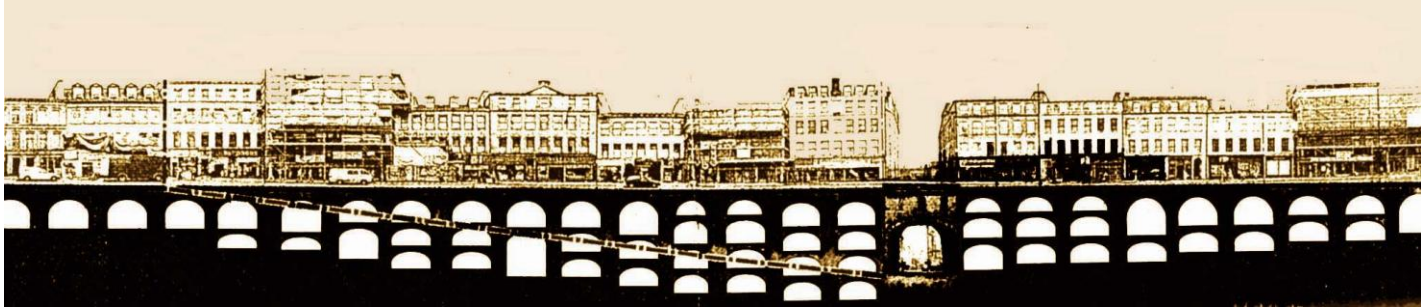
My discussion on the role of mediums and the increase in believer events within Edinburgh's tour circuit leads neatly into Chapter 5's critical examination of how the commercialisation of the supernatural has affected access and investigation of certain sites within the city. The popularity of ghost tourism and an increasing number of television shows detailing paranormal investigation has created an influx of people seeking extraordinary experiences. This has forced Scotland's ghost investigators to split into conflicting groups: ghost hunters (those who make money on their expertise; they often organise tourist events) and ghost investigators (who believe in the importance of scientific proof of spirits). The two vignettes in this chapter highlighted the contrasting methods of ghost hunters/investigators, as well as how growing tourist demand to experience the Scottish uncanny has forced investigation groups to adapt to an expanding paranormal industry.

Chapter 6 further expanded upon the commercialisation of the Scottish supernatural, which was a key theme in this thesis. While Chapter 1 illustrated that paranormal draw of Scotland has a long history, Chapter 6 explored the contemporary context of the tourism industry: namely, the ways in which the internet and television have altered how tourists engage with a site. I examined how television has played a role in inspiring a new generation of amateur ghost hunters to seek out the paranormal, as well as how televised hunts build anticipation for the tourist. Tour companies and for-profit ghost hunters are now expected to create an experience “as

seen on TV” to construct an “authentic” experience for the tourist. I analysed the ways in which visitor expectations are further enhanced through online discussion. Internet forums, posts, and pictures allow prospective tourists to engage with those who have already been on tours, and companies encourage tourists to discuss their own experiences and share photographs online. Online galleries of glowing orbs, human-shaped shadows, and spirit-induced injuries only add to the reputation of tourist sites and their increasing popularity.

My discussion at the end of this thesis offered some perspective on how my own personal views changed through the course of my fieldwork. I especially wanted to note that Annette Hill’s observations in her book *Paranormal Media* on the sensory and communal nature of ghost walks inspired me to explore beyond the subjects of storytelling and spectacle to embrace the inclusion of believer events. The paranormal industry has, quite simply, grown beyond ghost walks. To write another anthropological work devoted solely to the paranormal as entertainment would have been a crucial oversight, as Edinburgh’s ghost culture has become vibrant and broad in its scope of events. The lucrative paranormal industry has already spread outside the city and taken hold in places across the country, from Glasgow to Aberdeen. The spectre has become as much a part of Scottish identity as the tartan; it is a feature within its landscapes and its cityscapes. Now it is a part of what attracts visitors from all over the world who are seeking the extraordinary.

APPENDIX A



Cross section of the South Bridge Vaults

APPENDIX B



University of St Andrews

University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee

18 April 2014

Elizabeth Holzhauser (090013806)

Department of Social Anthropology

Ethics Reference No: <i>Please quote this ref on all correspondence</i>	SA8144
Project Title:	Edinburgh's Tourist Industry: Ghostlore, Death as a Spectacle, and Reconstructing History
Researchers Name(s):	Elizabeth Holzhauser
Supervisor(s):	Dr Stan Frankland

Thank you for submitting your ethical application form which was considered at the Social Anthropology School Ethics Committee meeting on 09/07/11. The following documents were reviewed:

- Ethical Application Form

The University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) approves this study from an ethical point of view. Please note that where approval is given by a School Ethics Committee that committee is part of UTREC and is delegated to act for UTREC.

Approval is given for three years. Projects, which have not commenced within two years of original approval, must be re-submitted to your School Ethics Committee.

You must inform your School Ethics Committee when the research has been completed. If you are unable to complete your research within the 3 three year validation period, you will be required to write to your School Ethics Committee and to UTREC (where approval was given by UTREC) to request an extension or you will need to re-apply.

Any serious adverse events or significant change which occurs in connection with this study

and/or which may alter its ethical consideration, must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee, and an Ethical Amendment Form submitted where appropriate.

Approval is given on the understanding that the 'Guidelines for Ethical Research Practice' (<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/UTRECguidelines%20Feb%2008.pdf>) are adhered to.

Yours sincerely

Convenor of the School Ethics Committee

OR Convener of UTREC

Ccs Supervisor

School Ethics Committee

UTREC Convenor, Mansefield, 3 St Mary's Place, St Andrews, KY16 9UY

Email: utrec@st-andrews.ac.uk Tel: 01334 462866

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- bit wierd down my right side and when i got back to the car i noticed i had a small fingernail imprint on my finger-- if i ever come back to edinburgh i will do the night tour-- if i feel brave enough.. [Facebook comment left for Auld Reekie Tours]. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/AuldReekieTours/posts/573447012676870>.
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