

I have to commend Montgomery for his conscientious devotion to such a crucial set of notions, but personally, as a psychologist with a speciality in the consciousness of schizophrenia, I thought perhaps the design of psychiatric asylums and the perspective of the contemporary insane might have been considered. However, this omission is nothing new. It has been said that schizophrenia is ‘the sacred symbol of psychiatry’, yet it is well known that schizophrenics are in fact some of the most vulnerable, poor citizens in today’s society. Kiyo Izumi (1971) interestingly has taken L.S.D. as an architect to design facilities for the care of the mentally ill. On reading this tome from cover to cover, I was reminded of the rare title by John Curtis Gowan (1974), *Development of the Psychedelic Individual*, a valuable psychological treasure trove of self-actualization.

Montgomery unquestionably highlights relevant ideas for the future of all mankind. *Happy City* will change the way you think about urban life and is a universal wake up call for the human race. Is this an essential title for the existential analysts? Yes. In their daily work with standard clientele, this work might be of use to ground the analysand in the reality and companionship of civilization. I think the knowledge contained within these pages is applicable to every individual on their quest to individuation in the world of inter-psychic recovery and cognitive nourishment. I recommend this volume as a thoroughly well-researched, agreeably written title for existential colleagues.

Gregory M. Westlake

References

- Aaronson, B. & Osmond, H. (1971). *Psychedelics: The uses and implications of hallucinogenic drugs*. London. Schenkman Publishing Company.
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A Ghost Story

Dir. David Lowery (2017)

Who would have thought that so much emotion, heartache and loneliness could be portrayed by an Oscar-winning actor who for the most part is covered by a sheet with only two black holes as eyes, that somewhat cheesy but familiar representation of all things ghostly? *A Ghost Story* is an intriguing reflection on time, loneliness, memory, existence, death and grieving not from the perspective of those left behind, but instead, unusually, from those who have died. The DVD cover and movie poster carry the strapline ‘It’s all about time’ and indeed *A Ghost Story* is very much a meditation on the theme. Even though it clocks in at only ninety minutes,

this is a film that requires patience. It took time (no pun intended) for me to be drawn in, but once there I was fascinated. Scenes are, in the main, either short and snappy or long and lingering with very little action, the latter of which reminds me of the films of Michael Haneke. It is one of a number of ways in which the director David Lowery plays with the elasticity of time.

C (Casey Affleck) and M (Rooney Mara) are a young couple preparing to move out of their rural home. Something goes bump in the night and shocks them out of sleep, but a check of the house finds nothing. Sleepily they return to bed. In the next frame we see the exterior of their home and a thin veil of smoke drifts across it. The camera slowly pans around to a car accident and we see C dead at the wheel. In the morgue, M is left to identify his body. She follows the attendant out and we are left lingering for what seems an age with the body lying under a sheet on the trolley. Suddenly, C's body sits bolt upright. He has become a ghost. Leaving the morgue, the sheeted spirit glides through the hospital and at the end of a corridor a 'rip' opens up in the wall, with the inevitable appearance of white light into which C is expected to step to move on to the next world... wherever and whatever that might be. However, the ghost of C declines the opportunity and the rip closes. Instead he makes his way back home, where he begins to sit out time.

As is the experience in the therapeutic space, time is not linear in *A Ghost Story*. Just as a client's narrative weaves through past, present and future, and back again, C's journey as a ghost takes him at one point right back to the arrival of the first European settlers in the area where his house is located, at another to a distant future when a sprawling city has grown in its place. It is hinted prior to C's death that there is tension in his relationship with M and that they have become isolated from each other, and there are personal events the ghost returns to as an observer. It is almost as if the ghost is attempting to give history and context to the situation it now finds itself in.

M's sense of grief is encapsulated in a scene where she comes home to find that her landlady has left a chocolate pie and a note:

'I'm so very sorry. Please call me if you need me. P.S. Let me know when it would be good to send over the painter for an estimate.'

This is a nice touch, reminding us that often people are not comfortable with other people's grief. There is a desire to see them move on as quickly as possible. M reads the note, looks at the pie, aimlessly rinses crockery, throws things in the garbage, sorts through mail, then grabs a spoon, sits on the floor and eats almost the whole pie, before jumping up and racing

to the bathroom where she throws up. Her mechanical movements are those of someone un-present in grief, all the while being observed in helpless silence by C.

Through a series of vignettes we see M starting to get back into the flow of life as a new date drops her home, she packs all of C's clothes away, she repaints the house, unaware (or unconcerned?) that C watches all the time. Inevitably, we see a removals van and M drives off, leaving her past behind.

She also leaves behind a reason for the ghost to linger. While redecorating, M writes something on a piece of paper, folds it and inserts it into a crack in the door frame before painting over it and sealing it in, at the same time sealing C's fate. His ghost, determined to read the note, is stuck.

His grief, if indeed he is grieving at all, is harder to gauge. Using the sheet motif to represent the ghost is a masterstroke. It could easily have been all a bit ridiculous, however the direction is such that it is pulled off to great effect. We can rarely be sure of what the ghost is thinking or how it is feeling as it stands there observing people, decay, emptiness, day, night, silence, noise, life, destruction, regeneration. It is just a sheet. In a way, this is how it should be... the dead do not have emotions or feelings. They have become frozen in time and place. We are more often than not left to reach our own conclusions as to what the ghost might be feeling. In effect, we are asked to put ourselves in the ghost's position, and perhaps all that can be done is to think of how we might feel if it were us.

The one time C asserts his other-worldly presence and lets humans know he is there is when a Hispanic single mother and her two young children move in. He is clearly not happy with the intrusion and lets his rage be known by making the lights flicker and throwing crockery around like a bad-tempered poltergeist. It is the only moment that the viewer is left in no doubt how the ghost is truly feeling.

One beautifully poignant scene occurs when C looks out a window to discover another ghost residing in the house next door. Through the use of subtitles we hear their otherwise silent conversation. "I am waiting for someone," the other ghost informs him. "Who?" he asks. "I can't remember," is the reply, as the neighboring ghost drops its head forlornly. Even then we can only guess at C's response to this. The camera lingers and pulls back from his motionless figure through the window, as he continues to stare outside. It is a moving moment and we are given a visceral sense of how trapped in time and place they truly are. The world of the living has moved on, it is the dead that are being forgotten and are therefore losing their sense of place and purpose.

A Ghost Story turns Sartre's maxim 'everything has been figured out, except how to live' on its head. Instead, the ghost of C seems to struggle throughout the film in figuring out how to die. He is stuck between life and a true, final death, existing among the living but not living himself. Not

unlike, in many ways, how some of my clients have described they are only existing in this world and not truly living. One can only wonder how C feels as he stand there listening to a man, who is attending a party in the house in another time (before or after his death? who knows?), providing an admonishment on the futility of achieving things in life in order to be remembered, how meaningless in the end it is to want to be remembered, be that by friends, family or the whole world, because at some point even Earth and the galaxy itself will cease to exist. As the man looks up at a flickering light bulb (perhaps caused by C's response to his lacerating monologue?), the following shot shows the same light fitting in a cobwebbed and deserted, decaying house. Humans have ceased to exist there, forgotten by time. The monologue itself has been forgotten too.

Anyone expecting a traditional horror story is bound to be disappointed. These are not ghosts that cause much concern to the living. However, *A Ghost Story* is a brilliant and creative examination of perhaps the most horrific realities that all of us face, that of our non-being and the fact that, when our time is up and the living stop grieving for us, our lives might just mean very little in the grand scheme of things. Strangely, as the film ended, the quote attributed to Joseph Stalin came to my mind: "A single death is a tragedy. A million deaths is a statistic." I wonder why?

Dean Andrews

David Cotterrell, installation artist

www.cotterrell.com

On 16 June 2019, the SEA organized as part of the national Creativity and Wellbeing Week a visit to the London studio of installation artist David Cotterrell. Ten psychotherapists and psychologists joined the artist to discuss some of his work, which addresses our experience of being human in a world that is at once communal and divided.

I am walking down a quiet, cobbled street. A slight breeze in my hair, the birds are singing, a park on my left. Finally, a glass door on my right and inside a circle of people, it must be here. Walking in, I sense a slight relief, a few familiar faces. Soon, Cotterrell starts to speak, first about becoming an artist and then about his decision not to produce art destined for musea or those who can afford to pay for his work, but rather for all of us. I am rapt.

Cotterrell expresses a fundamental concern with a prescriptive, narrow definition of art. Nowadays we tend to assume that art always had the limited conception we associate with it. We have forgotten that only during