

Memory as Presence: Ritual and the Philosophy of The Ghosts Movement

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22/07/2025

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1: Abstract

In a cultural landscape dominated by immediacy, productivity, and isolation, *The Ghosts Movement* offers a quietly radical alternative: a philosophy of presence grounded not in detachment, but in memory, ritual, and shared time. This essay explores the theoretical, emotional, and practical underpinnings of the movement, positioning it as a response to the erosion of communal ritual in secular Western life. Drawing on thinkers such as Charles Taylor, Byung-Chul Han, bell hooks, and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, it examines how the *Ghosts Movement* reclaims the sacred through everyday practices of remembering, listening, and presence.

Rather than retreating into the 'now' as a form of bypass, the movement invites participants to walk consciously with both light and dark, to honour the ghosts we carry as part of the fabric of living time. Memory is not treated as nostalgia, but as a portal to embodied presence. Ritual is not reserved for religion, but rediscovered through silence, circles, and gestures of ordinary reverence.

Through an analysis of the movement's manifesto, trilogy of books, and weekly reflections, this paper argues that the *Ghosts Movement* enacts a living philosophy, one that bridges individual and collective experience, and reweaves time as relationship rather than escape.

2. Introduction: The Return to Presence

Something is fraying in the fabric of modern life. Beneath the accelerating demands of productivity and digital performance, a quieter hunger persists not simply for stillness, but for meaning. Over the past two decades, cultural responses to this hunger have increasingly focused on the 'now.' From popular mindfulness programmes to bestselling books urging us to escape the mind and embrace the present, the prevailing invitation has been one of detachment: to let go of the past, ignore the future, and locate truth in the immediacy of the current moment.

The Ghosts Movement offers a different proposition.

Rather than severing presence from memory, it invites a return to presence through memory. Instead of treating the past as an obstacle, it recognises it as a field - emotional, embodied, and relational - in which meaning continues to live. Presence here is not a performance of calm, but a practice of remembrance. And time is not something to escape, but to walk with.

Founded through a series of written works including a poetic manifesto, a trilogy of reflective books, and three volumes of weekly practices, the *Ghosts Movement* is not a school of thought, but a living rhythm. It emerged from ordinary life, and continues to unfold through gestures rather than dogma. In its view, ritual does not require religion, nor does presence require silence. What it does require is a willingness to hold what has been, even when it aches.

In doing so, the movement does not flatten emotion into peace, nor lightwash pain into gratitude. It holds duality as sacred - sorrow and grace, memory and forgetting, love and loss. Light is honoured, but not at the expense of shadow. The very title of the movement affirms this: we are not trying to banish ghosts, but to walk with them.

While deeply personal, this approach is not individualistic. It offers a relational return to presence through community, memory, and time shared rather than conquered. In an era where depth is often replaced with immediacy, and complexity with clarity, the *Ghosts Movement* reawakens the slow, sacred, collective weight of being.

This essay follows that rhythm. Through a reflective and philosophical lens, it explores the thinning of ritual in secular time, the role of memory as presence, and the practices that emerge when we stop fleeing the past. In doing so, it situates the *Ghosts Movement* not only as a response to cultural loss, but as a living proposal - a model of how we might once again belong to time, each other, and ourselves.

3. Time Has Thinned: Ritual Loss in the Modern West

In much of the Western world, ritual has become a faint echo - a form half-remembered, often stripped of meaning and reduced to repetition. Where it once marked transitions, anchored grief, and wove individuals into collective time, it now appears as something optional, even quaint. Baptisms become photo opportunities. Funerals are compressed into efficient, forty-minute services. Birthdays balloon into spectacle while death is increasingly sanitised. In the spaces between, we often find only fragments: the candle someone lights for a parent long gone; the bench someone visits without speaking.

As philosopher Charles Taylor has observed, the modern secular age did not simply replace faith with reason - it flattened time. In the absence of shared cosmologies and community rituals, our sense of sequence has shifted from cyclical to linear, from relational to performative. Time has become something to manage, optimise, or escape. We are encouraged to live efficiently, not meaningfully.

The result is a cultural thinning - not only of time, but of presence. As Byung-Chul Han writes in *The Burnout Society*, we no longer know how to pause. Instead of spiritual fatigue, we suffer from 'excess positivity' - the pressure to always produce, optimise, and perform. Rest is rebranded as productivity. Even grief is expected to resolve on schedule.

Into this landscape, the *Ghosts Movement* returns something older - not nostalgia, but depth. It does not aim to reconstruct religious systems, but to retrieve the sacred function of ritual: not belief, but belonging. In its language, we don't move through time alone. We carry memory with us. We walk with the unseen. And we recognise that every life is layered - not just in chronology, but in feeling.

This recognition matters. The loss of ritual is not just a social inconvenience; it is an emotional dislocation. Without shared ways to mark, pause, or witness, we are left without collective mirrors. Joy goes unanchored. Grief goes unwitnessed. Transitions blur. Silence becomes absence rather than space.

The Ghosts Movement speaks into this silence, not with noise but with presence. Its manifesto is not a blueprint, but a field. It offers no dogma, only reminders. Among them: that time can be returned to; that memory is not noise but threadwork; and that ritual need not be grand or inherited - it can be the simple act of lighting a candle, pausing before a doorway, or speaking a name aloud.

We live in an era where we are taught to move on. The movement suggests instead that we stay with - that we reweave time not through escape, but through quiet return. In that return, meaning deepens. And what felt lost begins to pulse again.

4. Memory as Portal: Holding the Past Without Fixing It

Memory, in many contemporary cultures, is often seen as something to manage or overcome. Therapy asks us to process it. Productivity culture encourages us to forget it. Wellness industries invite us to reframe it into something palatable. Across this landscape, one thread remains clear: we are not meant to *stay* with memory - especially not the dark, the complicated, or the unresolved.

The *Ghosts Movement* proposes something quieter, and more difficult: to hold memory without fixing it. To allow the past to remain a living presence, not a closed chapter. This is not the same as nostalgia, which yearns for a return. Nor is it trauma repetition, which recycles pain. It is a practice of reverence - a way of letting what has been continue to speak, softly, into what is becoming.

In the manifesto's own words, 'Memory is not something you look at. It is something you *stand inside*.' Here, the past is not distant; it is somatic. It lives in muscle and scar, in rhythm and pause. What a person remembers is not always visual, sometimes it is the tightening in the chest before certain names, the unexpected tears at the smell of pine, the ache that returns each year without calendar.

This understanding places memory not only in the mind but in the body. bell hooks writes that 'the body remembers, the bones remember, the joints remember.' Memory, then, is not static content to be retrieved but a relationship to be felt. In trauma theory, this is echoed in Bessel van der Kolk's work on how the body stores what the mind may forget. But the *Ghosts Movement* goes further still, it treats this not only as pathology but as presence. What if memory is sacred, not broken? What if the body's remembering is not a wound but a whisper?

This is especially powerful when viewed communally. In a society that often individualises experience, memory can become isolated, a private burden, a personal failure to "move on." But the movement reframes it as something shared. We carry what our parents could not say. We echo the grief of ancestors never named. We live in houses filled with absences, of those who left, or those who never got to speak.

By recognising memory as a portal, the movement invites us not to relive but to *re-enter*. To allow ourselves to be shaped by what still has shape. This includes joy and warmth, not only pain. The sound of a grandmother humming in the kitchen. The weight of a sibling's hand before goodbye. These are not 'past events', they are presences, still active, still shaping.

The trilogy deepens this view by treating each book as a time-layered field: *Ghosts of Deep Time* maps ancestral and geological memory; *Ghosts of Living Time* inhabits the domestic, relational now; and *Ghosts Beyond Time* walks with the ache of what has not yet happened. In each, memory is not content but connection.

The weekly reflections, too, offer a living ritual practice, not as instruction, but as invitation. They do not ask the reader to 'let go,' but to lean in. Not to rewrite the past, but to return to it gently, with breath and presence. Each reflection offers a space not for answers, but for recognition.

In this way, the *Ghosts Movement* returns memory to its rightful place, not as a problem to be solved, but as a portal to be honoured. What we carry may be heavy. But when held in presence, it can become sacred again.

5. Between Light and Dark: A Dual Philosophy of Presence

In many modern spiritualities, light is exalted. It becomes a shorthand for growth, clarity, awakening, peace. Darkness, by contrast, is pathologized, something to purge, overcome, or move through. In this light-seeking frame, the shadow becomes a stage, not a place. It is something one must pass through to return to radiance.

The *Ghosts Movement* breaks with this. It does not offer light instead of dark, but *with* it. It does not see shadow as temporary or inferior, but as sacred in its own right. Presence, in this philosophy, is not about choosing one side of the spectrum, it is about learning to sit with both. To stay in the middle of the contradiction. To honour the ache, and the warmth that arrives beside it.

This duality is not metaphorical; it is lived. The manifesto speaks of ‘noticing the light, noticing the shadow’, not as a sequence, but as a rhythm. Joy and sorrow co-exist. Absence and belonging intertwine. A single memory can hold safety and loss. A single silence can feel both empty and full. Rather than trying to solve this, the movement asks us to stay.

This is where the language of ghosts becomes particularly potent. A ghost, after all, is neither here nor gone. It is presence inside absence. Emotion with no body. A memory that still moves. To walk with ghosts is to admit that we are not only shaped by clarity, we are shaped by the invisible, the unspoken, the unresolved.

This is not a passive acceptance of pain. It is a way of recognising its shape without turning away. bell hooks called this ‘loving justice’, a form of truth-telling that includes tenderness. In the *Ghosts Movement*, this tenderness extends even to the parts of ourselves we have disowned: the argument we regret, the name we can’t say, the child we once were.

In one of the weekly reflections, the reader is invited to pause and ask: *What memory do you return to in the dark?* There is no prompt to fix it. Only to witness. Other reflections ask when rage opened something up, or when silence held more truth than words. These are not mood boosters. They are *presencing tools*, ways of noticing both light and dark without rushing to resolution.

The trilogy echoes this structure. *Ghosts of Living Time* lingers in domestic thresholds where conflict and closeness live side by side. *Ghosts Beyond Time* walks with the ache of potential loss, not because it is morbid, but because it is true. Love, it reminds us, carries the weight of what it could lose. Hope is real not because it denies endings, but because it includes them.

In this way, duality becomes a practice, not a theory. It shows up in circles, where someone weeps and someone laughs, and both are welcome. It shows up in homes, where joy comes with exhaustion, and memory arrives without warning. The movement does not seek purity. It seeks presence.

To hold both is not weakness. It is strength of another kind, the strength to stay with discomfort, the strength to not shut down joy just because sorrow stands beside it. This is not a middle ground of compromise, but a field of wholeness.

We live in a time that privileges clarity. The *Ghosts Movement* reclaims complexity, not as confusion, but as truth. We are made of many things. And presence means walking with them all.

6. The Sound of Real Life: Honouring Memory Amid Noise

Memory does not wait for quiet. It lives in the middle of things, in footsteps on kitchen tiles, in children interrupting, in a kettle beginning to boil. The idea that reflection requires silence, stillness, or solitude is not only unrealistic, it's a misunderstanding of how memory works. The *Ghosts Movement* holds a different truth: presence happens in the real texture of life, not outside it.

Too often, people imagine memory work as something rarefied or sacred in the traditional sense, something that can only happen in candlelit silence or guided meditation. But memory doesn't care about conditions. It rises when it's ready. Sometimes in grief. Sometimes in laughter. Sometimes when you're chasing a toddler or scrolling your phone. The invitation is not to silence your environment, but to notice what calls your attention *within* it.

A *Memory Circle* might include crying children, the distant hum of traffic, or the fidgeting of someone nervous to speak. These are not distractions. They're part of the presence field. The circle is not a break from life; it's a way of *making space inside it*. This is where the *Ghosts Movement* diverges from many other approaches to presence, such as those that chase tranquility or mindfulness through detachment. Here, presence includes interruption. It makes room for sound, chaos, and daily reality.

This is especially vital in a world where presence is often sold as a luxury - a retreat, a product, a silent yoga mat in a sun-drenched room. But presence isn't something you buy or achieve. It's something you return to. And often, that return happens in the middle of dinner, in the breath before shouting, in the way someone says your name when you feel like disappearing.

Noise is not the enemy of presence. In the *Ghosts Movement*, it is part of the container. A family circle might carry the background hum of conversation or the clang of dishes. A walk with a friend might include detours, laughter, and the rustle of trees. What matters is not the removal of noise, but the intention to *hold memory inside it*.

The heartbeat of a *Memory Circle* isn't silence. It's *witnessing*. And that can happen anywhere. In the garden. In the park. In a living room full of restless limbs and open snacks. A shared breath, a gentle prompt, or a moment of stillness can thread through all of it.

Because presence, here, is not separation from life. It is *a deeper arrival into it*. And in that arrival, memory speaks.

7. Ritual Without Religion: Practising the Sacred in Everyday Life

Ritual has long been tied to religion. It is assumed to belong in temples, churches, synagogues, mosques. It comes with robes, candles, sacred texts. And for many, those forms still carry meaning. But for many others, the formal pathways to the sacred no longer fit. Belief has shifted. Tradition has loosened. And in the space that remains, something aches.

What the *Ghosts Movement* offers is not a new religion. It offers a way to remember the sacred in forms that are quiet, embodied, and personal, not inherited through belief, but discovered through attention.

Ritual, here, is not performance. It is a pause. A breath taken at the same time each week. A candle lit not for God, but for memory. A walk to a familiar tree, where presence settles and something unspoken is honoured. These acts are not small because they are private. They are sacred because they are *chosen*, and repeated with care.

This is not new. Many indigenous and ancestral cultures have always known that sacredness does not depend on institution. It depends on rhythm, relationship, and reverence. The *Ghosts Movement* draws from this deeper knowing, not by appropriating any tradition, but by returning to a fundamental truth: what we tend becomes sacred.

In the trilogy, this truth is carried across time. In *Ghosts of Deep Time*, ritual is embedded in the land, in stone, soil, and ancestral pathways. In *Ghosts of Living Time*, it enters the body, in the stir of a child's breakfast, the rhythm of laundry folded with care. In *Ghosts Beyond Time*, it moves with tenderness into the unknown, marking grief before it happens, honouring what may one day be lost.

Each book is paired with a companion of weekly reflections, one for each week of the year. These are not tasks, but invitations. They do not tell you how to heal. They offer a doorway into memory, into presence, into a quieter rhythm of being. One week might ask what silence has taught you. Another might ask who you are when no one is watching. They are not meant to fix. They are meant to reawaken.

These rituals are not replacements for therapy, nor substitutes for community care. But they are a kind of remembering of what it means to treat life as textured, storied, and sacred. Even when it hurts. Even when it's ordinary.

In this movement, ritual does not require belief. It requires attention. That is all. Attention to the past, to the people we carry, to the selves we've abandoned, to the quiet things that ask to be tended. Attention, repeated with reverence, becomes sacred.

This is why the movement does not demand faith. It invites presence. And presence when returned to again and again becomes its own form of prayer.

8. Beyond the Now: A Presence That Holds Time

We live in an age obsessed with the present moment. Popular teachings on mindfulness, productivity, and spirituality echo a single refrain: be here now. Focus on this breath. This task. This step. This is where peace lives, they say. This is where freedom begins.

There is wisdom in that simplicity. But there is also a loss.

The Ghosts Movement does not reject the now. It simply refuses to make it the only place presence can live. It invites us to inhabit time in fuller layers, not just what is immediate, but what echoes. What lingers. What hasn't happened yet but is already being felt.

This is a radical departure from the idea that presence is a narrow slice of consciousness. In the movement, presence is expansive. It holds memory and anticipates grief. It is found not only in the breath, but in the *weight* of that breath, shaped by a lifetime of other breaths, other silences, other moments of forgetting and return.

In *Ghosts of Deep Time*, presence stretches back through ancestral memory, land-based knowing, the deep sediment of unspoken histories. In *Ghosts of Living Time*, it anchors itself in the body, in routine, in rupture, in the rawness of daily life. And in *Ghosts Beyond Time*, it reaches forward, into the ache of future loss, into the love we already fear losing, into the tenderness of what we are becoming.

This is not theoretical. It is emotional. When someone dies, presence does not vanish. It changes form. When a relationship ends, something remains. A ghost, perhaps. A sound. A question we never asked. These are not signs of brokenness. They are signs that presence includes more than immediacy. It includes what we carry.

The movement honours this complexity. It does not reduce presence to mindfulness. It treats presence as a living relationship with time, a willingness to feel the layers, not flatten them. To walk through a place and feel what once happened there. To hold the hand of someone you love and sense, without words, that one day you won't.

This is not a loss of peace. It is a deeper kind of peace, one that doesn't depend on control, or clarity. One that can sit with both sorrow and stillness. One that trusts time to be thick and strange and sacred.

The weekly reflections guide this layered presence gently. One week might ask you to notice what is emerging. Another might ask you to sit beside a memory that still speaks. Another might ask what future moment you are already grieving. There is no pressure to resolve. Only to notice.

Presence, here, is not an escape. It is not the destination. It is the fabric that holds past, present, and future in a single felt thread. And by walking that thread, we remember that we are not only alive now, we are alive across time.

9. Conclusion: A Movement Rooted in Remembering

The Ghosts Movement is not a brand. It is not a method. It is not a spiritual shortcut for those who need fixing. It is a slow, quiet invitation to notice, to notice what you carry, what you've forgotten, and what still remembers you.

At its centre is a simple truth: presence is layered, and memory is one of its deepest forms.

We are not only who we are now. We are shaped by the lives we've lived, the people we've held, the words we never said, and the futures we quietly fear. These don't vanish when we meditate. They don't dissolve when we breathe deeply. They ask to be acknowledged. They ask to be included.

And when they are, when memory is welcomed back into presence, something shifts. Not because we understand more, but because we are no longer turning away.

This is the work of the movement: not to escape pain, but to honour it. Not to seek light alone, but to walk with the dark too. Not to chase the now as the only place of peace, but to feel presence as a living rhythm that echoes across time.

It is not theoretical. It is lived. In circles. In quiet rituals. In the holding of a cracked mug that belonged to your father. In the retelling of a story you were once ashamed of. In the breath you take just before you say, 'I remember.'

The manifesto is short enough to read in a sitting. The books offer a slow unfolding. The weekly reflections meet you where you are. There are no steps. No rules. Just a rhythm. Just a return.

And maybe that's enough. In a world that moves too fast, forgets too quickly, and numbs too easily, this movement is a reminder not of what you must become, but of what was never truly gone.

Memory is not a trap. It is a portal. And when we walk through it, not alone, not hurried, we begin to find our way back to the kind of presence that holds everything.

Even the ghosts.

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11. About the Author

Pedro Malha is a writer of poetic nonfiction, ritual philosophy, and speculative presence. He is the originator of the *Ghosts Movement*, a slow, reflective path that honours memory not as something finished, but as a presence still alive in the ordinary. His work explores what it means to live with both past and future woven into the present moment, and how ritual, presence, and memory can serve as anchors in a culture that often forgets.

Born in the UK to Portuguese parents, Pedro grew up within overlapping worlds - love-filled, chaotic, migratory, and layered with unspoken stories. A childhood shaped by deep affection and early invisibility taught him to listen for what wasn't said. Struggling with undiagnosed dyslexia, he learned to read not just words, but the spaces between them. That slowness, he now says, became his first teacher. Presence came not from effort but from attunement.

He went on to build businesses, explore spirituality, survive personal collapse, and awaken to a quieter voice beneath it all, the one that stayed when everything else fell away. The *Ghosts Manifesto* began not as an idea but as a rhythm, a whisper that slowly took form during years of listening, loss, healing, and return.

Pedro is the author of *Ghosts of Deep Time*, *Ghosts of Living Time*, and *Ghosts Beyond Time*, a trilogy that explores ancestral memory, daily ritual, and the legacy of presence through time. Each book is accompanied by a year-long weekly companion to support practice and reflection. His work does not promise transcendence. It invites noticing. It offers a slower rhythm. It honours what we carry, even the parts we never named.

He lives with his wife, children, and three cats with an uncanny habit of sleeping on important pages. He writes slowly, edits compulsively, and is still not quite sure whether 'echo' or 'resonance' is the better word, though he's open to revisiting it again.

Learn more at <https://ghostsmovement.com>