



Figures 1 & 2. Two ghost walks outside York Minster

from 150 to 2500 in the space of a decade (Hill 2010: 9). While ghost hunting groups have a diverse make-up, the ghost walks and tours explored in this article are primarily, although not exclusively, aimed at tourists. As a result, they are more frequent in Spring and Summer, with a seasonal spike at Halloween — a traditionally favoured time for stories anticipating spectral appearances. Ghost walks include a diverse set of practices where content and delivery are shaped by the knowledge and performative skills of the guide. They can be conducted by local historians, paranormal ‘experts’, or actors, and some are scripted while others are largely improvised. Walks can involve large amounts of theatrical acting, crowd participation (see Fig. 1 & 2), props and costumes (see Fig. 3 & 4) or be relatively scholarly in their approach. Some tours use buses instead of walking, while audio recorded tours and ghost walk book (see Jones 2009) offer self-directed trails that bypass the physical presence of a guide.



Figures 3 & 4. Two costumed guides from York ghost walks.

The boundaries of what constitutes a ‘ghost tour’ are blurred by significant overlap with walks that focus on murders or historical deaths that recount hauntings. In York for example both ‘Mad Alice’s Bloody Tour of York’ and ‘The Bloody Walk of York’ take death and murder as their central themes but include ghost stories where ghosts and murders intersect. The Arthur Machen themed walks in London, organised by Minimum Labyrinth, further distort definitional boundaries by blending fictional characters and events into real physical locations. These draw upon Machen’s supernatural fiction to replicate his mystical vision of London through interactions between participants and characters (played by actors) from Machen’s stories. The walks emphasise the interpenetration of fictive and real universes in ways that are simultaneously grounded in real locations and fictive events, inviting the ‘visionary to step through the veil of illusion into another world; a magical world’ (Minimum Labyrinth 2018). Similarly, other less explicitly literary ghost walks sometimes mention literary sources to emphasise how spectral events and locales have been worked into fiction — as was the case with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in two London ghost walks — one of which (the ‘Bankside Ghosts and Monsters Walk’) also visited the Rose Theatre in Bankside, where participants were informed that a production of Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* led to the appearance of the Devil to actor Richard Alleyne. Ghost tours and their related phenomenon therefore offer rich ground for exploring the relationship between people, history and landscape that is at once both physically real and imagined.

In this article we focus on the triumvirate relationship between the guide, the city and the participants, as it manifests in guided walks explicitly describing themselves as a ‘ghost’ walks or tours. Ghost walks take the (often traumatic) histories of particular cities and embed them in the landscape in a way that is simultaneously accessible and engaging by subverting some of the tropes otherwise encountered in dark tourism. Such ghost walks are simultaneously both the product of the city’s histories and the embodied, spatial practice through which the histories of these cities are experienced.

The towns we focus on are all noteworthy tourist hubs, and without this flow of tourists these ghost tours would be extremely limited. Prato and Pardo have noted how migration leads to continuous transformations in the experience of urban life. Ghost tourism adds to these ‘new historical conditions that determine the emergence of new meanings of “being urban”, influencing our conception of the common good and of associated life in a shared “urban space” as a whole’ (Pardo and Prato 2018: 17). Here we show how ghost tales feed the cultural needs of domestic and international tourists, but in turn how the resulting tours feed a richer appreciation of the histories that make cities distinct. The ghosts recounted, though fleeting and ephemeral, act as uncanny nodes around which historical moments, movements and characters are anchored to the built city landscape. We have tried to capture some of this in the text and through accompanying photos to give a sense of the ‘social spatial semiotics’ (Krase 2012: 22) of the cities — and while we hope this approach is evocative, these are multisensory walks alive with sounds, smells and things to touch and stare at.

We take up three primary factors that follow through the ambiguities of ghost walks in urban landscapes, first testing the limits of thanatourism through the explicit humour and

entertainment that is often related to otherwise tragic ghost tales in specific places; followed by an exploration of the peculiar tensions between ghosts, reality and scepticism, played out through the facts of storytelling and the suspension of disbelief; and finally how these elements are played out through being and remembering in cities walking through haunted landscapes. Across these three sections we demonstrate how these hauntings are relayed to tourists and how this embeds multiple histories in their experience of the cities through which they walk.

Ghost Walks as Entertainment and the Distancing of Dark Histories

The relationship between traumatic historical events and contemporary tourism can be understood in relation to the growing literature on dark tourism (Lennon and Foley 2000), or thanatourism (Seaton 1996). Most of the stories told on ghost walks relate trauma — murder, starvation, imprisoning, torture and abuse — and the grislier the death, the more details will be provided. While the tour guide on a ghost walk might stop to invest the landscape with a story about the industrial revolution, you can feel assured that any industrialist appearing in a ghost walk will either have been the victim or perpetrator of something quite heinous. The sedimented landscape of memory (Connerton 1989) we hear related somehow misses stories of expressions of love, engagements, marriage, births, birthday parties, feasts and other celebrations that would also mark these sites. Aside from claims around the supernatural, ghost walks are simply part of a growing pattern of dark tourism.

A burgeoning literature describes a growing propensity for tourism that centrally focuses on death and tragedy, and can incorporate ghost walks amongst its examples. However, ghost walks operate differently to other forms of thanatourism as they embed memories, places and events through recounting spectral tales in narrative and experiential spaces that allow for tragedy to be dealt with in a less problematic way, and often explicit aims to entertain participants. These factors stand in contrast to claims that dark tourist sites work as modern forms of pilgrimage (Lennon and Foley 2000: 3). For example, Robb notes in relation to dark tourism in Rwanda, Argentina, United States and Brazil:

‘Part of what is intriguing about dark tourism is the tension between what is conventionally conceived of as recreational travel and the interest in witnessing the hard realities of life. Leisure and violence are practices that traditionally have been seen as antithetical.’ (Robb 2009: 58)

The entertainment value often apparent in ghost walks lightens any tension between these categories of violence and leisure.

During ghost walks, humour can be deployed in ways that are contrary to the earnest tone of other thanatourism, even while ghosts are mostly attached to tragic and traumatic stories relating to ‘bad deaths’ (Pardo 1989: 113). To avoid voyeurism, tours evoke participants’ experiences as witnesses to the past. This sense of gravity or graveness is most distinct on ghost walks in regard to those who were executed or died through military violence; for example, several of the London walks noted ghosts relating to the prior existence of gallows in Lincoln’s Inn Fields and made significant mention of civil unrest in English history through the reformation. Comedy, however, often pushes back against such supposed limitations on ghost

walks. The middle ground between comic provocations and the sense that humour is part of the process of coping with tragedy means that no area is truly immune to becoming a joke — even if only within niche circles.

The tragic story of Margaret Clitherow (St Margaret of York) illustrates this well, her ghost is said to haunt the Black Swan pub in York. As a convert to Catholicism in the late 1500s, she became a key point of refuge for priests in the North of England. The priest hole in her house was disclosed by a frightened young boy and she was arrested and tried. Upon refusing to plead guilty: The common-law sanction for such refusal was that the refuser should be crushed alive (*peine forte et dure*) and this is what happened, in the Tollbooth in York, on 25 March 1586 where, in Mush's narrative, she is first stripped naked, in an obscene, virtually pornographic, shaming ritual, and then put to a slow and agonizing death (Lake and Questier 2004: 44). We also learn that 'A sharp stone, as much as a man's fist, put under her back and upon her was laid to the quantity of seven or eight hundredweights [about 900 pounds], which breaking her ribs caused them to burst forth of the skin' (Abbot 2012: 305)

Her suffering was such that Queen Elizabeth I is said to have apologised for the execution. While some details vary in walks and wider historical accounts (for example her nakedness is either by choice to show her piety or an act of degradation by the executioner), her martyrdom was clearly borne from extreme suffering. Yet in one walk in York the execution was re-enacted through crowd participation, and the haunting was used as a starting point for a historical story and theatrical re-enactment far from mournful in tone. While there was no evident intention for voyeurism or offence, the act of martyrdom was recreated by getting a number of teenaged European girls (representing rocks) to lie on top of another girl (representing Clitherow) in a re-enactment that quickly became giggly with almost everyone watching laughing at the spectacle. This was the intention, a humorous re-enactment at the end of the tour, and likely generated out of the specific dynamics of the participants as the guide had a clear sense of what was entertaining the group. Bearing in mind this specific story, in this case this re-enactment clearly falls outside the ordinarily grave genre motifs of dark tourism.

While all four walks in York discussed the haunting by murdered Clitherow and the story behind it, only this one took this particular approach to making it more entertaining. The same guide who used the crowd to dramatize Clitherow's death encouraged walkers to pretend to be the headless ghost of Thomas Percy (from the gunpowder plot, whose ghost haunts a York cemetery) and later in the tour to perform parts of the story of the Grey lady of St Leonards, a nun who was bricked into a room by her order following an affair with a nobleman. In each re-enactment, tourists were used to draw humour from the stories.

An absence of mournfulness and a leaning towards entertainment was found in other tours. In another story on different walk in York, the ghost of a grave robber who had committed murder by chopping off the hand of a victim to steal a bracelet was recreated with a fake knife magic prop and a theatrical wrist cutting trick. The same guide turned the death of a Victorian child into an opportunity for a 'boo' moment and a magic trick. A feature of that particular walk is that the group (on this occasion more than 80 people) are encouraged to collectively engage in scaring the occupants of an Italian restaurant by suddenly rushing towards its window. A tour

guide in Edinburgh persuaded the group to re-enact the execution of an accused witch as a comedic event despite its traumatic implications. In all these examples the use of humour, crowd participation, acting and tricks is unambiguously aimed at entertaining the audience. The success of these re-enactments pivots on the dynamics of the group; we all experienced the extremes of this taking part in tours where theatricalities were taken up with gusto, while others saw an embarrassed shuffling amongst participants.

Even the less theatrical guides in York used jovial banter with the crowd to engage the audience. One guide reflected that ‘only the guilty hear the bells’ for a big laugh in the middle of a more serious ghost story at the former execution site near the river as bells chimed in the distance. The theatrical tour in Brighton used several props including a severed head to illustrate one story, and a rolled-up carpet for another. Such props were used to add theatricality, shock and entertainment value to the walking tours.

Each isolated incident could be taken as a one off, but collectively they demonstrate a clear pattern that despite the presence of tragedy ghost walks are different from other forms of dark tourism. While histories and violent acts are mostly taken seriously, the ghostly accounts used to provide levity help transform them into something more akin to a fairy tale, or at least a less rational history. While this was not always the case, the Brighton Kreepy Kemptown paranormal tour guide emphasised the empirical truth of each account, such humorous approaches resonated across tours and sites and emphasised the particularities of ghost walks within wider body of dark tourism. The uncanny nature, the potential for scepticism regarding their existence and the ready theatricalization lend ghost walks as a genre an ability to deal with tragedy in a way that is somewhat removed from the harsher realities that inherently limit the humour of other forms of dark tourism.

It is perhaps a little too obvious to apply Derrida’s (2006) hauntology here. His use of hauntology as a joking Francophone and Anglophone portmanteau/homophone of haunting and ontology respectively stems from the image of the spectre of Marx haunting Europe. An idea that is simultaneously a joke and a critique of Marx, and uses ghosts as a metaphor, should be handled with care in relation to this particular article, but there is an aspect that can help disentangle the unusual nature of ghost walks. Derrida stresses the double nature of ghosts as simultaneously existing and not existing and of being from the past, yet in the present. The deaths recounted in these ghost walks may be real, yet there is an inherent ambiguity as to whether ghosts are real; even on the ‘Unbelievers Ghost Walk’, uncertainty creeps in, which allows a shift from conventionally mournful dispositions towards death. In much the same way that comedy, stand-up comedy in particular, provide safe but cathartic spaces for otherwise taboo speech acts (Westwood 2004), the uncanny nature of ghosts transforms social spaces in ways that other forms of dark tourism do not.

Ghost walks are not the only social spaces in which ghosts allow for an increased potential for certain kinds of otherwise taboo speech acts. Patricia Lawrence (2000) discusses how oracles, a form of spirit medium, were able to discuss otherwise taboo topics related to the war against a backdrop of silence in Eastern Sri Lanka during conflict. In such instances, talk of ghosts is therapeutic through its facilitative nature. Here, fear removed the military men’s

ability to act censoriously in this one social space and, in turn, the talk of ghosts indirectly facilitated discussion of events relating to the war and of kin, who through violent deaths had become entangled in the culture of silence. The British spirits of ghost walks seem to be similarly facilitative in talking about death and tragedy. The manner in which fatal violence against Catholics and Protestants ('Sceptics of London Halloween Ghost Walk'), the massacre of Jews at Clifford's Tower in York ('The Original Ghost Walk') and anti-Catholic violence under the Tudors (various) was discussed bears echoes of this social facilitation.

Even if the deaths being discussed are historically verifiable, the lens of ghosts adds an unreal, uncanny or paranormally ambiguous façade to the death that creates distance. As stories are recounted to tourists, a second layer of distancing expands potential for narrative and performance. As such the role ghosts play in the dialectic of memory landscape production and reproduction can be more transgressive than other histories.

Suspending Disbelief: Reality, Verification and 'Facts'

Belief in ghosts is not a prerequisite for participating in ghost tours, however most tours present ghosts as a 'real' phenomenon, providing provocative examples or theories that encouraged participants to judge for themselves (Thompson 2010). The very first walk around the City of London, which the researchers attended together, began with an appeal to the cross-cultural ubiquity of belief in ghosts and the fact that more than half the people in the world believe in them. The actress, new to the route and consequently reading from a script she was still learning, used the ubiquity of this credence to make the case that ghosts ought to be a concern, even for non-believers.² Only two tours we attended included a degree of scepticism. One was promoted as the 'Unbelievers Ghost Walk', while another ('Bankside Ghosts and Monsters') incorporated a 'sceptical' perspective; the tour leader claimed that many stories of ghosts arose out of misperception and misidentification, citing the case of a headless woman and a skeleton which supposedly haunted a house (no longer standing) in Blackfriars and suggesting instead that this may have disguised its use as a brothel. Later in the same tour, the guide joked about ghost hunters who, a few years earlier, had searched for Elizabethan ghosts at the Globe Theatre, despite its having only been built in the 1990s. In this instance, these attempts at disenchantment encouraged discussion amongst the participants regarding the veracity of the supernatural; at least half of them expressed a belief in ghosts.

There is an inherent ambiguity that is fundamental to ghost walks: 'By hearing a ghost story on a ghost walk, is a ghost tourist learning about an episode from the past or the nature of life after death? At the heart of this knowledge is a dialectical tension between knowledge of the past and knowledge of the occult' (Hanks 2015: 14). As is noted by Hanks in her

² Castro, Burrows and Woofit (2009) note that 37% of the UK population have reported a paranormal experience, including experiences of telepathy, precognition, extrasensory perception and contact with the dead. Similarly, Annette Hill reports that in the early decades of the 21st Century paranormal beliefs are 'on the rise in contemporary Western societies. Almost half of the British population, and two thirds of American people, claim to believe in some form of the paranormal, such as extrasensory perception, hauntings and witchcraft' (2013: 65).

ethnography on ghost walks ‘when I spoke with participants about their belief, many expressed a high degree of uncertainty. However, that uncertainty was marked by a desire to believe’ (2015: 84). The ‘Bankside’ tour guide later revealed to the researcher who participated on this walk that they were not so much sceptical about the existence of spectral or paranormal phenomena, but rather felt that it was important to legitimise such claims on a strong, evidential basis.

In York, a local historian tour leader finished most of his stories with the subsequent finding of corroborating archaeological or historical ‘evidence’ as proof of an empirically verifiable reality behind the hauntings. For example, a popular story retells the multiple sights of distinctly ‘short’ Roman soldiers near York Minster, whose apparitions seemed to emerge from the ground from their knees. According to the tour guide, the perception of soldiers wading through the street was accounted for by the subsequent archaeological ‘discovery’ of a sunken Roman road, around a foot in depth below the current cobbles.

The primary source of ‘evidence’ for hauntings drew on well documented historical sightings; however, personal accounts and more immediate sightings brought the ‘reality’ of these cases up to date. A familiar trope was the ‘rationality’ of the tour guide as credible narrator of both their own personal experiences and the accounts of others. The ‘Kreepy Kemptown Ghost Walk’ guide stated that all possible rational explanations were explored before accepting the supernatural as the only possible explanation. During this tour, his claims were further supported by another attendee, a psychic, who described the physical and unseen experiences she had encountered during the walk that corroborated the accounts given about the supernatural nature of the sites and their invisible inhabitants.

Tour guides also recalled the experiences of previous participants to bring a degree of temporal proximity and sense of fraternal possibility that ‘normal’ participants, just like them,



Figure 5. Small window in York where a ‘ghostly apparition’ is sometimes reported.

could potentially see a ghost at these sites. The verifiable existence of ghosts was diffused via these ‘credible’ witnesses, and offered as ‘truthful’ accounts on subsequent walks. The guide on ‘The Ghost Trail of York’ mentioned a couple who had been on the tour the previous week who got in touch to say they had seen a ghostly apparition at a window of one of the walk’s stops a few nights later (See Fig. 5). Another guide told the audience that three people had seen a ghostly hand at a particular graveyard on his tours in that week alone.

A guide on an Edinburgh walk (relating to the sunken road/plague trap) explained that sightings were more convincing if it was a child, assuming that they lacked the guile to deceive. Other ‘reliable’ sources included those traditionally in professions known for ‘veracity’, such as vicars, priests, doctors and police officers. Even renowned academics and somewhat counter intuitively, politicians, were recalled as trustworthy witnesses of supernatural incidents. The latter possibly being unlikely to make such an outlandish claim at the risk of a political career if untrue.

These types of accounts encourage walkers to suspend disbelief, but whether they believe in ghosts or not does not detract from the way in which ghost tours embed these types of stories or historical ‘realities’ into the material landscape. When a participant is encouraged to reach out and touch a wall through which a ghost walked through, or attention is drawn to an otherwise unremarkable window, they are being made aware of the physicality of the city as both real and imaged space, they are being taught how to be ‘present’ in the haunted city.

Being and Remembering in the Haunted City

Anthropological literature has provided many examples of how societies use ghosts to ‘remember’, specifically in relation to ancestors and kinship lineages (Kendall 1989, Carsten et al. 2008, Bell 1997). But ghosts also serve a function as a collective means of ‘remembering’ the city. As McEvoy describes it, the ‘metanarrative of the ghost walk is that of the town itself’ (McEvoy 2016: 123).

Ghost walks unambiguously engage with local iterations of public history across conventional periodisations. ‘The Original Ghost Walk of York’ features ghosts derived from Roman, Tudor, Stuart, Georgian, Victorian and WWII history as well as discussing local urban Viking geography for context (although no ghost walks featured any Viking ghosts). This span of 2000 years is shaped by York’s historical particularities, but across ghost walks the histories deployed are typically broad, albeit locally specific. The descriptions of these historical eras often make a physical appearance in ghost tales as palimpsests of buildings overlaid on top of each other where use and even appearance has since changed (Basu 2007). On our walks, ghost tales made reference to cellars or building works that dug down or uncovered long abandoned Victorian tunnels or Roman roads, narratively signposting a descent into history at that particular location (Bender 2006).

Ghost stories consequently reflect the most popular historical stories of a city or town, or how a city ‘sees itself’. In Brighton for example, two tours have very different intentions, one theatrical and one a paranormal expert, but both highlight the city’s connections with royalty, military and gangs to describe a rowdy and murderous past that echoes its contemporary raucous reputation. In York, the claim to be one of the most haunted cities in Europe is iterated

through ghost stories that take in those events and eras where the city was a ‘notable’, if somewhat rebellious powerful place, the bustling fortified Roman Town of Eboracum, the ‘Jorvic’ Viking strong hold of the north, the battle ground of William the Conqueror, as self-governing medieval city and so on. Telling these public histories in ghost walks provides the opportunities to present historical moments such as the Industrial Revolution, the English Civil War, or the dissolution of the monasteries as violent disruption of the social order, but also as markers of significant cultural, political economic and epistemic transformation and disjuncture through a local and consequently more accessible, familiar lens (Hanks 2011, Harte 2013). As one amateur historian guiding a London walk explained, relating public histories through ghost stories was educational, a way to re-envision different versions of the city. He went on to elaborate that participants wanted to be entertained, so they signed up for ghost tours instead of history tours, but they still gained knowledge, whether it be political, religious, or about the continuation of gas lamps in London’s streets through the disconcerting and uncanny tales of haunting rooted to a particular time and place (Samuel 1994).



Fig. 6. Actor from Edinburgh ghost walk recounting story of plague pits.

However, the ghosts that haunt cityscapes also reinforce a sense of the city as anonymous, dangerous, densely populated and chaotic. Ghost stories narrate broad historical events and significant moments in a city’s past, but the details describe a space where human relationships unfold at a time when people were poorer, sicker, gender relations more uneven, class dynamics more unfair, child health and education less reliable (see Fig. 6). In their narration, tales of ghosts and hauntings subtly call for social redress and express a history of social injustice even if it is little remarked upon. The battered wife in the Brighton pub, abandoned children in small attic rooms, bigamous marriages and secret relationships unveiled; through such accounts, cities are framed as sites full of domestic outrage and builds a sense of urban life that resonate with stereotypes about atomised individuals and decentralised lifestyles.

It is not only in the *narration* of its selected histories that the city lives and imagines itself. It is the situated presence of people living and being in the city that gives life to cities and in turn enables cities to remember and be remembered. From a relational point of view, or from a

non-representative, phenomenological geographies perspective, the person and the landscape, in this case, the city, are not so separate: who we are, how we experience the world, and what we remember, emerge through our relationships with(in) the world (Merleau-Ponty 2013, Ingold and Vergunst 2008, Deleuze and Guattari 2013, Bender 2006). People shape landscapes through the ‘porous location of bodies and objects within and through spaces’, inscribing them with the social and collective histories of daily life (Djohari et al. 2018: 352). Through the act of walking in the city (De Certeau 2011, Ingold and Vergunst 2008), walkers become part of the city, turning spaces into ‘places’ (Low and Zuniga 2008) by investing meaning and practice in each footfall.

‘Walking contributes to the culture of local places. In some places, such as the USA, there is a “car culture”; in others, such as Denmark, there is a distinct walking culture [...]. People choose to walk as a part of their experience of the city, often intentionally, but also habitually. Public transportation is also related to the mobility culture of places. Some choose to avoid public transportation in order to escape the necessity of sharing space with strangers and others choose it for this very reason’ (Shortell 2018: 134).

When walking is combined with talking and acts designed to anchor particular histories to locations, the city as place is inscribed with a very physical and embodied sense of the past.

Memory is important to sense of place because it is one of the means through which people are ‘in’ places; as Jones explains ‘Most people live and work in landscapes familiar to them and thus their immersion in them is temporal and memorial as well as performative/embodied and spatia’ (2011: 5). Memory making and remembering are consequently physical, sensorial activities in which smells, sounds, feelings and tastes become part of the fabric of our memories and how we experience the places we inhabit. How bodies remember (Kleinman and Kleinman 1994), ‘how societies remember’ (Connerton 1989) and, as we propose here, how cities remember, is through this deeply interpenetrating, embodied process co-created between people and the landscape. Ghost walks exemplify this, demonstrating how tours create avenues for ‘lived’ experiences that make history a ‘felt’ sensation, something ‘real’, tangible and present in the landscape.

Ghost walks thus constitute ‘ostensive’ activities in which spectral narratives are not merely recounted by the guide, but re-enacted and experienced by participants through direct, co-participatory interaction with specific locations. The performative memorialising we encountered in some of the ghost walks through stories and historical moments is particularly significant in relation to their commemorative role. According to French and Wilson, framing narratives around ghostly and paranormal experiences is crucial to informing and affirming the legitimacy of their psycho-cultural construction. People recount feeling or experiencing ghosts rather than seeing them, and attribute this to interactive responses with the physical environment (French and Wilson 2007).³ Although visual phenomena and reporting sightings of ghosts were

³ According to Richard Wiseman, visual apparitions only account for approximately 1% of reported ghostly encounters (Wiseman 2011).

reported in the many of the walks we participated in, it was more common to hear non-visual effects and sensations described. Where visual accounts were used, they were often accompanied by descriptions of feelings typically reported as affective ‘perception of a sense of presence’ (Holt et al. 2012: 128). We heard tales of a sudden drop in temperature in a haunted locale, a smell associated with the deceased, or aural phenomena such as apparent whisperings, knockings or rappings, occasionally materialising in the odd poke in the ribs. Thomas Metzinger (2010) suggests that the often-embodied nature of such experiences evidence the phenomenological construction and reconstruction of our sense of self via our interactions with our environment, offering a (neurological) model of how place memorialises itself in us through affective interactions.

Pascal Boyer and Ramble (2010) suggest that encounters with the supernatural are memorable due to their ‘counterintuitive’ nature in contrast to ‘everyday’ ontological expectations about our environment: the attachment of the ghostly to historical sites may be understood as a strategy of social memorialisation. Associations between ghosts and landscapes (whether rural or urban) are central to ghost walk experiences, and may be facilitated by modes of thinking similar to those explored by Alfred Gell (1998) in his discussions of human agency and works of art, where ‘the creative products of a person or people become their “distributed mind” which turns their agency into their effects, as influences upon the minds of others’ (Miller 2005: 13). As Adam Reed (2002) notes in his discussion of London walking tours, the personification of place was typically employed by participants as a means of engaging with the city’s collective and social history. He describes how the past can be experienced affectively via acts of self-identification with historically significant locales framed as (non-human) persons. In the context of ghost walks, social interaction with a personified environment was enacted in more explicitly ‘human’ (albeit supernatural) terms in the form of the ghosts themselves. In this respect, the spectral narratives encoded within sites of historical significance which we encountered in our research were sometimes made manifest via participants’ ostensive performance in those narratives by explicit identification with the historical figures, and at times re-enactment of events, as well as by their collective physical co-presence to the social spaces and locations in which history and memory were (spectrally) personified and encoded.

Cityscapes can be thought of as co-creators of memories and remembering because there is an affective quality to being in the city. If we evoke the city as actor, we see that what is remembered, the *narrative*, is chosen by the tour guide, but what can be remembered through the *performance* is dictated partly by the cityscape itself. For example, the decision on where to stop and recount a story is shaped by the availability of visual and sensory cues within the environment as well as how many people can be accommodated. Guides from the ‘Brighton Lanes walk’, the ‘Unbelievers walk’ and two of the York walks all describe having to choose different locations during peak season that would accommodate large crowds and keep them out of the roads. Likewise, sensorial features were often identified that could be used to evoke an ‘atmosphere’, such as narrow alley ways or cobbled streets, or opportunities for tactile engagement with crumbling walls or visible markers of where old and new building overlapped.

The routes are carefully planned to allow the guide to draw attention to features of the city that add a specificity and an evocative richness to their narrative. In the ‘Unbelievers walk’ for example, the guide led us through a narrow, oppressive alley to a dark graveyard where he explained the working practices of graverobbers and their fears of spectres and hauntings, while pointing out its juxtaposition to the lit pub in the next street where they had notoriously waited for the burial.

As expected, hauntings are anchored to built spaces in the cities rather than open spaces. In London, the only ghosts that did not belong to buildings were in outdoor places that were now gardens but once were gallows or graveyards. In Edinburgh and Brighton, ghosts occupied buildings, streets, bridges and parks; even the ghost-Romans in York walked upon a road built of stone. While in rural areas ghosts are associated with liminal spaces between the human-made landscape and nature, the spaces between forests and clearings or else ‘the places occupied by evil spirits are nonhuman territories like swamps, jungles, and bodies of water’ (Ong 1988: 33), in a built up urbanised context ghosts are tied to a built landscape.

In picking out the feature of the cityscape, the storyteller brings the history of the city to life, and audiences are invited to co-imagine and co-experience it. They are asked to become aware of the narrow walkways, of the cobbles underfoot, to imagine the sound of footsteps, or walking in a foggy winter’s day. In York, one tour guide loudly tapped his walking cane on the cobbles as the group passed through the narrow streets of the Shambles, the echoing taps made those following him profoundly aware of the narrow space being occupied. In other walks, participants were encouraged to pay attention to the details of moss patterns on gravestones, or changes in brickwork that revealed the transition between old and new structures. Where the trappings of modernity have led to new or reconstructed buildings, the storytellers ask audiences to imagine the houses in former states. They evoke the cold or the dark by asking crowds to imagine houses without electricity, heating or running water. They point out the remnants of walls that no longer exist. They emphasise the passing of time through houses that have become shops, or churches that have become museums, or reminders that central London was once fields.

As Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (1982) note, historically and cross-culturally death, dying and the spilling of blood are often seen as necessary to social renewal. Thus sites of narrated spectral activity which form the focus of ghost walks not only signify moments of historical significance through the lens of violent events, but they invest the social and architectural changes of city’s built landscapes with a sense of wonder through the lives that were given that provide each city with stories that shape their histories. Through the combination of immersion into a physical, sensorial cityscape and deft storytelling, audiences are taught how to read and feel the gravitas of the landscape through ghostly tales. As ghosts become more ‘real’ to the walker, the city also becomes hyper ‘real’: we stop to really see it, to feel it, it becomes more alive.

Populating the Haunted City: Conclusions

While it is possible to view the deviation from the mournful conventions of dark tourism as in some way exploitative or disrespectful, here we hope to have shown that instead this is a profoundly generative process that invests the city and its former inhabitants with continued meaning. Ghost stories narrate histories that simultaneously distance the tragic and horrific events of the past while expressing the ‘character’ of the city and its people through the selective recounting of its past. In the recounting of stories ghosts are conjured, made real and corporeal, through tales that encourage anticipation of the uncanny, and the prickly sensation or tactile encounters that come from immersion into a spectral cityscape. The heightened emotional state achieved by invoking ghosts makes histories more vivid for audiences being inducted into death-based narratives of the city. It is the materiality of the streets and built spaces alongside the narrative guidance that make the experience of walking in the haunted city an act of making and remaking the city itself. Through the sensory, visual and performative experiences evoked from immersion into a suddenly hyper real cityscape, the city and its history become something far more real, immediate and tangible. While similar ghost-free storied walks through urban spaces might assist engagement with the city, the introduction of the spectral and uncanny in these walks leads to a heightened sense of being in the place, while the attention to the deaths inherent in hauntings lend a sense of gravity to the stories. The result is a particularly affective induction to the histories of the cities.

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