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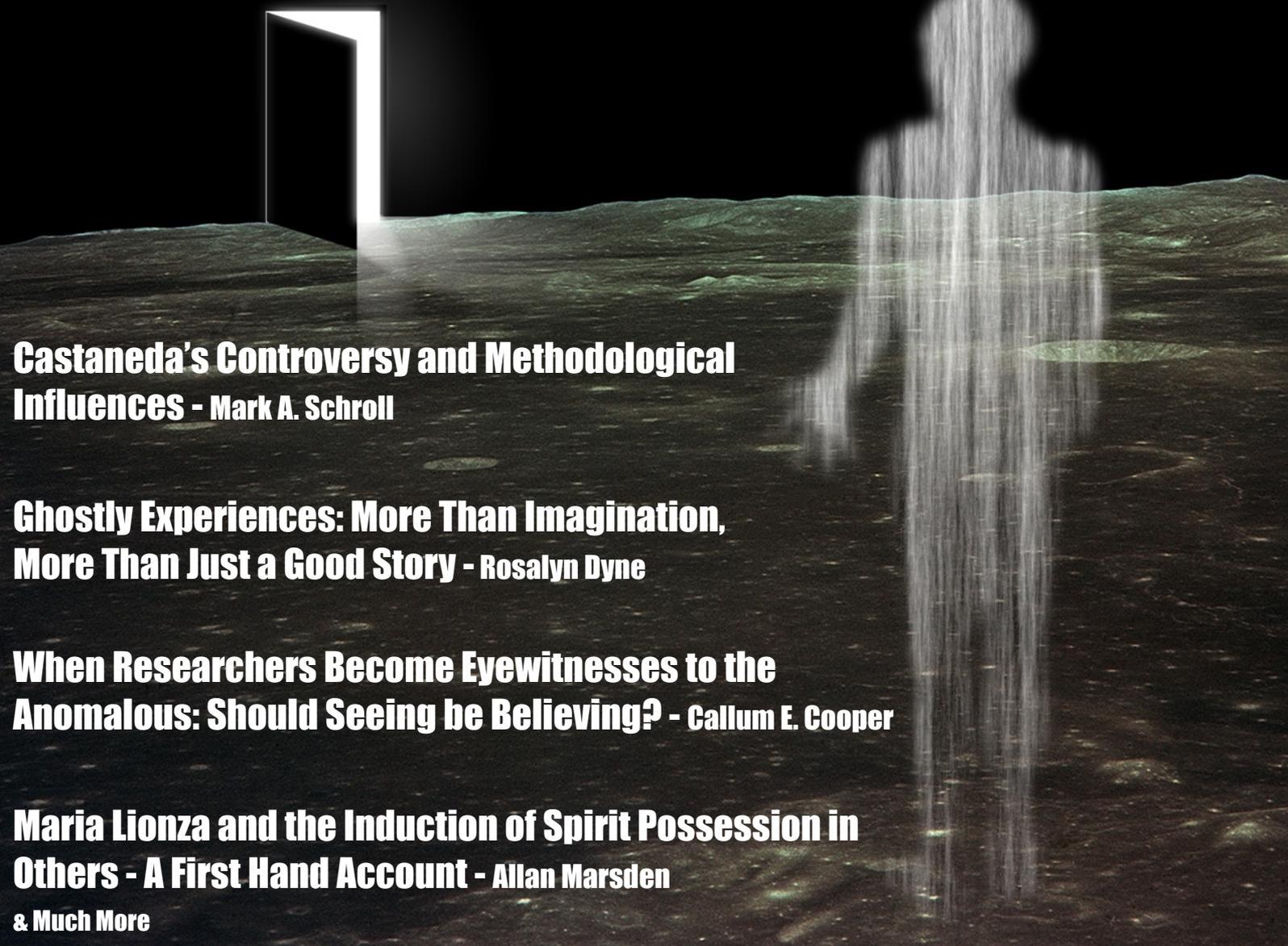
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Introduction

Welcome to the second issue of "Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal". The general theme for this issue is "Paranormal Encounters in the Field". In the context of the articles presented here "the field" is a term with a variety of definitions: from the exotic locales investigated by anthropologists, and the haunted house of the ghost-hunter, to the laboratory setting of parapsychological research.

By now I have written and talked about my undergraduate fieldwork experience at the Bristol Spirit Lodge, at differing levels of detail, in various places. I want this short article, however, to deal specifically with the most significant event, at least in my opinion, of my fieldwork experience: the occasion when, during a trance development session, I lost control of my left arm.

It was normal practice for the Spirit Lodge to conduct mediumship development sittings when the regular medium was, for whatever reason, unable to attend. During such sittings all present members were invited to meditate in the Lodge in the hope that spirits might make themselves known through any receptive vessel. The method, therefore, was simply to meditate and see what happened. At the time I considered this an opportunity to relax in a calming environment, so I closed my eyes and allowed myself to relax, breathing normally.

I wasn't expecting anything out of the ordinary to occur, so I just sat back and enjoyed the music. Soon, though, I began to feel my pulse become more pronounced, and my head began to slump forward as though I was falling asleep, despite maintaining an awareness of my body. This was very strange, as I was conscious of the fact that I must have looked quite odd to those with their eyes open, but I was unable to do anything about it: my head slumped forward heavily of its own accord. The sensation of detachment from my body grew and I began to feel as though I was floating just behind my body, but very close to it. I could still feel my body, but was aware that some sort of shift in the location of "myself" had occurred.

At the peak of this peculiar sensation I heard the seance leader say that she sensed a presence with me, over my shoulder, and sure enough I sensed it too. It was at this moment I realised that my left arm was beginning to move: slowly at first, and then increasing in rapidity until my arm was shaking around erratically. Once again I was self conscious of the fact that I must have looked quite strange to the other sitters, and yet despite this I was unable to stop my arm from doing what it was doing.

This experience (amongst others of a less intense degree) altered my appreciation of the belief in mediumship. I realised that there were indeed experiences that could be classed as "mediumistic", and that even if there was no paranormal component involved in the development of mediumship traditions, then at least there was a physiological basis - experiences that feel as though they are the product of an external agent influencing the body.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Paranthropology, it certainly contains a lot of interesting food for thought.

Jack Hunter

Castaneda's Controversy and Methodological Influences

by Mark A. Schroll, PhD.

This article explores Carlos Castaneda's impact on anthropology, and how this controversy continues to shape its future. We begin with a personal reflection on Stanley Krippner that leads us to Douglas Price-Williams and his relationship with Castaneda. Leading us to explore participant observation's methodological challenge, that in 1973 (when UCLA awarded Castaneda a Ph.D. in anthropology) posed a significant threat to the practice of field research whose resistance remains within EuroAmerican science.

Celebrating Krippner's 70th Birthday

On a beautiful sunny day October 6, 2002, I had the privilege of attending Krippner's 70th birthday, held in Sheep's meadow Central Park in New York City. Walking to this event with Leslie McQuade from where we had parked, she pointed to a man ahead of us and said: "that looks like Stanley." Sure enough, I called out to Stanley and we embraced each other with a warm greeting. The three of us completed walking to the party. Nearly every time Krippner introduced me, he mentioned my interest in Castaneda, and that I was organizing a symposium on Castaneda's Controversy. This introduction made me

grimace, because I do not consider myself a Castaneda scholar, yet Krippner did correctly describe my interest in this controversy; specifically its challenge to our views of subjective and objective states of reality. In subsequent conversations with Krippner he does not remember the incident this way, but he trusts my memory of these events.

Castaneda: Shaman or Sorcerer?

The Strange Tale of Douglas Price-Williams

If there was any moral to be drawn. . . . It might be said that

in an quest for magic, in any search for sorcery. . . it might be wise to first check the human heart. Rod Serling, 1960, pp. 186.

In April 2003, SAC's 23rd spring conference at the University of Las Vegas-Nevada, I chaired the symposium "Castaneda's Controversy: Examining Consciousness Studies Future." This meetings theme, "Chance Encounters with Consciousness," provided an excellent opportunity to re-examine Castaneda's

legacy that Joseph Long wisely rejected at the 1974 American Anthropological Association conference in Mexico City.¹

Summarizing (Schroll with Schwartz, 2005), Krippner believes Price-Williams' research provides clear evidence that Castaneda consistently and significantly "borrowed ideas" from Douglas without ever asking and without acknowledging their source. But, in a strange ironic twist, if Krippner's suspicions prove to be true, then Price-Williams should be proud Castaneda chose to exploit him. Because the counterculture in 1968 was ripe for Castaneda's tales of a seemingly uptight middle-class Latino whose encounters with an old Mexican Indian unveiled a non-ordinary reality, a numinous state of consciousness, and corresponding way of life that provided a serious challenge to rational secular science (Castaneda, 1968, 1971, 1972).² These *tales of power* also provided a psychological sense of *personal empowerment* for a generation seeking an alternative paradigm to EuroAmerican science's dominant story. This, says Kremer:

- Has led to well-known consequences which are highly problematic—for example, the threat of nuclear holocaust and the possibility for ecological catastrophes such as the destruction of the rain forests and the ozone layer, the pollution of air and water, nuclear accidents, and so forth (Kremer: 189, 1988).

Consequently, and I think Price-Williams will understand where this statement is coming from, it was more believable to a rebel generation for Castaneda to tell these tales than to hear the message from a white establishment anthropologist. Considering the importance of raising both public and scientific awareness of shamanism, if Castaneda had not bestowed this discussion with his charisma, colleagues such as Michael Harner (1980, 1993) might have had to invent him. The double irony is *it was a white establishment anthropologist* who had some unique insights into the clash (that has increasingly been acknowledged) between the worldview of indigenous people's, and our scientific view of the world.³

Throughout their many conversations Price-Williams noted that Carlos repeatedly mentioned a book he really wanted to write, *The Art of Sorcery*. This book would explain why sorcery is an art and not a science. Krippner said he considers sorcery to be a technology—neither science nor art. He also stated that Price-Williams had concluded that Castaneda was the embodiment of his own (Price-Williams') shadow and trickster personality; thus, knowing Castaneda benefited him toward the integration of his own shadow. In sum, while Price-Williams and Krippner agree that Castaneda's books are not important anthropological documents, these books played an important role in furthering anthropology's

investigation of shamanism. More recently Castaneda's influence lead to one of the best book's on shamanism I have ever read, Stephan V. Beyer's thoroughly researched book on ayahuasca shamanism (2009). Beyer's years of study in Peru provides an in-depth analysis of both healing shamanism, and its deadly opposite sorcery.

Castaneda's Influence on Methodology

Anthropologists (and most social scientists) prefer nomothetic or etic/quantitative analysis to ideographic or emic/qualitative methods. Challenging this etic preference, Castaneda argued that understanding shamanism requires becoming a practitioner. Sarah Williams revisits this argument:

His [i.e., Castaneda's] narratives of his interaction with the Yaqui shaman argued that one could not understand the shamanic worldview without becoming a shaman. No informant could ever convey this, because so much of it was experiential. More fundamentally yet, all the Castaneda writings proposed the idea that non-technological peoples were not primitive, and were as capable of insight as their technological counterparts; albeit in different areas of human functioning. . . . What had been categorized in anthropology as "magical thinking" was suddenly proposed as a valid perspective that the discipline must master to fulfill its self-defined task of understanding human beings and their cultures (Schwartz 2007:7, quoted in Williams:66, 2007).

My deepening inquiry toward reconciling etic/objectivity and emic/subjectivity has benefited from Castaneda's contributions to the research methodology of social science. Specifically, Castaneda's claim that the only way to truly understand shamanism is to become a practitioner supports the need for subjective narratives as the starting point of all social science research. Schroll (2010) argues:

Contemplating these concerns (which involved a cognitive reiteration of our previous discussion) led me to the hypothesis that becoming a shamanic practitioner transcends our most far-reaching nomothetic and ideographic methods. This is why shamans use precise objective methods when teaching initiates, because initiates must first liberate themselves from their enculturation, erasing the parameters of our culture that frame the symbolic construction of our worldview. Controversies as to the legitimacy of Castaneda's research do not diminish this challenge, unless we avoid discussing a somatic tradition of mystical experience (Schroll 2005). Joseph Long's interest in psi phenomena, and the many students and colleagues his inspired, support the importance of understanding this core religious experience (Long 1977). Without this, a science of consciousness would have no reason to

exist. This thesis (which will require additional experimental and field research to evaluate) rests on two central points:

1. The necessity of drawing the empirical line; that researchers need to have a personal encounter with alternate states of consciousness, anomalous cognition, and/or practice a form of energy or infomedicine, like shamanism, before they can be considered adequately prepared to assess these states of consciousness.
2. Researchers need to then initiate the process of integrating their somatic religious experience with their personal mythology of how the world works and what their place in it is (Feinstein et al, 1988; Krippner 2004, quoted in Schroll: 15, 2010).

Bringing this discussion back to the legitimacy question regarding Castaneda's work, Larry Baron points out: "one is not required to be a believer in the existence of don Juan, any more than one has to believe in God, in order to do a sociological study of the ideas presented" (Baron: 54, 1983). Baron goes on to say:

- The articulation of Castaneda's journey into the world of nonordinary reality may be effectively depicted by the use of Alfred Schutz's theory of multiple realities. . . . This affinity between Castaneda and Schurtz is not so far-fetched when one considers that Harold Garfinkel, a pioneer in ethnomethodology, was Castaneda's teacher and dissertation supervisor at UCLA (Baron: 61, 1983).

Baron offers his own ironic twist to this tale:

- Skeptics have argued that don Juan is a fiction, the protagonist in Castaneda's fantasies. . . . Although this is quite plausible, it could be that don Juan is the fictional personification of Castaneda's teacher Harold Garfinkel, keeping the world authentic by relentlessly bringing into relief our commonsense assumptions. . . . it [thus] becomes conceivable that Castaneda's books are an ethnomethodological experiment (Baron: 66, 1983).

Conclusion

Summing up Castaneda's impact on methodology:

- . . . [E]ven though ethnography and other narrative heuristic approaches are improvements on strict quantitative methods, ideographic methods also collect data in an

objective way. Data is treated as an "ontological other" or thing that is separate from the observer. This approach is not an I/Thou, Dasein [there being], or wu-wei [actionless action] orientation, which are perspectives that allow the researcher to truly become a participant observer. Similar to nomothetic methods of research, participant observation collects, analyzes, and interprets data as an I/it relationship, failing to grasp the "beingness" of the experience. Ultimately therefore, none of this is doing any good (Schroll: 15-16, 2010).

Notes

1. A summary of this symposium, plus a discussion of psi and anthropology has been published in (Schroll with Schwartz, 2005). Douglas Price-Williams has since published his magnum opus (2008).
2. Schroll explores Castaneda's contribution to methodology in (Schroll, 2010; Hunter explores similar concerns related to psi and anthropology (Hunter, 2010).
3. A more complete discussion of this point will be taken up in Part 3, "Psi and Anthropology: Shamanism and Neo-shamanism."

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The Anomalous Anthropologist: Field Experience As An Insider Medium/ Anthropologist

Paul D. Biscop, Ph.D.

Most cultural anthropologists who study spiritist phenomena typically do so in "the culture of others" as outside ethnographers. For most of the history of the discipline, fieldwork was almost always done as an outsider, with a few exceptions. Having been a Spiritualist Medium from long before I took up the profession of Cultural Anthropologist, I began my first field work at a time before the debate on insider/outsider had largely ended. While my MA defense

was grueling, by the time I defended the Ph.D., four years later, everything had changed. In any event, field work often brings change to the worker (Young & Goulet, eds., 1994), especially in the light of anomalous experiences.

My interest in anthropology began during my years in mental health as an Art Therapist/ Child Care Counselor, working with adolescents and their families from many ethnic and socioeconomic groups. I was intrigued by the connections between culture, family, personality, and behavioural issues. I hadn't then thought about religion, nor about paranormal phenomena, in relation to culture. Originally I had planned to study in cross-cultural psychiatry, documenting *pibloctoq* among northern peoples. But instead I became the anomaly I was studying, Spiritualist mediums and spirit communication (Biscop, 1981; 1985) Did I have anomalous experiences in the field? Yes, of course I had anomalous experiences, the same ones I had been having for many years as a publicly demonstrating Spiritualist medium; the other anomaly was my stepping back for a while from the practice of mediumship, while I concentrated on being the anthropologist doing fieldwork. I was the outsider/ anthropologist being the insider/Spiritualist trying to be the outsider/insider anthropologist: decidedly anomalous.

Perhaps the greatest anomaly I experienced was the profound awareness of the entrenched cultural biases which we all share, biases that become one with our character and personality in early socialization. Those biases arise first out of the long held basic **definitions of reality** of the culture we share. Because those biases begin in Primary Socialization, they become part of the unrecognized **assumptions** and **paradigms** of social interaction in our daily lives, part of our personal identity, defended against anomalous experiences as defined by the culture around and within us. In Western society, those definitions have told us that the dead do not communicate with the living, and that if they appear to do so, it is the work of "psychosis" or "The Devil"; there are no viable options other than illness or deceit, in whatever forms they take. The bias against the possible reality of spirit communication comes from within orthodox materialist science (Wallace, 2008) as well as from orthodox religions of the West, "home"; so anomalous experiences in the field tend to be excluded from the likelihood of having any ontological reality per se; they will be explained away by the stresses of fieldwork (DeVita, 1992). Even strange or unusual experiences at home will be discarded **because** we're used to strange experiences in cross-cultural encounters and really, how odd can our own culture be anyway? There is a paucity of serious open-minded anthropological fieldwork among Spiritualists in North America or Kardecists in European societies. At best, what there is, typically is a medium (forgive the pun) for their personal theoretical positions, rather than genuine responses to the phenomena and data.

For most cultural anthropologists, then, experiences of the paranormal and spiritistic probably are written off much as "mumbo-jumbo" as such things used to be called in other societies by early anthropologists. But perhaps our earliest colleagues in anthropology should be a reminder to us that we can still suffer from biases, and that we ourselves are subject to social relations of power and control that can shape our experiences even within the confines of our discipline itself, and thereby shape the way we explain the world to ourselves and to others.

On a personal level, I am a social scientist and, in general, a skeptic. Nonetheless my experience of 41 years of mediumship has given me a "preponderance of evidence" (Tymn, 2009) in support of the hypothesis that human consciousness continues after the death of the body. I cannot ignore that experience anymore than I can deny the evidence of relativity of all things cultural, while at the same time I continue to be amazed and delighted by the beauty and profundity of common humanity and their experiences.

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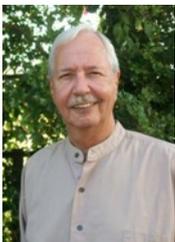
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An experiential paradigm for the anthropology of consciousness

Kim McCaul

Introduction

Many indigenous peoples and religious groups place great value on what we might call "extraordinary experiences of consciousness" and actively pursue them through rituals, ceremonies, drug use and other techniques. Anthropology's key research tool of participant observation can open us to this experiential dimension, and there are now a good number of accounts where anthropologists don't just observe the behaviour of their informants, but weave their own experiences of consciousness into the account (Young & Goulet 1994). This raises fundamental questions about the paradigm through which we view such data.

I here argue for the possibility of developing an experientially based, etic model of consciousness with which to make sense of the varied extraordinary experiences of consciousness that anthropologists collect in the field.

Extraordinary experiences

For the purposes of this paper, "extraordinary experience" encompasses altered states of consciousness such as dreams, trance and out-of-body experiences, as well as such variety of experiences as telepathy, premonition, perceptions of non-physical beings, poltergeist effects and even uncanny physical sensation.

My own extraordinary experiences started during my first undergraduate summer holidays. On the recommendation of a fellow student I spent time at a meditation center in Solo, Indonesia. The elderly Indonesian teacher taught a fairly simple meditation technique that I started to practice on a daily basis. As a result, my world started to shift. It would be a very long story to describe all that occurred at the center, or subsequently, and I want to focus on the experiences that related to my later interpretation of ethnographic texts. Some key experiences were:

- out-of-body experiences (OBEs), i.e. being conscious of myself as not in my body and my body as being asleep;
- many experiences of meeting and interacting with non-physical people during sleep states;
- auditory perceptions of voices when there was "nobody" there;
- visually perceiving, during the ordinary waking state, non-physical persons who communicate with me telepathically.

I have just summarized these events in a few words, so they may not seem like much, but when they first started they were earth shattering. As well as altering my sense of the world around me they also altered my sense of self, especially my sense of boundary between self and others. In fact, I spent quite some time wondering about my sanity, especially as I had no reference point by which to understand them.

One of the things that helped me was my anthropological reading. I developed a particular fascination with the literature on shamanism and the various spirit cults that exist around the world. I felt I could relate to a lot of the experiences that were being described, including the seemingly neurotic behavior of some shamans (some of my own behaviour probably seemed quite neurotic at times) and people's relationships with spirits, both good and bad.

Anthropological Models

I could relate less well to the anthropological modeling of those experiences. Based on my own experiences I considered informants to be describing, through cultural filters, real experiences, which the anthropologists were reducing to metaphor and symbol (Turner 1992). Depending on the analytical model, researchers would argue that spirits are actually about power relations between genders, or about the social management of neurosis or used to create social obedience. Only one thing is certain, they can't be real! As anthropologists we should be the first to realize that this attitude itself is a social construct, a point made by De Martino (2001) many years ago.

Of course not all anthropologists are reductionist. Numerous have exposed their own experiences of, for example, spirit encounter (Turner 1992), guardian spirits (Schwartz 1994) or OBE (Zurfluh 1981). Such accounts, however, usually avoid modeling of the experience, or confine themselves to the emic model of the informants.

Because of the background of the culture for which they are writing, researchers who have extraordinary experiences that they are not prepared to deny find their capacity to discuss them highly circumscribed. Adopting the discourse of the society where the experiences emerged is the most straightforward way of circumventing this social censorship. But even authors who experientially accept spirits still maintain a resistance to etic modeling. In a significant paper in which she clearly expresses her opinion that there are such things as spirits, Turner asks a series of questions:

"What are spirits?" And I continue with the thorny question, "What of the great diversity of ideas about them throughout the world? How is a student of the anthropology of consciousness, who participates during fieldwork, expected to regard all the conflicting spirit systems in different cultures? Is there not a fatal lack of logic inherent in this diversity?" And the reply: "Is this kind of subject matter logical anyway?" We also need to ask, "Have we the right to force it into logical frameworks?" (Turner 1992:30)

I would suggest that spirit systems across cultures are not as divergent as Turner suggests, that the subject matter is logical, and that we not only have the right but the obligation to create a logical framework if we want to present our research as anything other than interesting, culture specific anecdotes. If we truly want to make a contribution to a wider cross-cultural understanding of consciousness, I would argue our research must be grounded in a paradigm that allows for mutual comprehension of diverse data.

Conscial paradigm

Vieira, a Brazilian consciousness researcher, emphasizes the importance of combining personal experimentation with theoretical research. He argues that we must accept ourselves, the human consciousness, as scientific research instruments through which to obtain data (e.g. Vieira, 1994, 1997, 1999). Anthropologists know only too well that our tool of participant observation is both our strength and our weakness in the eye of the harder sciences. In Vieira's approach we engage in a participant observation not only of the world around us, but crucially also of our own microuniverse.

Based primarily of a "projection interpretation" of the OBE (Alvarado 2000), Vieira proposes that any understanding of consciousness should be built on what he calls the conscial paradigm, which includes the following premises:

- Consciousness is multidimensional, i.e. it experiences and manifests in more than one dimension, both during the human, physical, experience and in an extraphysical state during the OBE and after death;
- Consciousness is holosomatic, i.e. it uses more than one body (soma), including the physical body, and the psychosoma, a double of the physical body in which we move about during OBEs and which is abundantly recorded in the ethnographic literature;
- The human experience is dominated by bioenergies; i.e. every living creature, including plants, has an energetic body and our interactions with each other and our environment are fundamentally energetic.

Here I can only touch very briefly on each of these highly complex, and no doubt controversial, premises. I argue that they can allow us to discuss a host of spirit experiences and altered states of consciousness without undermining the cultural interpretation of the experience.

For example if we approach consciousness as multidimensional and holosomatic we can make sense of spirit possessions logically and systematically, not as psychological fantasy or a ruse to obtain social standing, but as the interaction between two individuals: one with a body and one without. We could also engage with our informants about their dreams from an understanding that includes the possibility of OBEs as real, shared, experiences beyond the physical body. The concept of bioenergies, finally, has particular relevance to Australian Aboriginal religious experiences, for example the touching and rubbing of sacred objects or natural features during ceremony. More broadly it can provide an analytical anchor to understand a variety of healing and sorcery practices. I have explored these analytic benefits in the context of Aboriginal Australia elsewhere (McCaul 2008).

One advantage of this approach is that it increases our ability to communicate with our informants from a basis of mutual understanding. Of course we can have conversations about spirit beliefs or soul journeys without accepting the accounts as reality, but in my experience if we bring experiential and theoretical understanding to such discussions our empathetic connection to our informants is greatly enhanced and our conversations may take directions not otherwise available to us. Another benefit would be that we could actually feed some of the understanding we may get from working with cultures with a strong value of extraordinary experiences of consciousness into our own culture. That way we not only improve our understanding of other cultures but enrich our own. Finally we would open up whole new fields of investigation. For example, consider the following quote by a Western Desert *ngangkari*, or traditional healer:

"Ananagu doctors work with the spirit of the sick person, both when he or she is awake and when he or she is asleep. *Ngangkari* work at night when all is quiet, gliding among people's sleeping spirits similar to the way an eagle soars. *Ngangkari* have special tools called 'mapanpa'. *Ngangkari* travel in their spirit bodies at night, meeting up and conferring with each other. *Ngangkari* do not travel like this in ones and twos; they gather in large groups from extensive areas." (Wanajura, 2003, 15)

This comment suggests a potential field of nocturnal investigation, fieldwork during our sleep so to speak, but only if we are prepared to participate in this particular manifestation of consciousness, the OBE.

Participative anthropology of consciousness

This points to a fundamental element of what I am proposing, namely that to work with the consensual paradigm we need to go beyond theory and participate in the experiences of consciousness we are discussing, including OBEs and contact with extraphysical consciousnesses (i.e. spirits).

This produces a certain limitation, because this is not everybody's thing. In fact I would suggest that, at least for the time being, this sort of research would be limited to a small number of researchers who are that way inclined and prepared to undergo the requisite training. Charles Tart's work on state-specific sciences has relevance here. In discussing the difficulty of consensual validation of states of consciousness Tart argues that such research and its validation will need to be undertaken by highly trained individuals - like in any other scientific investigation ...

Public observation, ..., almost always refers to a limited, specially trained public. It is only by basic agreement among those specially trained people that data become accepted as a foundation for the development of science. That laymen cannot replicate the observations is of little relevance. (Tart, 1998)

Just as the advanced mathematician will struggle to find a receptive audience among laypeople, so the advanced projector might struggle; but in neither case does it mean that what they have to say may not be useful. In the case of anthropology, the science that studies the human being, I would argue a full exploration of extraordinary experiences of consciousness really goes to the core of the discipline.

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Paranthropology

Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

Issue 3 will have the general theme of "Mediumship and Spirit Possession"

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Recollections of an Indian Magic Show

Richard Cardew

I lived in Clyde Road Rawal Pindi in April 1946. I had just turned 7 years old and my father was a colonel R.E of the British Army in India. We army children, with our nurses, went to a magic show in the local playground, where we sat in two rows, small children in front, taller ones and nurses in the back row. I was in the front row, with my older sister a few seats away with her friends. It may have been put on as a part of the Victory celebrations.

I can remember two events because they were so striking, but they seem now to be interrelated. The first event was that we all had to get out of our seats and go round to the back where two Indians were lighting a coal fire on the ground, probably using petrol because the flames were very high.

Then everybody left and went back to their seats, except for me. I was a very dreamy child who loved flames so I just stood there absorbed in them, until the two Indians came along with a bucket of water and put the fire out, completely. Only steam came from the coals. They suddenly noticed me watching them. I became really terrified and ran away back to my seat.

Meanwhile the magician had been doing tricks. As I arrived he held up a flapping pigeon, put its neck over a small empty food tin and proceeded to saw away at it with what seemed to me a very blunt pen knife. I can remember thinking "that's not cutting its neck" (much to my relief), when he suddenly held up its head in one hand and its body in his other hand. I can remember thinking "that bird is flapping its wings" and furiously told myself to try harder to see what was really happening.

The magician walked along the row of children, putting both head and body in front of each of our noses. I can't remember what the pigeon's body neck looked like because I was staring at the neck on the severed head. It seemed to be like a bit of roasted meat, with no

visible bone. I know now that pigeons necks are very thin, but this was like a small beef joint. Then, back on his dais in front of us, he put the head back onto the body, put a handkerchief over it, and the bird began flapping. Then he walked along the row again showing us the blood inside the tin. When he showed it to me, I could only see an empty tin with a bit of paper with writing on it stuck to the bottom. I strained my eyes, and did manage to see a dark stain on the paper. "That must be blood" I thought.

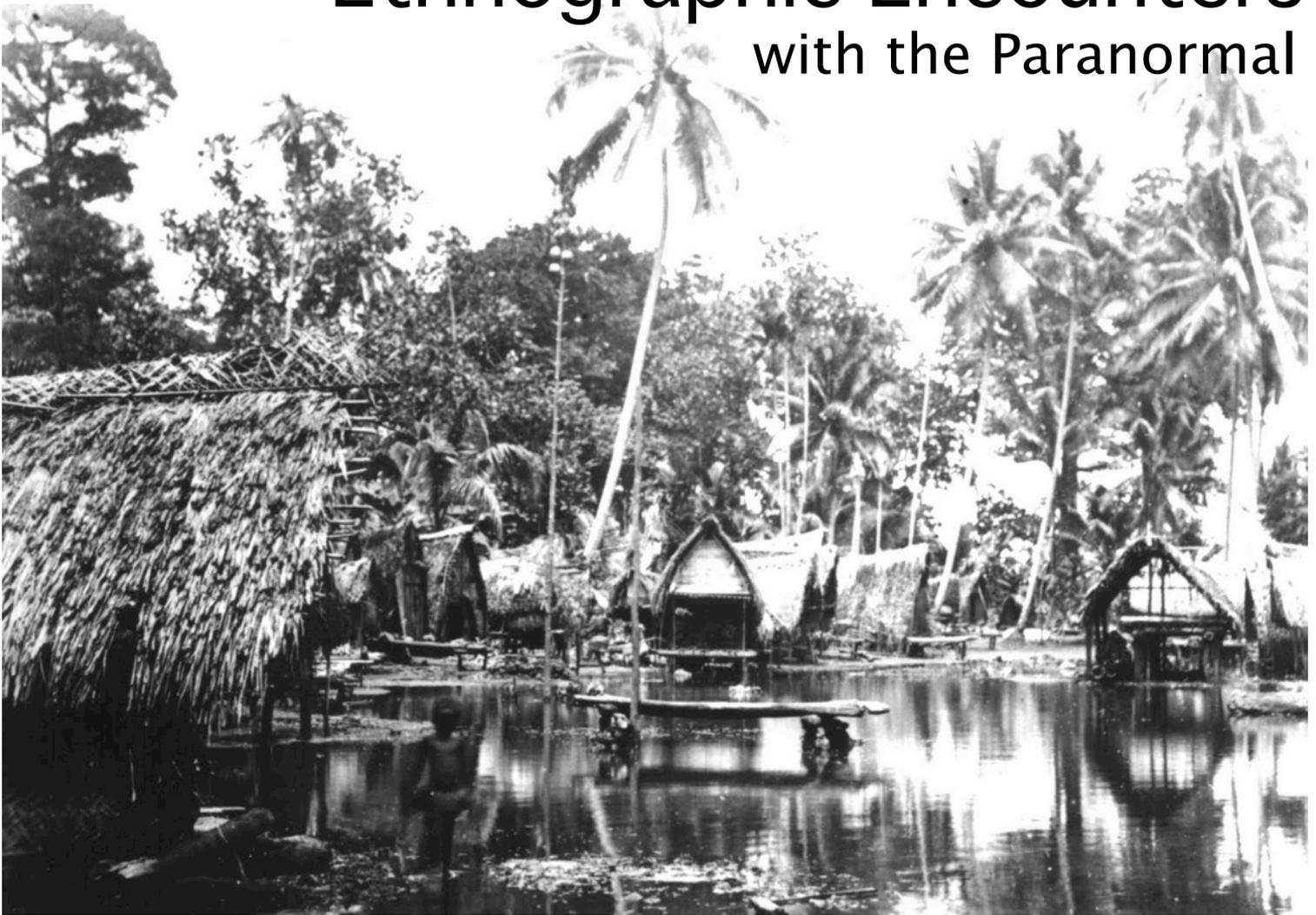
Shortly afterwards we walked back to the fire. The magician took off his shoes and walked across the soaking steaming coals. "I can do that!" I told my nurse and I started forwards but she restrained me vigorously, saying "you'll get burned". No one in our family ever argued with an adult about anything. A long time later I asked my sister, "do you remember that magic show?" "What did you see inside the neck?" "I saw it stuffed with straw" she said. "How much blood was there?" "The tin was about half full". "Did he actually walk through flames?" "Yes, they were huge". "If I had walked through them would I have been burned?" "Yes".

What strikes me now is that I really wanted to "see what I should see", perhaps like believing in the scenery of an amateur pantomime or a Shakespeare play. I believe that when people sitting in a séance see something it is because they will the phenomena into being, just as theatre goers do not grumble about the scenery lacking verisimilitude.

Richard was born 21.2.1939 in Bombay of army parents and returned to the UK in May 1946. He did a BSC in Mathematics at Warwick, became a teacher of computing in a 6th form college and retired in 1996. Since then he has collaborated in exhibiting mathematical artwork and has also been researching harmonic ratios, mostly as used in the Stone Age. He lives in Salisbury with his wife and daughter.



Ethnographic Encounters with the Paranormal



Experience Narratives

The short narratives that follow are representative of just a small selection of descriptions of unusual encounters recorded in the ethnographic literature. The extracts are taken from anthropologists writing at various different points in the historic development of the discipline - from very early to much more recent times. The descriptions also come from a wide variety of different cultural and geographic settings and detail several differing experiences that would generally be classed as "paranormal". Narratives such as these clearly suggest that there is something (or, indeed, many things) going on which seemingly requires that we reconfigure our dominant materialistic world-view and learn to appreciate alternate modes of living in, understanding, and experiencing the world.

Waldemar Bogoras

"So we two were left, the shaman and I, in the sleeping room of his underground house. Abra had removed nearly all of his clothing. He took my best American double blanket and placed two corners of it on his own naked shoulders. The other corners he gave me to hold. "Do not let them go!" he warned as he began to crawl out of the sleeping room, which

was some ten feet wide. The blanket seemed by some strange power to stick fast to his shoulders. It tightened and I felt the corners that I held on the point of escaping from my hands. I set my feet against a kind of cross beam that ran along the flooring, but the tension of the blanket almost raised me to my feet, entirely against my will. Then all at once I made a sudden movement and dug both my arms, blanket and all, deep behind the wooden frame that supported the skin cover of the sleeping room; I and the sleeping room were practically one. "Now we shall see," said I to myself. The tension continued to increase, and lo, the framed wall rose on both side of me, right and left. The rays of moonshine entered the room and cut athwart the darkness. A flat tank to the right of my, full of water and half dissolved snow, was overturning and the ice cold water was spilling on my knees. A heap of iron pans and dishes and ladles and spoons, on my right, was breaking down with much noise and clangor. I had a feeling that in a moment the whole house would tumble in about my ears, and from a sheer instinct of self preservation I let go of the blanket. It skipped across the space just like a piece of rubber. Then, all at once, I came to myself and looked around. The water tank was in its proper place. Likewise pans and dishes. Everything was just

as it should be. The awful old shaman had worked on me by will power and made things look queer."

As cited in F.Bowie (2002). "*Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction*". Oxford, Blackwell Publishing. p.204.

Sir E.E. Evans-Pritchard

"I have only once seen witchcraft on its path. I had been sitting late in my hut writing notes. About midnight, before retiring, I took a spear and went for my usual nocturnal stroll. I was walking in the garden at the back of the hut, amongst banana trees, when I noticed a bright light passing at the back of my servant's hut towards the homestead of a man called Tupoi. As this seemed worth investigation I followed its passage until a grass screen obscured the view. I ran quickly through my hut to the other side in order to see where the light was going to, but did not regain sight of it. I knew that only one man, a member of my household, had a lamp that might have given off so bright a light, but next morning he told me that he had neither been out late at night nor had he used his lamp. There did not lack ready informants to tell me that what I had seen was witchcraft. Shortly afterwards, on the same morning, an old relative of Tupoi and an inmate of his household died. This fully explained the light I had seen. I never discovered the real origin, which was probably a handful of grass lit by someone on his way to defecate, but the coincidence of the direction along which the light moved and the subsequent death accorded well with Zande ideas."

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (1976). "*Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*". Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 11

Edith Turner

"And just then, through my tears, the central figure swayed deeply: all leaned forward, this was indeed going to be it. I realised along with them that the barriers were breaking - just as I let go in tears. Something that wanted to be born was now going to be born. Then a certain palpable social integument broke and something calved along with me. I felt the spiritual motion, a tangible feeling of breakthrough going through the whole group. Then Meru fell - the spirit event first and the action afterward...Quite an interval of struggle elapsed while I clapped like one possessed, crouching beside Bill amid a lot of urgent talk, while Singleton pressed Meru's back, guiding and leading out the tooth - Meru's face in a grin of tranced passion, her back quivering rapidly. Suddenly Meru raised her arm, stretched it in liberation, and I saw with my own eyes a giant thing emerging out of the flesh of her back. This thing was a large gray blob about six inches across, a deep gray opaque thing emerging as a sphere. I was amazed - delighted. I still laugh with glee at the realisation of having seen it, the ihamba, and so big! We were all just one in triumph. The gray thing was actually out there, visible, and you could see Singleton's hands working and scrabbling on the back - and then the thing was there no more. Singleton had it in his pouch, pressing it in with his other hand as well. The receiving can

was ready; he transferred whatever it was into the can and capped the castor oil leaf and bark lid over it. It was done."

Turner, E. (1998). "*Experiencing Ritual*". Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. p. 149.

R.G. Trilles

"One day I was talking to a ... witch-doctor. I was waiting for my paddlers to bring provisions and I spoke of this to the fellow while wondering aloud if they were far away and if they would bring me the things I'd asked for. "Nothing could be easier to find out!" he cried. Then he took his magic mirror and with great concentration pronounced some incantation. Then he said: "At this moment the men are rounding this bend in the river (it was more than a day's paddling away), the tallest man has just shot a large bird, it falls into the water. They've caught it. They're bringing you back what you asked for." In fact everything was true: the provisions, the shooting, the bird, and, as I said, they were a day away!"

As cited in E. de Martino (1972). "*Magic: Primitive and Modern*". London: Tom Stacey Ltd. p.17.

Joseph K. Long

"It was the height of market day and both shops and street vendors had a lively trade going when the thing appeared. It was a three-wheeled open coffin apparently steering itself into the midst of the crowd. There were three lively vultures perched at one end and a dead arm hung limply over the side. As if that weren't enough, a hollow voice issued from the coffin's interior repeatedly inquiring the location of one Jim Brown. Hundreds of people saw it - and heard the voice."

As cited in S.A. Schwartz (2000). "*Boulders in the Stream: The Lineage and Founding of the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness*" (<http://www.stephanaschwartz.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Boulders-in-the-stream-SA.pdf>) p. 7.

Bronislaw Malinowski

"I remember well the first time I heard the *kosi* mentioned. It was a dark night, and I, in the company of three natives, was returning from a neighbouring village, where a man had died that afternoon and had been buried in our presence. We were marching in Indian file when suddenly one of the natives stopped, and they all began to talk, looking around with evident curiosity and interest, but without a trace of terror. My interpreter explained that the *kosi* was heard in the yam garden which we were crossing. I was struck by the frivolous way in which the natives treated this gruesome incident, and tried to make out how far the natives were serious about the alleged appearance, and in what manner they reacted to it emotionally. There seemed to be not the slightest doubt about the reality of the occurrence, and I learned afterwards that although the *kosi* is quite commonly seen or heard, no one is afraid to go alone into the darkness of the garden where the *kosi* has just been heard, nor is anyone in the least under the



influence of the heavy, oppressing, almost paralyzing fear so well known to all those who have experienced or studied the fear of ghosts, as they are conceived by us in Europe."

Malinowski, B. (1954). *"Magic, Science and Religion"*. New York: Anchor Books.

Tanya Luhrman

"The result, to begin with, was chaos and confusion. Everyone was laughing as we dodged in and out, creating a tangled knot of yarn. It was scarcely a scene of mystical power; a ritual magician would have blanched pale and turned in his wand on the spot. But an odd thing began to happen as we continued. The laughter began to build a strange atmosphere, as if ordinary reality was fading away. Nothing existed by the interplay of colored cords and moving bodies. The smiles on faces that flashed in and out of sight began to resemble the smiles of archaic Greek statues, hinting at the highest and most humorous of Mysteries. We began to sing; we moved in rhythm and a pattern evolved in the dance - nothing that could every be mapped or plotted rationally; it was a pattern with an extra element that always and inevitably would defy explanation. The snarl of yarn resolved itself into an intricately woven cord. The song became a chant; the room glowed, and the cord pulsed with power like a live thing, an umbilicus linking us to all that is within and beyond. At last the chant peaked and died and we dropped into trance. When we awoke, all together, at the same moment, we faced each other with wonder."

As cited in F. Bowie (2008). "Anthropology of Religion". *Blackwell Religion Compass*, Vol. 2, No. 5, pp.865-866.

David St. Clair

"I waited in the semidarkness of the room, smelling the strong incense... A boy came in, aided by an older man. The boy could hardly stand. His feet turned in at such an angle that he was almost walking on his ankles... He must have been about eight years old. Palmerio lifted him up onto an ordinary kitchen table and examined the tortured feet. Then he closed his eyes and swayed slightly, his voice becoming deeper and deeper as he mumbled a prayer to one of the Umbanda spirits. The boy's eyes, which had been filled with terror at first, closed and his head slumped forward. Palmerio pressed the deformed feet together and shook them, violently. Then he shouted

something and glared at the twisted ankles for a full minute. Brusquely he raised the feet toward his face. Softly he kissed each foot with his lips. Then he shook the feet again and allowed them to swing back down by themselves. He spoke to the boy, who came out of his doze and smiled... The boy slid from the table and landed with both feet firmly on the floor. His knees shook for just a second, but Palmerio was behind him, almost pushing him across the floor. The boy took tentative steps, then bolder steps and finally crossed over to the door unaided and walked away with complete confidence."

St.Clair, D. (1971). *"Drum and Candle: First-hand Experiences and Accounts of Brazilian Voodoo and Spiritism"*. New York: Bell Publishing Company. p. 150

Bruce T. Grindal

"As I watched them I became intensely aware of their back-and-forth motion. I began to see the goka and the corpse tied together in the undulating rhythms of the singing, the beating of the iron hoes, and the movement of feet and bodies. The I saw the corpse jolt and occasionally pulsate, in a counterpoint to the motions of the goka. At first I thought that my mind was playing tricks wit my eyes, so I cannot say when the experience first occurred; but it began with moments of anticipation and terror, as though I knew something unthinkable was about to happen. The anticipation left me breathless, gasping for air. In the pit of my stomach I felt a jolting and tightening sensation, which corresponded to moments of heightened visual awareness. What I saw in those moments was outside the realm of normal perception. From both the corpse and goka came flashes of light so fleeting that I cannot say exactly where they originated. The hand of the goka would beat down the iron hoe, the spit would fly from his mouth, and suddenly the flashes of light flew like sparks from a fire. The I felt my body become rigid. My jaws tightened and at the base of my skull I felt a jolt as though my head had been snapped off my spinal column. A terrible and beautiful sight burst upon me. Stretching from the amazingly delicate fingers and moths of the goka, strands of fibrous light played upon the head, fingers, and toes of the dead man. The corpse, shaken by spasms, then rose to its feet, spinning and dancing in a frenzy. As I watched, convulsions in the put of my stomach tied not only my eyes but also my whole being to into this vortex of power. It seemed that the very floor and walls of the

compound had come to life, radiating light and power, drawing the dancers in one direction and then another. Then a most wonderful thing happened. The talking drums on the roof of the dead man's house began to glow with a light so strong that it drew the dancers to the rooftop. The corpse picked up the drumsticks and began to play."

Grindal, B.T. (1983). "Into the Heart of Sisala Experience: Witnessing Death Divination". *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol. 39, No. 1, p.68.

Conclusions

As already stated, this selection is by no means exhaustive. What becomes clear from reading these descriptions, however, is the wide diversity of claims to ostensibly paranormal experiences in the anthropological and ethnographic literature. What should we make of these observations? I have suggested elsewhere (Hunter, 2010), that such descriptions can be treated as a sort of empirical data, what Stephen Braude would perhaps refer to as "semi-empirical evidence": not generally replicable within laboratory conditions but sufficiently recursive to be taken as indicative that something is actually going on (Wiebe, 2006, pp.512-513). Ethnological participant observation, after all, is allegedly a scientific methodology. As empirical data, therefore, these observations can be analysed, and from them inferences drawn, as a means to shed light on not only the nature of paranormal experience, but also on the factors (social, psychological, emotional, physiological, etc) that contribute to the occurrence of such phenomena.

Based on an analysis of this small selection alone it is possible to highlight several key factors apparently involved in the production and experience of paranormal phenomena in the field:

- Altered States of Consciousness (can be induced in a variety of ways including, but not limited to; rhythmic dancing, chanting, music, the use of psychoactive drugs, tiredness, physical exhaustion and so on).
- Ritual (is very often the context in which paranormal experiences occur).
- Emotionally arousing circumstances (times of sadness, e.g. death, illness, stress, joy, fear, and so on).
- Often the presence of a magico-religious specialist is required: a medium, shaman, priest, healer, witchdoctor etc.

Of course not all of these factors need necessarily be involved together in a single experience, but it certainly seems as though in the majority of instances at least one of these factors is involved.

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Ganzfeld Experience in the Laboratory

Ian Holfield

This is a record of a ganzfeld session at the Downing Site Dept of Experimental Psychology Parapsychology lab on 30th March 1979. Session starts 15.00 hrs, ends 15.30 hrs GMT

Session controller Dr Carl Sargent, sender Ruth P, receiver 'Ian Holfield'

This record was made after the session by Ian Holfield.

"I tried 'thinking of nothing' with eyes open, feeling rather silly and just looking into the diffuse pink glow; then with eyes shut, when the colour was a deeper red glow. Then the pips went. I lay there, wondering what would happen. I remember thinking 'Where do our thoughts come from, anyway?' Where do images arrive from under 'normal circumstances?' and 'What IS thinking, finally?'

I didn't repeat these ideas, but as I watched the glow, I had the slightest impression of a sort of vertical condensation forming in the glowing visual field, I said "A vague vertical shape, an upright..." and then as I said this, a second one appeared, and then two more, smaller and between the first two, as if further away. I said "there are four now, like the corner posts of a boxing ring..." I then had the clear impression of someone jumping vertically up, up into the air, the strong feeling of someone leaping skyward, repeatedly. Then an impression of a postbox, and myself posting a letter into the slot...repeated several times.

Next, I had a series of images of an old house, with a high wall round it. The house in the images was one I had seen in the village where I was living outside Cambridge, and my description flowed on, describing it as having wrought iron gates, a crazy paved stone pathway to the front door, little trees in pots, clouds and birds in the sky; quite unlike the actual house which in fact had a broken wooden gate, and a worn and weed infested gravel drive.) Then I said "I am panning up the front wall, and the masonry is changing into something else...it's transmogrifying into..." and I actually visualised high tension electrical cables stretching into the distance, but I said "it's

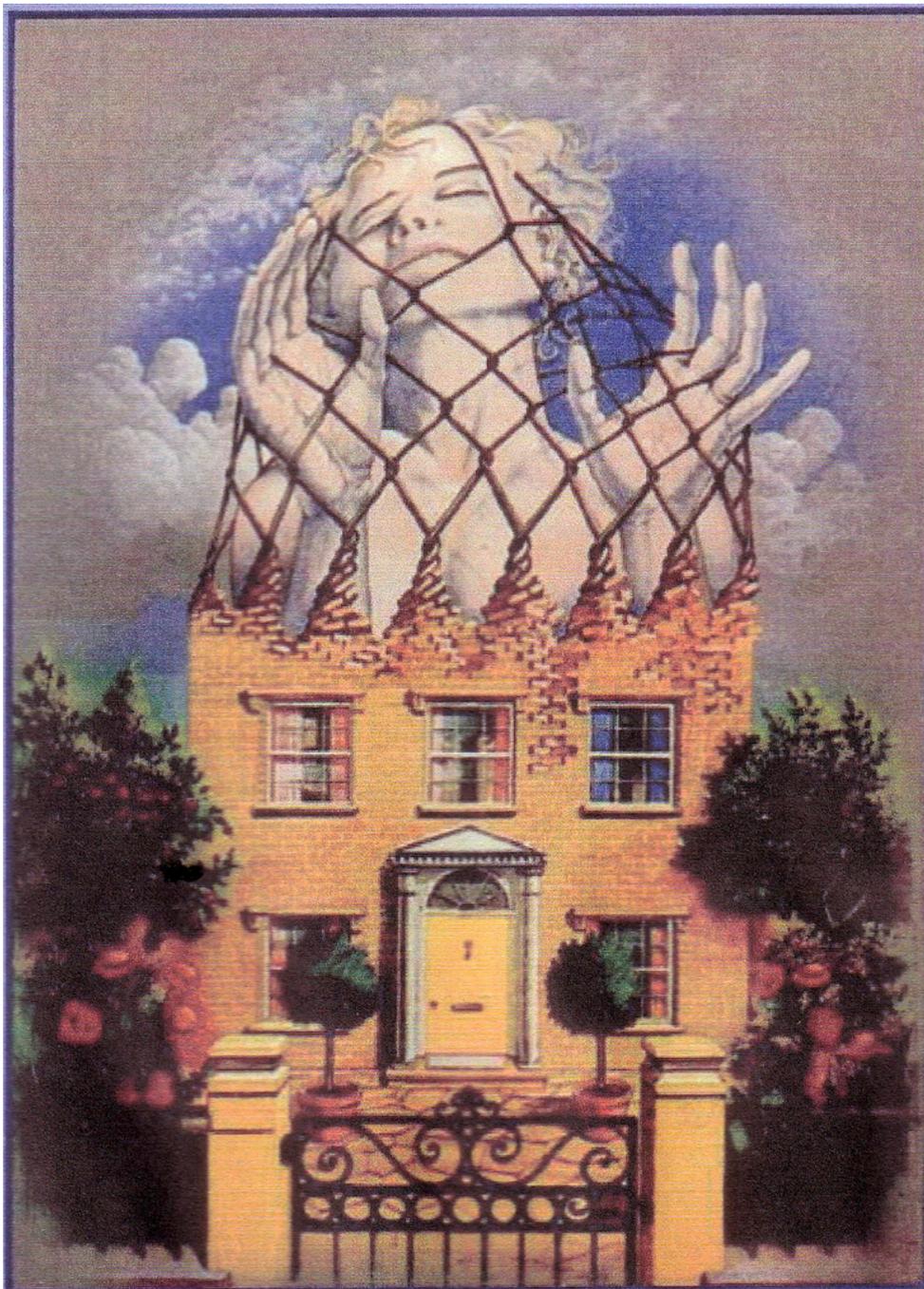
turning into a system of cables, cables under tension..."

Then there was a blank period; I had a brief sensation of being in a car somewhere dark, but didn't mention this as it seemed too mundane. I then got the clearest possible visual image of the Houses of Parliament, viewed from above ground level, from the north side of the building, apparently from about 20 feet up in the air or about a first floor window level. At the same time I had the strangest feeling of numbness in my legs, as though they had been heavily anaesthetised; I described all this, and then had a brief flash of the side of a London bus, with advertising on it, a view down the Thames from Westminster bridge which had a lot of traffic on it. Then this sequence also came to an end.

The next part was quite different. I had the sensation that I was outside the earth's atmosphere; I described having a bubble type space helmet on, having "the impression of communications, telecommunication in space, with satellites, comsats...stars across the field of vision, and a selection of satellites...in the right mid distance a planet, lit from the right side like a crescent moon...then I detected a curved flight of a group of classic Adamski type flying saucers in the centre distance, BUT I EDITED THIS OUT and didn't mention it, because it seemed a bit nutty!

Then I said, "Hold on, there is something odd here, one of the satellites isn't like the others, it's a long needle nosed thing pointing left towards the centre of the field of vision, its got little stubby triangular wings, I can see the outlet of a jet engine, and it's got the letters USAF on the left wing...". At this point, the lights came on, and Carl came into the room, with the duplicate set which he had now been given, in their sealed envelopes. We sat at a table, tea and biscuits were brought in, and Carl opened the duplicate envelopes one by one:

(A) The first was an art print, somewhat bigger than a postcard size, of the ideal detached townhouse; stone wall round it,



wrought iron gates, crazy paved stone path to the front door, a very prominent brass letter slot in the door, little topiary box-trees in tubs each side of the door, birds flying and some puffy clouds in the sky. One thing is really unusual about this picture, which is called "Executive Wife": the masonry of the house walls transmutes, morphs as we would now say, into a steel net, which is holding back the enormous torso of a woman, which presses it up as she strains upward to the sky, and freedom, her wedding ring clearly visible as her clenched hands press against the cables of the net!

(B) Was a cartoon drawing of people in a pub, I think by bill Tidy.

(C) Was a small print of the famous painting "Light of the World" of Christ holding a lantern and standing outside a tower covered in ivy.

(D) This one was folded up like a triptych, and when Carl opened it, I was seriously shocked, to say the very least. I had already been incredibly surprised by the first picture, which I had described in full detail, with NO ELEMENT MISSING without ever actually seeing anything like the image on the actual target picture! What I saw now was truly beyond belief, and I wouldn't dare write this as fiction. The thing was some sort of advertising leaflet for a series of new books I think...in the bottom

right hand side of the picture, two men in spacesuits are looking away from us, into the screen; the background is a stars cape with telecommunications satellites strewn across the field of vision; on the right, in the mid distance, a planet is lit from the right hand side, looking like a crescent moon; in the centre far distance, a curved flight of 4 or 5 classic disc type UFOs, and just right of foreground centre, but pointing into the picture to left, is something like a Lockheed Starfighter, small delta wings, needle nose, single jet, not rocket, engine, and on the left wing, the letters USAF. Though I had a slightly higher item count for "Executive Wife" I went for the space picture as I preferred it and it was fresher in my mind; it would have had a higher count than the A picture if I hadn't edited the UFOs out, as they would have scored quite high, as anything idiosyncratic was given a higher score. The morphing roof in A scored high as well.

We went and unlocked Ruth, the sender, and found she had actually been sending the A target, and she said it reminded her of her marriage, which she said was "like a boxing match, we were scoring points off each other all the time..." (she was recently divorced and I was actually having a relationship with her at this time, and she had introduced me to Carl and his work.) Ruth said she had "sent" this image with a lot of personal emotion surrounding it as it summed up certain aspects of her failed marriage.

As I had placed the A picture in second position, the session was classed as a 'binary hit'. At this time, Carl was getting 60% direct hits. By chance alone, obviously you would have a 25% direct hit rate (one in four, as the targets were in sets of 4). I was by now late for an afternoon session in the Fulbourn Psychiatric hospital where I was working. I rushed back and was relating what had just happened to some colleagues in the office of an acute admission ward when we heard "Hey, come out and see this you lot, quick!" We piled out, and a group of people were watching a newsflash on the large TV screen, where a voiceover was talking about someone being seriously injured in a London hospital...suddenly, I had a strong deja-vu type sensation, as I realised that what was actually on the screen was exactly the same view of the Parliament buildings as I had described in the ganzfeld maybe an hour earlier.

The flash was about the assassination of Airey Neave, a close advisor and friend of Margaret Thatcher, in 1979 the Prime Minister of the UK. A bomb attached to the underside of his Jaguar had blown off both his legs, and he died half an hour later in St Thomas's Hospital. The bomb went off at 2 minutes to 3pm, and he died at 3.30pm. We checked the tapes the next day, and my session was from 3 till 3.30pm. It's a pity I didn't mention his name on the tape, but I had never heard of Airey Neave till that day. Obviously something other than 'telepathy' has to be invoked to explain how I could describe a target which even the sender had not seen. As the commonest form of psi event in the huge anecdotal literature is, in fact, precognition, I felt that what was actually happening

here was that the ganzfeld was amplifying the receptivity of the subjects to precognition, effectively allowing them to "see (in a limited way), half an hour into the future"



Ian is Irish, educated in Ireland and Cambridge, studied psychology, gave up training as a psychotherapist and went through various mutations via journalism, and later some very interesting engineering projects. For the last 10 years he has been living in France running various businesses, a property business, and an engineering related business, plus fine arts trading. He lives with his French wife, a bilingual 19 year old daughter, and an orange Basset dog.

When Researchers Become Eyewitnesses to the Anomalous: Should Seeing be Believing?

Callum E. Cooper

When it comes to reports of spontaneous anomalous experiences, the importance of reliable eyewitness testimony being gathered and recorded has been discussed in parapsychology (O'Keeffe, 2001; Cooper, 2008). 'Spontaneous' is the key word to focus on in these events; the phenomenon have, in many cases, gone as soon as they appeared (particularly in cases of apparitions). All that we are left with in many cases are accounts of the events. Psychology has demonstrated that by investigating human memory, and techniques for recall (and even reasons for memory loss), psychologists and those working in crime investigations can assist a person's memory recall by applying these techniques to help produce an account of events known as the eyewitness testimony (Loftus, 1975). To take eyewitness statements from those who claim to have witnessed the anomalous is extremely good practice for parapsychologists and particularly those still involved in the investigation of spontaneous anomalous experiences in the field. Baker and O'Keeffe (2007, pp.225-226) have also proposed the application of interviewing techniques as standard practice for any researcher involved in the investigation of haunting experiences. But where do we go to next when researchers themselves witness these unusual but well-documented events?

There are many people who embrace paranormal belief whether or not extrasensory perception (ESP), psychokinesis (PK) or ghosts, exist. Paranormal belief in itself can occur due to a number of reasons including; religious belief, personality types or from an individual claiming to have been a witness to a paranormal event (Irwin, 2009). In the latter

case, misinterpretation may have caused someone to believe they had seen a ghost while being in a building renowned for haunting type phenomena, when in fact what they briefly saw in the corner of their eye was a reflection or a shadow at the end of a darkened room. This might not be the case for every individual, but it is one of the most rational explanations for such experiences. For the person involved the suggestion of a building being haunted, and then later seeing something in that building, is a case of two and two being put together. The expectation of being witness to an unusual happening in a haunted location can be very powerful psychologically, and is very hard to eliminate from anyone's current thought when in that situation. However, there are some cases in which the activity reported is clearly objective in its nature and when researchers are called in they get to witness this for themselves. The most common accounts of researchers frequently witnessing parapsychological phenomena for themselves are often found in poltergeist activity.

In a case of a supposed poltergeist plaguing the intercom/paging system at an industrial plant, which many people had witnessed, parapsychologists D. Scott Rogo and Raymond Bayless were called in to assist (Bayless, 1979). Both researchers had spent many years researching electronic voice phenomenon (EVP) and were able to witness the unusual occurrences at the plant for themselves. Voices were heard which could not be explained, even after the electrical equipment was checked and changed. The well known Enfield Poltergeist case was another in which the researchers, Maurice Gross and Guy Lyon Playfair, reported witnessing countless events for themselves (Playfair, 1980). However, not all the researchers involved in the Enfield case witnessed the activity, or at least were able to maintain their sceptical doubts. This in itself is quite unusual and indeed it might once again be explained by the researchers own beliefs in the paranormal and individual differences with regards to misinterpretation of events. However, this is just an assumption and not a definite explanation. The fact that not all the researchers involved *witnessed* the activity might simply enforce the true nature of the activity and its well-known spontaneity. Therefore anyone would simply have to be in the right place at the right time to witness these rare events.

In cases where a number of people witnessed the same supposed paranormal activity, it could be argued that group suggestion could possibly have caused false memories to play a part in their accounts of the events (Loftus, 1992). However, this simply leads back again to the earlier point of misinterpretation which we would like to assume (but can't guarantee) that researchers of the paranormal would take into account. With the poltergeist case discussed by Bayless (1979) the activity was clearly objective in its nature. Everyone who visited the plant at the time of the activity could hear the noises and voices produced on the intercom. The problem is, what caused this? and if it is paranormal and has



no rational explanation, what then? This question has plagued me for sometime when conducting field experiments into purportedly haunted locations. If ever a researcher were to experience anything, or even have a record of the event on camera, would people take their research seriously? Many might assume that if you caught 'poltergeist activity' on film there would be rational explanations for the movement of certain objects, or that the film footage is simply fraudulent. The only people who could actually know what happened are those that filmed the event and were present at the time. Once again this brings us back to the importance of producing an accurate eyewitness account as soon as possible after any activity is reported.

It wasn't until 2007 that I personally witnessed 'activity' in a certain location that I could not honestly explain. Paul Nunn, Richard Fox (colleagues of mine) and I had just begun investigating Clifton Hall in Nottingham, which later became a two-year project. On the first night there several trigger objects were set up in different rooms of the hall with certain ones having locked-off camcorders over them (simply depending on how many video cameras were spare). A trigger object is an item that is placed on a piece of paper, drawn around and then checked at regular intervals to see if it has moved away from its original position in areas reported to produced poltergeist type activity. All three of us stayed together throughout the night and did not split up due to the small size of the hall. Even though we all had radios, it was thought that staying together would be the best idea so that we could account for each other in case any noise, movement or activity was heard in other rooms. I kept the keys to the hall and I was the first to enter every room and the last one to leave. I personally set up one particular trigger object that was a whistle together with an old English penny. However, a camcorder was not left on this particular trigger object, but before-and-after photographs were taken. During the course of an hour or so, after all the trigger objects had been set up, several unusual noises and voices were heard loud and clear by all three of us in various parts of the hall. After we took a break we returned to check on the trigger objects

and to our surprise the penny had moved (see figure 1). Though we cannot account for what happened in between the time the penny was left and when we returned, I can safely say that the only people in the hall had stayed together and not gone near the trigger objects after they had been set up until we returned. There are also video records of our time together in the hall and the specific moments when the trigger objects were set up and then checked on.

On two other separate investigations, around 2008 and 2009, I have witnessed the movement of objects, some of which occurred on command. These investigations were also filmed. However, with all these later cases an interesting point about the activity was noted. Even though objects (quite often stones) were seen to move or be thrown across the room as if of their own accord, or by unseen hands, the starting position of the object was never seen in my experience. Therefore we are still left with the need to be sceptical about the reported event. Sometimes the objects thrown were reported not to have been noticed in that room before. However, at the first glance of any new scene, we could report on visually perceiving and processing no more than four of five objects or aspects of that scene and surrounding environment anyway (Carter, 2002, pp. 13). It should be well noted though that the position from where the object was thrown was usually an empty part of the room where no one was standing or was even nearby. The activity in its nature was purely objective. It was also spontaneous, however, sometimes it occurred on command, which demonstrated some form of intelligence to the activity, and this is supported in many texts outlining poltergeist phenomena (particularly: Roll, 1976; Gaud & Cornell, 1979).

How people choose to look on researchers who claim to have experienced unusual activity for themselves, when working in the field, may differ due to personal opinions on the paranormal. I can only begin to develop speculative theories to account for the activity I personally witnessed, and it only supports what I have read in many of the texts on poltergeist activity. These theories do cover psychology, misinterpretation, paranormal belief and even PK theories. I can say with confidence though that my thoughts on the paranormal still remain relatively the same as they were before I became involved and witnessed bizarre activity for myself. There have been countless events that I have managed to explain. Some simple, some not so simple, and only a fraction I could not explain (and nor could others). I remain sceptical and the activity only made me question what the researchers and I saw at the time. I also quickly develop a greater deal of respect for those who had also taken their time to research and write up their personal accounts, and others, of unusual activity witnessed in the field.

Seeing might not be 'believing', but knowledge of the situations in which spontaneous phenomena occur, and knowledge of earlier accounts from previous researchers' work, may be a way forward to understanding these events. Field research is how

the founders of the Society for Psychical Research began and there are still parapsychologists today that support it (Luke, 2009, p. 22). If we apply suitable research methods, suitable field studies can be conducted; and there is no harm in getting our hands dirty so to speak. Sometimes, to move forward and make new discoveries, we have to be ambitious and devolve into areas of science that many would frown upon or simply reject, and this is how parapsychology has often been met in the past. But to continue building a catalogue of data on paranormal events, researchers must be grounded in investigative skills such as survey designs, interviewing techniques, laboratory research and field investigations. Only then can we take our studies further in the sciences dedicated to the paranormal such as; parapsychology, parapsysics, parasociology and paranthropology. This is the path to being taken seriously and one possible way of understanding the paranormal. More researchers at some point might witness something for themselves, which might support previous documented accounts. Anyone involved in the serious study of the paranormal must keep well-documented records of these events through interviewing techniques. Hopefully, we can then understand the anomalous through modern science and our understanding of the mind and its vast capabilities will become more comprehensive.

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I'm originally from Nottinghamshire and have a long standing interest in the history of haunted locations and the investigation of spontaneous cases. In 2009 I received the Eileen J. Garrett Scholarship from the Parapsychology Foundation and I'm the current student representative of the Parapsychology Association along side Renaud Evrard. I graduated from The University of

Northampton with a BSc (Hons) in Psychology. I have written on numerous topics, particularly survival of death and have been involved in many projects including investigating purportedly haunted locations, Ganzfeld research and exploring new methods of testing the sense of being stared at. I am involved in the media now and then as a representative for parapsychology. I am currently based at Sheffield Hallam University reading for an MRes in Psychology (exploring survival from the perspectives of cognitive psychology, the psychology of death and beliefs).

From the Academy to the Street

Kristen Gallerneaux Brooks

This paper traces the lineage of the public representation and processes of belief within paranormal investigative groups, from the early antecedents of nineteenth-century psychical research societies to modern vernacular ghost hunting groups. My interest in this type of research supports my idea of "visual legendry," in that ghost-hunting groups perpetuate folkloric principles by the presentation and negotiation of belief through material and visual evidence. I also believe the field of parapsychology contains explicit legend-making processes and folkloric traditions – an idea that is rarely addressed in the humanities.

I. Foundations:

A multitude of writings concerning the foundations of Spiritualism already exist, so rather than devoting a large amount of space to the history of that religion, let us instead consider that the practices and claims of its mediums *literally* created the need for psychical research societies. Also

relevant is the "home circle," Spiritualism's private counterpart to public mediumship. These small groups were common in rural areas where distance from larger city centers made it prohibitive to travel to participate in private sittings and demonstrations with the mediums of Boston or New York, for example. These groups acted as bricoleurs, piecing together their information from the publications that were a byproduct of the informational output of the Spiritualists. Such notions of privacy, exclusivity, and modes of self-education parallel the formation of contemporary ghost hunting groups.

Beginning in the 1980s, the ASPR and SPR seem to have turned their focus inward, focusing on lab experimentation and becoming educational resources through their maintenance of paranormal archives. Published materials concerning this topic are volatile by nature, but on looking through the organization's respective journals, it is possible to see a rich history of contribution to abnormal psychology, the research of anomalous phenomena, psychic testing experiments, and records of scandal. Similarly, the few remaining paranormal research labs located within American universities have continued to close over the years, but this near extinction of academically based research in the US should not be interpreted as a decline in belief, but as a paradigm shift to the DIY aesthetic of modern ghost hunting groups, which, although generally less professional, continue to posit similar questions.

II. Conduits of Communication:

The basic ghost hunter toolkit contains a variety of devices that increase the potential for paranormal communication through audio-visual digital technologies. Glitches and failures in machinery are often interpreted as direct actions of the paranormal -- simple battery drain is often interpreted as a spirit harnessing the energy of technology. So the unseen/unheard attributes of the twenty-first century ghost are not due to a decrease in the belief levels of society, but our need to safely process experience through technology. Not that the use of technology in ghost hunting is unique to our era. Since the 1850s, science has been inextricably linked to researching the paranormal. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, specialized detection equipment was associated with the more wealthy, academic psychical researcher, whereas in the age of localized ghost hunting, basic tools are widespread and affordable to most. This increased availability of cheap technology lends itself to the formation of ghost hunting groups, and to an increased chance to "prove" the existence of the supernatural. Items essential to the modern-day ghost hunter's toolkit can be purchased for under \$200, though much of this equipment is not being used for its original intention. High-tech visual recording technologies exist to reveal the liminal zone of the unseen: thermal cameras reveal heat signatures and anomalous energy transference, and infrared cameras are thought to capture ghostly energy emissions that lay outside of the visible

spectrum. Contemporary investigative techniques are multi-sensory, and seek to make concrete those sensations we most value in Western society. "Because vision often takes priority in American culture, Americans tend to believe what they can see" (Tucker 2007:46). So, the ability to provide recorded evidence lends veracity to personal narratives.

III. Tactile and Tenuous Spaces:

In both folklore and parapsychology, patterns in narratives concern themselves with the mechanics of the haunted house. There is the notion of a happy or unhappy house, or residual hauntings where energies and habits of previous owners can become "locked in." Gillian Bennett speaks of place-centered issues in haunted houses, focusing on liminal spaces that are "betwixt and between": cellars, attics, thresholds, and stairways (1999:44). Architectural ruins act as a beacon for supernatural experience. When a building is abandoned, its mortality becomes evident, and we invert its intended purpose—to provide a site for the intermingling of the processes of the living and the dead.

The physical presence of ghost hunters in ostensibly haunted locations is more complex than one might think. Property owners, cognizant of the negative attention an investigation could attract, are frequently reluctant to give access. Professional ghost hunting groups have individual codes of ethics, and one contentious issue is the necessity of gaining permission for entry. Some groups respect the rights of the property owner, while other "renegade" groups choose to forgo this rule, and act with the same attitudes as "urban explorers."

Of course, a recent innovation entirely removed from tactile experience allows for literal armchair research—the paranormal webcam. The home computer user engages in a virtual ghost hunt through real-time surveillance cameras set up in a variety of "active" sites. Most ghost-hunters, however, exclusively conduct their research in the traditional, tactile sense.

In one such case, in September of 2009, a 29-year-old woman was illegally exploring a "haunted" building on the campus of the University of Toronto. As she was crossing rooftops, she fell to her death. Police labeled her demise as "death by misadventure." This was an apt description, because while other buildings on the campus share reported paranormal activity, the building in question had no such associations (Huber 2009). Here is a case where the visual codification of what constitutes a haunted location had grave implications.

IV. Maps for Action:

At the core of paranormal belief, issues of authenticity have been as much a source of debate as they have been of upheaval, from early organizations like the SPR to contemporary groups. But the ethical position of the folklorist conducting fieldwork is a special case, as Gillian Bennett believes: "researchers should not disbelieve informants on the basis of their

own beliefs" (1999:3). Belief in the paranormal can still be seen as vulgar—a primitive throwback—and, in the academy, "traditions of disbelief" dominate. Folklore, in this sense, is inclusive in its acknowledgment of reflexive methodologies, and accounts for the polarization of believers and disbelievers. In line with Leonard Primiano's philosophy concerning vernacular religion, belief here is a blanket approach where *experience* is key; it is no more valuable if it abides by a strict set of codified, institutional traditions than if it exists through oral and material tradition alone (1995:44).

So the ritualistic actions of the Spiritualists in their séance rooms are no less valid than those within the cathedrals of Judeo-Christian religions; an unexplainable effect witnessed by a ghost hunter is no less admissible than an inexplicable measurement taken by the parapsychologist in the controlled laboratory. While ghost hunters may identify with a specific religious faith, strange experiences have the potential to create metaphysical belief where there previously was none, colliding with the pure boundaries of "ideal" religion.

Paranormal television programming, in its functional position to replace the traditional printed text as legend-teller, is parallel to the principle of "ostension," as adapted by Linda Degh and Andrew Vazsonyi (1983:19-20). Here we are most concerned with "ostension itself," which is the desire for individuals to engage in legend-creating activity themselves; and "pseudo-ostension," hoaxing or imitating elements of a legend to perpetuate its belief (Ellis 1989:208-209). Mikel Koven contributes the additional category of "cinematic ostension," the dramatization of legends using filmic representation (2007:185). It is possible to see all forms of ostension at work in these shows, and issues of pseudo-ostension are certainly prevalent.

The forensic approach of a program like *Ghost Hunters* is meant to quell the resulting disbelief caused in part by its mediated nature, but nevertheless it is not alone for having come under fire for fakery. "Staging crews" are becoming commonplace, with network employees planting evidence the investigators themselves may not be aware of in order to bolster ratings. In reality, most ghost hunting expeditions turn up very little evidence in comparison to the amount of time they spend in the field, and are denied the hierophanies they seek.

Koven believes that *Most Haunted* is in itself a kind of televised "legend-trip" (2007:186). The legend trip serves as a ritualized pilgrimage to a location associated with paranormal activity, a "ritual of rebellion" (Ellis 1996:439) enacted by teenagers to prove courage and contribute to the formation of identity. Abandoned houses and cursed gravestones are just two examples—locations identical to those explored by ghost hunters. The stories associated with such markers "do not keep teens away from the legendary spots but, paradoxically, function as dares that excite repeated visits to invoke danger" (Ellis 1996:439).

Late one night in 2006, a group of teenage girls from Ohio trespassed onto a property rumored to be haunted, acting out the classic legend trip. In fact, the house was inhabited by the reclusive Allen Davis and his mother, "who [had] a cauldron-shaped planter in the yard that gained her a witchy reputation among kids" (Smyth 2007). Davis woke up, and, being used to trespassers, fired warning shots to scare off the girls. Unsure of the origins of the noises, they returned to investigate. Davis fired again, this time striking seventeen-year-old Rachel Barezinsky in the shoulder and head, paralyzing her. Davis was sentenced to nineteen years in prison. This case became known as the "Spooky House" case, going beyond a simple enactment of a folkloric principle and entering the court system to become a discussion of property protection rights (Smyth 2007). If Bennett believes that memorates act as "tradition in action" (1999:5), Bill Ellis takes this thought one step further: "...folklorists must acknowledge that traditional narratives exist not simply as verbal texts to be collected, transcribed, and archived. They are also maps for action [...]" (1989:218) and their enactment, can be alternately benign and dangerous.

V. Conclusion:

So, when considering the recent histories of vernacular ghost hunting groups in comparison to the established histories of the psychical research movement, it is possible to see a direct philosophical lineage from one to the other. In both groups, there is a drive to provide definitive evidence of the afterlife that is equally wrought with issues of authenticity and the ultimate goal of providing visual proof of the unseen. Records of investigations from groups like the SPR and ASPR, considered through folkloric principles, reveal Spiritualist mediums in a different light: as embodied legends, representing ambiguous evidence in living form. The fraudulent behavior of these mediums laid the groundwork for vernacular ghost hunters, addressing the need for a heightened awareness of human interference with paranormal evidence. As a result, psychical research has set standards for professional investigation—or hoaxing, depending on one's moral point of view. Mediums under strict scientific investigation have in the past defended fraudulent behavior through the explanation that while some of the phenomenon was authentic, given the pressures of the controlled séance room, bogus material was often used to meet expectations. Considering this, the elevation of contemporary ghost hunting groups into the media and subsequent accusations of purposeful manipulation of evidence is not particularly sensational or unique.

The material and visual culture of the paranormal are not static, but are imbued with a record of belief and attitude, serving as a locus point that simultaneously documents customary practices of belief negotiation, approaches to mourning, and performative aspects of the same. The liminal zones of the paranormal are thresholds—thresholds at which the intersections of belief, science, and modes of

human creativity converge to create new forms of experience, and in turn, legendary.

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Maria Lionza and the Induction of Spirit Possession in Others – A First Person Account

Allan Marsden

In July 2008 a castle in central Europe hosted a week-long private retreat for a group of several hundred followers of Wicca, a modern pagan religion¹. One strand of the talks and workshops at this meeting was a talk I gave on the Cult of Maria Lionza, a syncretic religion from Venezuela with elements of Kardecian spiritism, Catholicism and other afro-caribbean religions bolted on to pre-existing indigenous worship of a nature-spirit – Yara – who was renamed Maria Lionza by the Catholics. In its present form, the spiritist element of the cult generally involves the use of a *banco* to induce trance, and subsequently possession by ancestor-spirits², in others. I have visited Venezuela and spent time at Sorte, the sacred mountain which is the cult centre³ on several occasions, have participated in a number of rituals and have been given a variety of cult objects by one of the *bancos* there to enable me to continue the practices on my return to Europe.

Following this talk, a demonstration was arranged in which I took the role of *banco*, and sought to induce trance, and subsequently possession, simultaneously into a group of five volunteers. In this, I was assisted by a further group of five helpers whose primary role was to ensure the safety and comfort of all involved, and by a small group of experienced *djembe* drummers whose rhythms were used to help induce the trance state. An audience was allowed to be present as witnesses, and photography by the audience was actively encouraged. A video of the event was taken (with permission).

This was my first attempt at inducing trance possession in others, and was done in a spirit of enquiry rather than from a belief in or knowledge of what would happen. My earlier attempts at trance possession in myself had been successful in part, but full possession had never been achieved.

Among participants in the Cult of Maria Lionza, possession is judged to have occurred to a level of 25%, 50%, 75% or 100% in any particular instance. 25% possession is where the presence of the spirit is felt and communication is possible, but the entranced remains fully conscious and in control of their mind and body. 50% possession involves a situation in which the entranced and the spirit have roughly equal control of the mind and body. At 75%, the spirit is in control, but the entranced retains awareness of what



is happening. At 100%, the entranced has no awareness of what their mind and body are doing, and the body's actions are entirely controlled by the spirit.

None of the participants other than myself had any prior knowledge of the Cult of Maria Lionza. Furthermore, Wiccans in general (including most of those involved on this occasion) have limited experience of spiritism. To accommodate this, and to allow for the fact that the majority of participants were a long way away from their homelands, I made the express purpose of the ritual to contact the 'earth spirits' (*spiriti loci*) of the area in which the retreat took place, rather than to contact ancestor spirits as such.

Preparation for the demonstration consisted of:

- emptying the room of furniture (or stacking it in corners) , with chairs set up around the periphery of the working space for non-participants to watch the demonstration
- setting up an altar to Maria Lionza in one corner of the room, using the items I had brought with me for the purpose,
- placing various oils, unguents, fruits, cigar(s), and bottle of rum on the altar for use during the demonstration.
- lighting numerous candles around the periphery of the working space, and
- creating five horseshoe shaped figures on the ground using lines of talc, large enough for a person to lie prone within them, with their feet



at the open base the horseshoe pointing towards the altar in each case. Candles were lit at points along these horseshoes. Figure 2 shows the equivalent at Sorte.

The demonstration itself started with prayers to Maria Lionza to assist us and keep us safe, followed by 'spiritual cleansing' of the participants.

The participants then lay face-up in the horseshoe shapes on the floor, and were instructed to clear their minds of all thoughts. The drummer commenced a slow, rhythmic drumming. Over the next half hour or so, I anointed each of the participants with the oils and unguents⁴ and rubbed them with fruit pulp, I blew cigar smoke over them, I spat rum over them and I walked around them, banging my stick (itself of Venezuelan origin, and supposedly containing an indwelling spirit or *nkisi* – see Figure 4) on the ground around them in rhythmic patterns.

It should be noted that during this process I myself fell into a light trance state. I was more or less fully conscious, however, and not aware of being 'ridden' by any external spirit.

The drumming was stopped and a period of silence ensued. Roughly three to five minutes later, without warning, Participant A leapt from the supine state to a crouching position, and started talking in an agitated manner. I spoke with him. He said we were in great danger, and when questioned further explained that the angels were coming, terrible angels who dragged their massive swords behind them, ploughing up the landscape as they did so. He expressed considerable confusion as to where he was and who we were, but was certain that the danger was real and considerable.

After a few minutes discussion, I was able to convince him that although we humans would not be able to help the situation (as he insisted), Maria Lionza might be able to. I lead him to the altar, introduced him to Maria, and left him in a position of silent prayer, being watched over by some of the helpers.

By now, several of the other participants were showing signs of movement. I assigned helpers to watch over them while I addressed Participant B.

Participant B stated that he had come from the Stone People. He carried a message. In the old days, the Stone People had been revered by humans, but now they were ignored. He asked that we should pay them due reverence. I agreed to do what I could, and after a few minutes lead Participant B to the altar and left him too communing with Maria Lionza.

Participant C stated that he was a nature spirit which had been trapped in a kind of well for many years, and the invocation had released him. He was very grateful. He was fairly swiftly led to, and left at, the altar.

Participant D also appeared to be possessed to a greater or lesser degree, but I cannot recollect at this stage the details. She too was fairly swiftly led to, and left at, the altar.

When I initially spoke with Participant E, she stated that she was not possessed. A little later, her watcher suggested that I speak with her again. This time she whispered to me that she was in fact sharing her mind, but she did not wish to make this public, as the possessing spirit was an angel, and she feared a confrontation with Participant A. She stressed that angels were kind, loving, wonderful creatures, and in no way similar to what Participant A had suggested. It was notable that Participant E was speaking as herself, describing what the angel was saying, rather than speaking as the angel. After a while she too was led to the altar.



After a while, I began the closure procedure, which involved thanking Maria on behalf of all present, then following a set of steps to persuade the spirits to leave the bodies they has taken over. I then asked each participant a series of questions designed to confirm that the original owners were back in control of their bodies, with acceptable responses. The demonstration was then drawn to a close.

It was possible over the following days to have wash-up meetings with the participants both singly and as a group. The following information of interest was gleaned from these meetings:

- None of the participants were 100% possessed, in that they all retained memory of what they (or the possessing spirit) said and did during their possession. Participants A and C claimed to have been 75% possessed, and hence unable to control their actions during their possession. The remainder claimed about 50% possession, although arguably Participant E was only 25% possessed, as she continued to speak with her own voice.
- It proved possible to identify the Stone People. These were boulders raised locally using rubble left after bombing during the second world war. The boulders were painted with caricatured human faces, and could be seen in several of the local villages. It is almost certainly correct that these were revered when first raised, but are now generally ignored. Participant B claimed not to have known about these prior to the ritual but may have seen them in passing unthinkingly.
- Participant C recently stated: "I had an immense feeling of gratitude (about being freed from the well) that stayed with me for months, making me able to experience many other things I might not without this experience."

- Participant E stated later that she had deliberately misled me during the process of persuading the spirit to leave after the demonstration, and that in fact the spirit was still with her, and she continued to converse with it. When pressed why she had done this, she stated that in her youth she had been involved in a serious accident which left her with many broken bones. She was prescribed morphine for pain relief during her hospital stay, and had become addicted. She stated that the feeling she had got from the presence of the angel was the first time since her addiction when she had felt a 'high' comparable to the effect of the morphine on her. I was unable to persuade her to rid herself of the spirit. Fortunately, one of the 'helpers' at the ritual lived with Participant E, and I left him to keep a lookout on her once the retreat was over. I was later told that the 'angel' remained with decreasing intensity for some months before eventually fading away.

I do not seek to draw conclusions from any of this. I merely report it as it happened to, or was reported to, me. I think it is interesting, though, that even if you don't really know what you are doing and don't particularly believe in it, this sort of work produces real and significant effects. I'm not willing to speculate on what these effects 'mean', or even what they 'are' in any absolute terms. That is, to me, less important.

Allan Marsden is an Engineering Consultant in his 50's living in Mid-Wales. He has been a Wiccan since the early 1980's, and a follower of Maria Lionza since 2006. Allan has no formal qualifications in Anthropology, but has been a keen amateur for many years.



Impossible Things : Notes from the boggle threshold

David Taylor

Alice laughed: "There's no use trying," she said; "one can't believe impossible things."

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

Alice in Wonderland.

It could be argued that it is a brave or perhaps a foolish man who admits to having had an experience that takes him to the edge of his own boggle threshold.

Certainly the anthropological literature is only now coming out of the shadows, with a few brave souls willing to share their own experiences with what we would describe as the 'paranormal' while engaged in ethnographic research.

My own experience at investigating anomalous phenomena spans 25 years. In that time I have been fortunate to have a few experiences, although these are few and far between. When writing this article I have had to consider which experience to share. Should it be the responsive poltergeist or perhaps the apparition I saw while on an investigation at a local education centre. Eventually I settled on a truly bizarre experience I had in the early 1990s.

Late one mid-week evening in January my peace was shattered by the telephone ringing. It was late, but it was something I was used to – late night calls from people wanting to report a variety of paranormal experiences. But this phone call was different. The voice on the other end of the line was different, strange even. A very deep gruff voice asked to speak to me. When I replied it was me speaking the voice became even deeper, almost more animal. In a deep, snorting voice it said "Avebury. The 9th. All of you". Thinking fast I tried to stall for time, and mumbled something about Avebury. Before I could finish the voice continued "Avebury. The 9th. 9 o'clock. All of you". And before I could open my mouth, the phone went dead!

The experience left me a little shaken. If this was someone's idea of a joke, it wasn't very funny. Before I could compose myself the phone rang. Not again I thought! This time it was my friend Jane from Coventry. She asked, rather sheepishly if I had just had a strange phone call. I replied that I had and asked her why. She recounted that she had had a similar phone call to the one I had just had. The only difference is that her mysterious caller had told

her to ring me! This was getting stranger by the minute, and it had only just begun!

We worked it out that the voice was asking, even telling us to go to Avebury, the stone circle in Wiltshire. The next '9th' was in a couple of weeks – Saturday 9th February. The 'all of you' could only relate to a small group of researchers, psychics and mediums that met in the Warwicksire area of which I was a member. Unfortunately it proved impossible to get the others to go at short notice. So the afternoon of the 9th saw three of us, Jane, myself and our friend Robin, traveling down the motorway to Wiltshire, unsure exactly what to expect.

It was dark by the time we arrived in Avebury. The majestic splendor of the largest Neolithic stone circle in Europe was lost on us due to the dark. The occasional road side stone was illuminated in the car headlights, adding to the eerie atmosphere of the whole journey.

Unsure exactly what to do or expect, we had a drink in the village pub. At 8.30pm we made our way down towards the church. The voice had not been specific about where in Avebury we should go. As we crunched our way up the church path the church clock struck 9. We all jumped out of our skins before bursting into laughter. This was getting tense! It was then that Jane commented that she had the feeling we were being watched. With my heart still beating from the shock of the church clock and with my tongue in my cheek, I addressed whatever 'it' was that had sent us all this way on this supernatural errand. I said we had come a long way, that we weren't expecting much, nothing too spectacular, a couple of flashes of light would do. We waited. And of course, nothing happened!

Feeling that we had been made proper fools of, we decided to cut our losses and have another drink in the pub before the long journey back to Coventry. But before we entered the pub I noticed a gate opposite the pub car park. Perhaps, I suggested, we should have a look in the field, see what was there.

Grudgingly we crossed over the road and into the field. Three huge stones loomed up out of the darkness. We examined them, and decided that the pub was still looking like a better idea. It was then that we saw a bright white flash of light in the clouds above the pub in front of us. We stopped in our tracks and waited. Nothing. It was then that Robin suggested we stand by one of the stones and meditate. With nothing to lose we did just that. After 10-15 minutes we opened our eyes. Before we could move there was another bright white flash of light in the clouds above the pub. Again we waited for it to happen again. We must have stood there for 20 minutes. Nothing happened. Our minds raced back to earlier at the church and Jane's feeling of being watched. Had we got what we had asked or – a couple of flashes of light?

We drove back to Coventry in silence and puzzlement. Why had we been instructed to go to Avebury? Who or what was the voice? What had caused the flashes of light? Could they have seen car headlights? No, because we had seen plenty of those all night, and they were completely different. Could it be something meteorological? Again no, as I was able to rule this out a few weeks later after making enquiries with the relevant experts.

With reports such as this, it is easy to mock and be skeptical. No one was more skeptical of the experience than me!

To be of value scepticism must be informed. Psychic research has been challenged by many sceptics during its long history, but few of them have taken the trouble to make a proper study of the evidence. Most have argued from a priori positions – it can't be, so it isn't – so their comments are valueless. To be of value, scepticism must be constructive. It is not enough for the sceptic to indicate the shortcomings of an explanation; they must be able to offer a better one.

John Michell, writer and earth mysteries researcher who died recently, was a great opponent of what he called 'Explanationism', our need to explain everything we encounter in relation to our own cultural understanding: "Explanationism is a disease of cranks which makes them explain everything in terms of their pet theory". Michell believed that mysteries were not to be explained away, but entered into, a form of initiation, a way of seeing the world differently. We should not be surprised that there are bitter arguments over the reality of witnesses' experiences. The impasse seems formidable until we abandon those extreme either/or positions. Most paranormal phenomena are ambiguous, and I think it is significant that they are often dream-like events. Perhaps they are special forms of reality which bridge the internal and external worlds. Because of their paradoxical nature, I sometimes liken the paranormal to the Taoists' 'Un-carved Block'. They are like fragments of a primal reality. Pregnant with a myriad of possible manifestations, before they are whittled and polished into intelligible shape by the way we process our perceptions and expectations. If this sounds mystical, so be it.

"There is a theory which states that if ever anybody discovers exactly what the Universe is for and why it is here, it will instantly disappear and be replaced by something even more bizarre and inexplicable.

There is another theory which states that this has already happened." -- Douglas Adams

Ghostly Experiences: More Than Imagination, More Than Just a Good Story

Rosalyn Dyne

In the July 2010 issue of *Paranthropology* Eric Ouellet observes; "there is a serious need for a social science and humanities equivalent to the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* or the *Journal of Parapsychology*." Not only do I agree with his sentiments, I also argue that the various disciplines within the Humanities and Social Sciences should discard their wariness of all things paranormal; instead, accepting that such phenomena is worthy of scholarly interest. Folklorist, Gillian Bennett maintains, that this 'wariness' has meant there is "little opportunity to revise popular stereotypes or counteract educated prejudice" surrounding "supernatural folklore." She further contends that a broader study of paranormal phenomena, which explores beyond the boundaries of the Sciences, is required especially as "people continue to have experiences [...] that science as we define it today cannot provide."

Personal experience narratives, such as those discussed by Bennett in *Alas, Poor Ghost*, offer more than just material for psychological analysis. Although studies that explore these aspects of paranormal phenomena play an important role in the overall understanding of such phenomena, negative issues concerning experient's mental health or personality traits, which are often implied by these studies, have the effect of deterring many people from sharing their experiences. My research, which explores the ghostly experiences of non-Indigenous Australians, examines how studies pertaining to these experiences and Australian paranormal phenomena in general, would benefit by moving beyond the Sciences and into the Humanities and Social Sciences. This would enable a better understanding of ghostly experiences and, specifically, their link to beliefs concerning death and an afterlife; as well as the subsequent effect of these beliefs and experiences on individuals, families, and society in general.

Apart from their link to afterlife beliefs, ghostly experiences and the stories they engender are often viewed merely as entertainment; however, they have a lot more to offer. Tales of ghostly encounters can, for example, provide a means for studying the history of an event, or site. In his booklet *Now I Believe ... in Ghosts!* Brian McDonald, a former tour guide, recounts some of the ghostly experiences of those who either worked at, or toured, Sydney's Quarantine Station at North Head, in New South Wales; all the while, recounting the history of the site and the lives of those who passed through its gates. While Jack Sim, who conducts tours in and around the city of Brisbane, Queensland, not only tells of events that gave rise

to Brisbane's ghostly phenomena but also the history of the people and area in which these phenomena have occurred. McDonald and Sim are just two of many individuals, and groups, who conduct ghost tours in various towns and cities around Australia – all of which add a different dimension to the telling of an area's history.

John Pinkney, on the other hand, believes that tales of ghostly encounters "point persuasively to the apparent existence of a universe parallel to our own." Although the tales presented in his book *Haunted: The Book of Australia's Ghosts*, resemble those in other anthologies centring on ghostly phenomena, Pinkney appears to believe the tales are true because many are told by supposedly reputable people. For example, apart from stories retelling the ghostly encounters of "well known Australians," he also states that "others who express their belief in ghosts include an RAAF Wing Commander, a CSIRO scientist, [... and] Australian Army personnel." Pinkney is not alone in believing that the tales reinforce claims that such phenomena are 'real.' However, mainstream scientists do not consider experiential examples provide sufficient evidence for the actuality of ghostly, or paranormal phenomena; preferring, instead, experiments that deliver results which display repeatability between experimenters.

While scientists may dismiss experiential evidence, some social researchers have found that tales recounting ghostly experiences provide valuable indicators of the mores, morals and beliefs of a society at any given point in history. Ronald C. Finucane, for example, found that "ghosts of the twentieth [century] have one overriding function to play in society: to demonstrate the existence of an afterlife;" while those in "postmedieval" times were used "not to reinforce beliefs about heaven, hell and purgatory, but to confound and refute atheists and Sadducees by proving that an afterlife existed." However, it has also been found that beliefs pertaining to death and an afterlife can have serious consequences; especially emotionally.

Peter Read, while primarily exploring the idea of 'inspired' earth in his book *Haunted Earth*, observes that generational changes in beliefs within migrant groups, such as those relating to specific burial rites to prevent the dead returning as ghosts, can have an adverse effect on family relationships as well as individual cultural identity. This is especially so if one family member has discarded the family's supernatural belief system in favour of one that does not allow for any supernatural connections, and/or diminishes the need to perform certain burial rites required for the appeasement of the decedent's spirit/soul.

Tales of ghostly encounters, while exhibiting a society's afterlife beliefs, also evince traditional ideas associated with ghosts and hauntings. Many of these 'traditions' focus on the use of correct burial procedures to ensure the deceased does not return as a ghost. Read highlights the importance some individuals place on these rituals through a

recounting of an interview he conducted with a young male who was originally from Chinese Malaysia, but is now residing in Perth, Western Australia. Despite the young man's father voicing concerns about his son's ability to carry out the required "devotions towards the dead" now he lived in Perth, his father was also worried about his own death and who would perform the necessary rituals when the time came. He had good reason to worry. After his father's death, the young man decided not to carry out all the rituals, choosing only to do those that 'fitted in' with the beliefs he adopted since his move to Australia. His decision upset many family members, none more so than his sister, who, although she had married an Australian, been educated in a Catholic school and now also resided in Perth, desperately believed all the rituals should be observed or their father's ghost would not find rest. After much debate, the young man carried out an important ritual for their father, and in so doing finally gave his sister some peace of mind.

The cultural issues displayed in this example are particularly relevant in a multicultural society such as Australia, where people from many cultures and religious backgrounds come together. However, during my research into Australian ghostly experiences I observed that these experiences, and phenomena, although relevant to cultural issues within that society, remain under-researched. Furthermore, that Australian ghost stories, as a literary genre, are often overlooked in publications in which one would expect them to be represented. For example, Nicholas Birns' and Rebecca McNeer's book *A Companion to Australian Literature Since 1900*, while devoting an entire chapter to science fiction, failed to mention one ghost story – despite the increase in publication of these tales.

Rather than entering into the debate concerning the 'reality' of ghostly phenomena, my research aims to show there is more to understanding such phenomena than the study of psychological issues; or as Pliny inquired of his friend, Sura, nearly two thousand years ago, "whether you think there are such things as ghosts, and whether they have their own shapes and some divine existence, or whether they are unreal images that take their forms from our own anxieties." Moreover, I maintain that such experiences offer more than just an entertaining tale to be told on a cold, stormy night in the hope of scaring some poor soul. Ghostly experiences and the narratives they engender supply much more – they supply a means of exploring history, social and cultural issues, religious doctrines, and literary styles. But more importantly, for the experiencers and those who believe their tales, they supply hope there is more to life than this life.

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Toward a cross-cultural view of parapsychology

A new site, *World of Parapsychology* (WoP, <http://www.thewop.org>), was launched in July 2010, based on an idea of Renaud Evrard an a brilliant technological achievement by Nikolaos Koumartzis. Initially it was based on research conducted for the *White Book of Parapsychology* (published in 2009 by the Institut Métapsychique International, Paris), the website soon became a very ambitious project to aggregate relevant information on what is going on today in parapsychology worldwide, and by whom.

All around the world, often isolated researchers are trying to communicate the standards of scientific research on paranormal phenomena. On its side, the public seeks the most reliable information on parapsychology in the middle of a jungle in which access is difficult, especially when English is not their native language. WoP proposes to address these needs by using modern collaborative tools: everyone can contribute to WoP and, reciprocally, share what they find on their networks. Furthermore, this website, initially in English, can be translated into all languages by just one click, and translations can be improved collaboratively.

Each team or society known for the quality of its contributions to parapsychology has its own page on the website, summarizing essential information and linking to frequently updated news. Conference programs, calls for papers, calls for volunteers, grants opportunities, new publications, podcasts etc.: all verifiable and relevant information can be transmitted no matter its geolocalization. The parapsychological community, which is quite small on the scale of scientific research, suddenly becomes more interconnected.

This project provides a great opportunity to observe the cultural differences in the reception of parapsychology. Just picking some examples from the pages of the website: in Brazil, the Integrated Experimental Parapsychology Center lies at the heart of a spiritualist organization that, however, ensures its ideological independence. This situation recalls the beginnings of societies such as the Society for Psychical Research in London and the Institut Métapsychique International of Paris. Kardecian spiritualism has always claimed to be compatible with a strictly scientific approach, although it emphasises

certain hypothesis and research topics. This is the situation in Japan too, where the acceptance of chi and other subtle energies helps to legitimize and fund numerous research projects on the exceptional abilities of the human body. Their experimental findings suggest that a strange energy materializes there more than elsewhere. In other religious and more or less economically developed countries, parapsychology has still not emerged. In sum, the disparities between countries and cultures become important. In some countries (like France and Greece, according to our personal experiences), people cannot imagine that parapsychology is an academic discipline, while in others, particularly in the United Kingdom, this is commonplace.

So, why is the contagion effect between neighbouring countries not larger? Some sociologists (eg., Méheust, 1999) showed that each society developed a deep personal relationship with the paranormal, whose signs are visible across the centuries, with cyclical effects. Forgetfulness can quickly engulf a continent of research (such as those on "animal magnetism") which will re-emerge elsewhere (i.e. after a sophistication via Anglo-Saxon cultures). By comparing the history of development of parapsychology in different contexts, we learn much about the links between science and society.

One question that arises from these cross-cultural studies, is the unbridled pursuit of invariants. There are several visible here: First, in countries where parapsychology is undeveloped, there is often one researcher who will be the ambassador of parapsychology, often for several decades. The media, other scientists and people living exceptional experiences ask him to answer all their questions, as if he had all the necessary skills; while skeptics will draw a caricature of him, which will prevent them from having to analyze what the field of parapsychological research really demonstrates. These ambassadors often show great originality in their experiments which goes along with the limited means at their disposal.

Other effects suggest the invariance of the archetype of the Trickster (Hansen, 2001), which is an anthropo-sociological pattern of incompatibility between "parapsychology" and "institutionalization". Where parapsychology is the most institutionalized, approaches are more cautious and less proof-oriented. "Classic" parapsychology is reflected in liminal environments where data are retrieved via New Age theories. Some local facilities are independent replications of the Trickster effect, as this setting "one foot in, one foot out," which combines the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest and the parapsychological activity of the Racio Association led by Hungarian physicist Zoltán Vassy.

There have been several cross-cultural studies comparing the narratives of exceptional experiences (e.g., Belanti et al., 2008). Other recurrent publications help to show the specificity of parapsychological research in a country or a region (e.g. Angoff & Shapin, 1973) but there is still no cross-cultural or transcultural vision that emerges.

We hope that the WoP project will soon serve as a basis for a global ethnography of parapsychology. Other questions arise: Will such a globalization project help to standardize the common information on parapsychology? Will there be a better distribution of resources? Will it be the tool to overcome language and cultural barriers? Any contribution to this ambitious project is welcomed...

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Events

2010

October 23rd-24th Fortean Times Unconvention, University of Westminster, London.

October 25th-30th Swindon Ghostfest
(<http://hswin.moonfruit.com>)

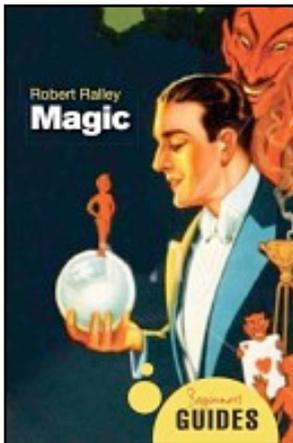
June 2th-4th Academy of Spirituality and Paranormal Studies Conference - "Spirituality, Science and the Paranormal" - Kutztown University, Kutztown, Pennsylvania, USA. (www.aspsi.org)

2011

March 11th-13th Spooksfest, York 2011
(www.spooksfest.co.uk)

Reviews **Books & Events**

Magic Robert Ralley



"Magic"

Author: Robert Ralley

Pub: Oneworld, Oxford

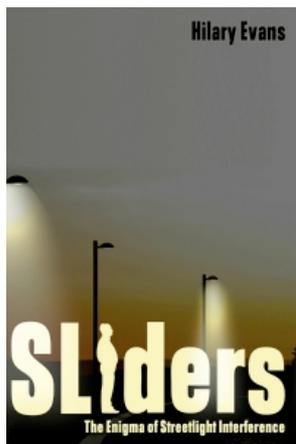
ISBN: 9781851687138

Price: £9.99/\$14.95

The academic study of so-called Western Esotericism has really taken off in recent years, with more and more universities offering opportunities to study this intriguing aspect of European history. This short book by Robert Ralley perhaps represents a break-through of this growing academic exploration of magic into the popular sphere. "*Magic: A Beginner's Guide*" takes the reader on a tour of magical history in terms that are easy to understand, without an excessive oversimplification of the subject matter. Ralley introduces the reader to the the key figures of the western magical tradition: Paracelsus, Cornelius Agrippa, Pico, John Dee, amongst others and traces the developmental line between the "experiments" of these renaissance occultists and the tricks and illusions of contemporary stage magicians. Ralley also charts the development of modern occultism in the 19th century giving insights into the contributions of Eliphas Levi, Aleister Crowley and Gerald Gardner, and others, to the development of modern paganism, witchcraft and ritual magic. The final chapter, entitled "Analysing Magic", examines anthropological approaches to the study of magic, beginning with the still influential work of E.B. Tylor and J.G. Frazer (magic as a stage in the evolutionary development of the modern scientific intellect) in the late 19th century, right through to the works of Durkheim, Mauss, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard (magic as a social-functional system). It is a shame that the chapter does not go a little further to explore the current state of anthropological investigations of magic, for example with the anthropology of consciousness, or into the fascinating realms of the experiences of ethnographers participating in magical rites in the field. Nevertheless, Ralley's inclusion of an anthropological perspective in conjunction with the historical approach of the majority of the book is highly admirable.

Jack Hunter

SLiders Hilary Evans



Next time you are walking down the street, walking back from the pub perhaps, and one of the street lights in front of you goes out, it may not be a faulty bulb, but an SLI effect! SLI stands for 'Street Light Interference', and describes the apparent ability that some people have to make street lights go out. Why you may ask? Well, this is a very good question. This is exactly what Hilary Evans, veteran investigator of anomalous experiences and author sets out to investigate. For several years now Hilary has been co-ordinating SLIDE - Street Light Interference Data Exchange. Back in 1993 ASSAP published a booklet by Hilary on the early stages of his research. As bizarre as this ability may sound, Hilary has an impressive collection of these reports from around the world. There are various theories to explain this phenomena, from the unlikely faulty street light to psychokenesis. I should, at this point, probably express an interest in this book, as I have experienced something similar to this myself (only a few times, 25 years ago), and indeed these are detailed in Hilary's book. As strange as this all sounds - people being able to turn street lights off at a distance - this excellent new book by Hilary Evans shows that it is a very real phenomenon. As this is the first full length book on the subject, this is destined to become a classic.

"SLiders: The Enigma of Streetlight Interference"

Author: Hilary Evans

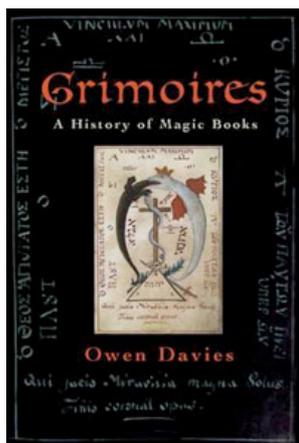
Pub: Anomalist Books

ISBN: 1933665475

Price: £10.95/\$14.95

David Taylor

Grimoires Owen Davies



Owen Davies' book "*Grimoires: A History of Magic Books*" takes the reader slightly deeper into the world of Western Esotericism, focussing particularly on the development and spread of grimoires (defined as "books of conjurations and charms, providing instructions on how to make magical objects such as protective amulets and charms"). In charting the development of these magical books, Davies is able to explore wider social and historical themes such as the development of science, slavery, the interaction between religions in early modern europe, the witchcraft trials and general trends in religious doctrine. All of this is achieved through tracing the movements through history of certain key magical texts (Greater and Lesser Keys of Solomon, Picatrix, the works of Agrippa et al.). Throughout the course of their existence these books have been condemned as demonic and frequently rooted out to be destroyed. Despite this persecution, however, such books have maintained a huge popular interest and as a consequence have somehow managed to avoid complete destruction, offering us a spectacular glimpse into the world of medieval magical beliefs and practices. But it doesn't stop there, *Grimoires* follows the story of magic books right through to the present day, examining their effect on popular culture, and pop culture's reciprocal effect on the grimoire tradition (a trend most evident in the effect of H.P. Lovecraft's dreaded Necronomicon). All in all this book is a gripping read, full of exciting characters and fascinating stories that is well worth getting hold of.

"Grimoires: A History of Magic Books"

Author: Owen Davies

Pub: Oxford University Press

ISBN: 9780199590049

Price: £9.99/\$16.95

Jack Hunter

Weird 10 Conference**Warminster 21st-22nd August 2010**

Weird 10 is the second such event to be held at the Athenaeum Theatre in Warminster, Wiltshire, which is dedicated to discussion and knowledge transfer regarding the paranormal, UFOs and aliens. This review is based on the second day, (21st August 2010) of the conference and will take in the two main talks regarding the areas of ghostly paranormal events and parapsychological research. The first speaker to address the conference was Dr. Ciaran O'Keefe, the first part of his talk was used to explore the different areas of parapsychology and the diverse areas of research that are undertaken, including into extra-sensory perception and psychokinesis.

Ciaran talked the audience through the notion of mind trickery and the ability for the mind to believe that it has experienced something that is unexplainable, when there are other possible explanations for the event. An example of this was carried out with the audience being told that they were about to experience an episode of telepathy, two people were called from the audience who had never met each other, they were asked to sit at different ends of the stage and hold a notebook each, one was to be the sender and one the receiver. Needless to say this experiment was a success with the exact message in the form of a picture being sent and received. Telepathy had seemed to be the only reasonable explanation, or was it? As a reviewer it would not be fair to reveal any further details about the other possibilities that could lay behind this extraordinary stage experiment, I'm sure if you ask Ciaran he would be happy to give you a clue. During the talk Ciaran also noted the need within current parapsychological research for more work to be conducted out actually in the field. At the moment a lot of experiments are conducted under laboratory conditions, whereas the very nature of the paranormal is unpredictable - it needs to be investigated where it is allegedly occurring: in its own environment, rather than tests that are simply conducted in a setting that is quite foreign to anomalous events. He explained that television shows such as *Most Haunted* provide a very honest objective, in that the locations are well known and researched haunted locations where the actuality of events occurring is quite often not analysed enough parapsychologically, the element of TV and spectacularisation gets in the way.

He also talked about the ability in such situations for group hysteria to play an important part in investigations, particularly the notion of one member hearing an unidentified sound, which then, through the power of suggestion, leads other members, whether they heard it or not, to confirm that they did indeed hear the noise. This lead neatly onto analysis of his work and continued involvement with the television program *Most Haunted* where he stated that there have been a number of situations which have proved interesting. In the first instance where there has not been an obvious explanation for an alleged paranormal sound or event, but when undergoing further analysis the event can be explained as completely scientifically possible, however he did say that through his work with the show there have been a few events that to this day have avoided a scientific explanation. The overall emphasis of his talk was to give a broad introduction to the world of parapsychology, with real world examples of how the mind can be tricked, whilst highlighting the fact that this area of research is not always about a rational denial of extraordinary events, but more work and research needs to be done in real world situations rather than the controlled laboratory which is the mainstay of current enquiries in this field.

The second part of this review will focus on a talk by ASSAP representatives Nicky Sewell and Dave Wood. This talk was used to first explain who ASSAP are, The Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena, and their positioning in the field as a neutral body who hold a scientific interest in the investigation of paranormal events. Nicky spoke in detail with regard to the epidemic of ghost hunting groups, and linked this to television programs that feature ghost hunting as a method of scientific data collection for anomalous events. Nicky highlighted the problems with this culture of ghost hunting that has endeavoured to replicate on screen ghost hunting yet has merely represented it with even lesser rigorous standards of authenticity. Examples of this were provided highlighting a new culture of the hobbyist ghost hunter who goes out with friends at the weekend for fun after a few drinks in the local and then may end up stalking out the local grave yard, having performed little or no research and certainly no thought about any scientific framework or approaches to a supposed haunted location.

This talk was fascinating as Nicky and Dave provided some compelling examples and anecdotal evidence for the shifting in contemporary society toward a more widespread engagement in the ghost hunting field, which is no bad thing, whilst at the same time questioning the approaches being used by emerging groups. The now widespread use of the Electro Magnetic Field (EMF) meter to confirm that there is a spirit near by is a direct

result of the contemporary ghost hunting TV program, the problem is, as Nicky and Dave point out, the use of such a meter and its ability to detect anything of this nature is totally unfounded, therefore a mass collection of data of this kind is futile and will only lead to there being a huge collection of information and research that has no bearing or scientific worth as far as furthering our understandings of anomalous experiences. In conclusion ASSAP as an organisation feels that this area of ghost hunting may need to start over again, questioning their practices and methodologies of scientific data collection.

In all the Weird conference was a very well organised and well rounded event, highlighting the very different areas of the paranormal and drawing together not only some internationally renowned speakers who are hugely respected in their field but also some very engaging interdisciplinary debate. If you wish to find out more about these events you can check their website: www.mystical-county.org.uk

David Woollatt

Second Annual Exploring the Extraordinary Conference

University of York 24th-25th September 2010

Building on the success of the initial Exploring the Extraordinary Conference last October at the University of York, this year has proved to be even more worthwhile in regards to the content, quality of speakers and the organisation of the event, which has now expanded into a welcome two day affair. Originated to explore divergent theories within the anomalistic field, speakers draw their inspiration from anthropology, sociology, transpersonal, spiritual, cultural and parapsychological areas, so creating a cosmopolitan mixture of interests and friendly debate, with invited speakers from a truly international community.

The sessions over the two days were split into themes and the first day focused on the more 'experience' based talks, beginning on a high note with a presentation from psychotherapist Josefina Speyer on the impact of extraordinary experiences within the bereavement process – a study conducted with Dr Mary Murray, who unfortunately was not able to attend. It was interesting to note that during her interviews, Josefina recognised the familiar reluctance individuals have in recounting strange experiences to others, although, in this instance, the overall impressions gained were of benefit. Following this was a talk by a very jet-lagged Michele Knight, who had flown directly from her home in Australia to attend – a sign of true dedication! She reviewed her current PhD project detailing how communication between the bereaved and deceased can positively impact on well-being and spiritual growth.

Directly after the coffee break, Alice Herron captured the audience's attention again by sharing her personal experiences of being actively involved within a new religious movement and her subsequent investigation into whether spiritual leaders have distinctive personality aspects which enable them to develop into such roles. Before lunch (and before stomachs began rumbling too loudly), Dr Jenny Hallam and Candice Sunney presented their joint research project which explores qualitatively the experiences of individuals involved in a (so-far) undefined 'earth energy' spirituality, and which generated many interested responses from the audience.

Following the lunch break, the sessions resumed with Dr Gerhard Mayer and Rene Grunder (who had travelled across from Germany), and a fascinating study of the impact of extraordinary experiences on the development of heterodox beliefs, especially neo-paganism and which aroused considerable interest. Unfortunately, Keith Beasley was not able to attend, and so his paper was presented by Tamlyn Ryan from the University of York, who successfully managed to direct any subsequent queries via email to the man himself! The keynote lecture in the afternoon by Dr David Clarke on experiences involving UFOs proved to be highly entertaining and soon managed to energise any flagging souls within the audience. With such subject matter always garnering controversy, Dr Clarke, with a background in folkloric studies and journalism, demonstrated a unique knowledge of previously secret British Government files that had been amassed on UFOs – with apparently more still undisclosed....researchers form an orderly queue here, please! At the end of such an enervating first day, delegates were invited to attend a privately arranged Ghost Walk around the historic city of York, plus a meal at a local hostelry (which became unintentionally involved with an 'A' list celebrity party in the same building...who could have predicted that?), plus a spot of after-dinner storytelling.

As the second day commenced the weather changed for the worse, but which happily, did not manage to dampen the delegate's enthusiasm. The general theme for the day encompassed more of the spiritual nature

of anomalistic events and the morning began with an engaging talk by Sarah Metcalf from the University of York on her PhD research. This examined the contemporary concerns facing psychic practitioners and the consequences of the 'emotional labour' involved and produced obvious support from the audience. Sarah was followed by Jack Hunter, who presented his unique insight into a branch of the Spiritualist movement in Bristol, specifically within the Bristol Spirit Lodge. With a background in anthropology, his research strives to understand the experiences gained by both mediums and sitters within a spiritualist group as and when they occur. Having recently been awarded the Eileen J. Garrett grant from the Parapsychological Foundation, this year his research will continue to strengthen. Preceding the lunch break was an exploration of Lady Cynthia Sandys, aristocrat and medium, from Dr Fiona Bowie. Dr Bowie shared her fascination with this intriguing figure, particularly regarding the books that were published from the 'channelling' of deceased members of her family and acquaintances.

After another delicious lunch, the afternoon sessions were launched by Ann Davies, a professional artist just at the beginning of her PhD studies into phenomenological art. She also practices as a 'psychic artist' – channelling pictures and portraits of spirits. She provided the audience with a thought-provoking presentation which included a portrait of a young girl that had been verified by a bereaved family member as being incredibly accurate, and willingly discussed aspects of fraudulent medium behaviour with clarity and sincerity. The late afternoon presentations began with another international traveller – Dr Yves Marton – discussing his long-term anthropological project in Brazil and Los Angeles. He succeeded in shocking the audience by revealing the latent prejudice towards certain working class communities and their beliefs, especially Santeria (the worship of Saints), in both Americas.

Next to the podium was the well-known current President of the Parapsychological Association, Dr David Luke, who offered a presentation on the relationship between anthropology and parapsychology. Although, fighting against the clock, he still managed to review how two apparently disparate fields often have close connections, exploring historic figures such as Andrew Lang, who championed such a worthwhile marriage in the face of hostility - possibly also echoing attitudes in the contemporary world? Last, but by no means least, Dr Paul Marshall as the final speaker of the event, discussed further the connections between what is defined as being either psychic or mystical in nature. With a relaxed style of presentation he was able to enthrall the audience one last time with his review of the comparisons that can be made between such extraordinary experiences, and how each area could actually learn from each other and utilise methodology in understanding such occurrences.

As is seen from the above programme, the diversity of the presentations is to be commended and it was gratifying to see so many delegates attending from such varied academic and interested perspectives. The two days generated so much discussion, both at the conference and socially, with many new acquaintances formed, that that the 3rd Conference in 2011 will no doubt prove to be even more popular and something very special, too.

Sophie Drennan

Next Issue

The next issue will be available in January 2011. Its theme will be “Mediumship and Spirit Possession”. If you would be interested in contributing a short article, roughly between 500-1,000 words (longer articles are also accepted), or an account of your own personal encounters with the paranormal while engaged in fieldwork, please get in touch via discarnates@googlemail.com.

Contact

If you would like to contribute an article, review, have an event publicised, suggest something you'd like to see, or simply comment on something you have read in this journal, please don't hesitate to get in touch via discarnates@googlemail.com.

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