

Paranthropology

Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

Vol. 2 No. 3

July 2011

The Esoteric Experience: Positive or Negative? - Mike Rush

Supernatural Abductions: UFO and Folklore Narratives - Franco Bejarano

Application of an Ethnographic Methodology for the Study of Spirit Possession - Terence J. Palmer

Capturing Intention?: PIP Photography and Shamanic Intervention - Zoe Bran

Evidence Unseen: The Ethnographic and Personal Unknown - Paul D. Biscop

The Ka in Ancient Egypt - Callum E. Cooper

Anthropology, Evolution and Anomalous Experience - James McClenon

A Matter of Spirit: An Imaginal Perspective on the Paranormal -Angela Voss

Psychedelics, Spirits and the Sacred Feminine: Communion as Cultural Critique - Cameron Adams

Reflecting on Paranthropology: Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal - Jack Hunter, Mark A. Schroll & Fabian Graham

& More...

Paranthropology

Welcome to the July 2011 issue of *Paranthropology*. This issue marks the first anniversary of the journal's existence. By now the journal has attracted well over 200 subscribers and is continuing to grow and develop in new directions. At this point I think it would be useful to try to outline some of the directions I would like to see the journal move towards. The first is to put together a board of reviewers to peer-review articles submitted to the journal and to thus increase the academic respectability of the publication. This, I feel, is a necessary step as it will, to a degree, improve the way in which this sort of eclectic research is perceived by the academic establishment. This will also ensure that the quality of the articles published in the journal maintains a high standard both in terms of their content and style of presentation. To find out more about the review board, and information about submissions and subscriptions, visit the journal's new website at www.paranthropology.co.uk.

This issue is also the first to be made available as a physical print-on-demand magazine. The hope here is to expand the availability of the journal, and to make it easier for libraries and other institutions to keep hard copies. Although it is necessary to pay for physical copies, the journal will continue to be made available online for free. It is important that *Paranthropology* remains freely available. All too often high quality research into paranormal topics is difficult to access, and it is about time that this changed.

As you can see from the contents list this issue is packed with fascinating articles which I sincerely hope you will find inspiring and thought provoking.

Jack Hunter

Contents

The Esoteric Experience: Positive or Negative
- *Michael J. Rush* 3-8.

Supernatural Abductions: UFO and Folklore
Narratives - *Franco Bejarano* 8-13.

Reflecting on Paranthropology:
Anthropological Methods for Studying the
Paranormal - *Jack Hunter* (with
commentaries from *Mark A. Schroll* & *Fabian
Graham*) 14-21.

Application of an Ethnographic Methodology
for the Study of Spirit Possession - *Terence
J. Palmer* 22-26.

Capturing Intention?: PIP Photography and
Shamanic Intervention - *Zoe Bran* 27-29.

Anthropology, Evolution and Anomalous
Experience - *James McClenon* 30-33.

Evidence Unseen: The Ethnographic and
Personal Unknown - *Paul D. Biscop* 34-36.

A Matter of Spirit: An Imaginal Perspective
on the Paranormal - *Angela Voss* 37-43.

The Ka in Ancient Egypt - *Callum E. Cooper*
43-45.

Diary of a PK Experiment 46-48.

Psychedelics, Spirits and the Sacred
Feminine: Communion as Cultural Critique -
Cameron Adams 49-52.

Paul Devereux Live at the Rhine: Naturalizing
Psi as the Anthropology of Consciousness -
Ryan Hurd 53-56.

Conference Abstracts 57-59.

Comments and Discussion 60.

Reviews 61-63.

The Esoteric Experience: Positive or Negative?

Michael J. Rush



Western Esotericism, or occultism, has often been viewed with suspicion and mistrust by the public, police and academia. It is often represented by the media as being synonymous with Satanism, as depicted in movies like Roman Polanski's (1968) *Rosemary's Baby* or books such as Dennis Wheatley's (1972) *The Devil Rides Out*. Unfortunately this stereotype influences many parts of society including television censorship, for example the ITC report on acceptable viewing (Sancho, 2001), and the 1980s Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA) hysteria, which was partly due to ignorance of Paganism and modern witchcraft (La Fontaine, 1998). Until recently many academics have also treated the academic study of occultism with suspicion. Bronislaw Malinowski (1925) commented:

'Even for those who do not share in that hankering after the occult, after the short cuts into "esoteric truth", this morbid interest, nowadays so freely ministered to by stale revivals of half-understood ancient creeds and cults, dished up, under the names of "theosophy", "spiritism" or "spiritualism", and various pseudo-"sciences", ologies and -isms – even for the clear scientific mind the subject of magic has a special attraction.'

Even occultists themselves have made disparaging remarks about their own tradition, Arthur Edward Waite (1972) commented on magical grimoires, 'We shall see very shortly...that we are dealing with a bizarre literature, which passes, by various fantastic phases, through all folly into crime.' It is not surprising then that, according to the popular view, experiences from within occultism would be of spiritual evil. A general study of negative spiritual experiences made by Jakobsen (1999) found that spiritual evil can come from within or without a person, can be encountered in certain places or people, is described in numerous ways and can result in '...ice cold shivers, tingling scalp, sweating with terror, paralysed lips, vomiting from fear, shaking, rocking body, being unable to speak or move'.

In brief Western Esotericism includes the beliefs and practices centred around magic, astrology, and

alchemy from the ancient period to the modern day. Antoine Faivre (Faivre & Needleman, 1992) has defined Western Esotericism by describing six characteristics, four essential and two nonessential to the definition. The first four are: *correspondences* between the microcosm and the macrocosm; *living nature*, the idea that the world or universe is alive or ensouled; *imagination and intermediaries*, the use of the imagination to access states or metaphysical worlds between man and the divine; and *the experience of transmutation*, the psychospiritual process of transformation often implicit in these ideas and experiences. The additional two characteristics are: *concordance*, the concept that all spiritual traditions originate from, and therefore contain aspects of, a single primordial wisdom tradition; and *transmission*, the ways in which this tradition is passed down through the centuries between initiates or adepts.

In the academic arena, unlike the popular one, the term 'esotericism' is not usually synonymous with 'occultism'. In popular usage the latter may be used as a convenient catchall but a more restricted use would tend to apply it only to those aspects of esotericism that involve practice rather than doctrine (Faivre, 1987). According to R.A. Gilbert (1993) the term 'occultism' was first used in English by Madame Blavatsky in *Isis Unveiled*, 1877.

Methodology

The question asked by this study was simply: what kinds of spiritual experiences are reported by people involved with esotericism and occultism? Are experiences, and their outcomes, negative or positive? This approach was based upon that of William James, author of the seminal *Varieties of Religious Experience* (James, 1902), who advocated judging spiritual experiences by their fruits. The three traditions selected were Helena Blavatsky's *Theosophy*, G.I. Gurdjieff's *Fourth Way* movement, and Mathers' *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*. All three traditions were founded in the late 19th or early 20th centuries and still have followers today. Sources of written accounts of spiritual experiences were collected from published texts, the archive of the *Religious Experience Research Centre* (RERC), and from contemporary practitioners. The availability of occult and esoteric

texts has increased greatly over the last few years making such material more easily accessible than ever before. Many of these texts contain autobiographical material relating to spiritual experiences. The RERC, founded by biologist Sir Alister Hardy FRS in 1969 and now housed at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, has an archive of over 6000 accounts of religious experiences from a diversity of traditions. Contemporary accounts were elicited by e-mail requests, letters, online forums and my website www.esoteric-experience.org.uk. Groups and organisations were identified using the Internet. Requests for accounts did not indicate that the experiences would be categorised as negative or positive in order to avoid bias in the response. In addition an attempt was made to contact lapsed or ex-members of the three traditions in question.

Often a distinction is made between 'religion' as the doctrines, history, rituals, etc, of a tradition, and 'spirituality', the experiences and behaviour of people. This issue will not be debated here so the terms 'religious' and 'spiritual' experience will be used synonymously. 'Anomalous' experience (Cardena, Lynn & Krippner, 2001) may be a preferable term, encompassing a wider range of experiences, without prejudging what category they belong to. Whilst this term may not apply in some cultures where such experiences are viewed as part of normal everyday life, for the accounts collected here this term seemed appropriate. Most of the accounts were considered religious, spiritual or psychic by the experiencers themselves.

Three Esoteric Traditions

Founded in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (HPB, 1831-1891) and Colonel Henry Olcott the Theosophical Society has as its principle aims the following:

1. To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.
2. To encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science.
3. To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.

The writings of Blavatsky and other prominent Theosophists form a large and complex body of ideas. Prominent among HPB's works are *Isis Unveiled* (1877), *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), *The Key to Theosophy* (1889) and *Voice of the Silence* (1889). These

works outline ideas such as; the seven stage spiritual evolution of the Earth, the seven-fold constitution of man, the existence of Tibetan Mahatmas who have reached the pinnacle of spiritual development and now work to aid mankind, the Ancient Wisdom Tradition which predates and supersedes both modern science and Christianity, and evidence from paranormal phenomena of a non-material aspect to the world.

G.I. Gurdjieff published a number of books, the most significant being his *All And Everything* series, comprised of *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (1950), *Meetings With Remarkable Men* (1963), and *Life Is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'* (1975). The whole of Gurdjieff's system focussed on waking up 'man the machine' and creating a single, permanent 'I' rather than the usual state of multiple, conflicting 'I's'. Two important techniques of the system were *self-observation* and *self-remembering*. Although the system is very psychological in nature it is also interwoven with certain ideas about the nature of man and the world. The process of 'waking up', known as 'the work', involves much physical, emotional and mental effort: represented by the 'moving', 'emotional' and 'intellectual centres' respectively. Gurdjieff described the physical way as the path of the fakir, the emotional way as the path of the monk and the intellectual way as the path of the yogi. In distinction, the Fourth Way utilises a balance and harmonisation of all three ways. Gurdjieff also taught of the four bodies of man and the universe; the physical body, the astral body, the mental body and the causal body, similar but not identical to the concepts in Theosophy. Gurdjieff used the octave as his way of understanding the creation of the universe (the *Ray of Creation*) and the process of awakening in man. These processes; the *Law of Three* and *Law of Seven* are summarised in the symbol of the Enneagram.

Probably the most famous occult society in history was founded in 1888 by S.L.M. Mathers (1854-1918), Dr William Westcott (1848-1925) and Dr William Woodman (1828-1891). The organisation they founded, and which had a massive influence on subsequent esotericism, became known as *The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*.

As for the origins of the Golden Dawn Westcott claimed that he had discovered an old coded manuscript said to contain a number of mystical rituals which were subsequently expanded by Mathers. Westcott claimed that he had received authorisation from a German adept to found the Isis-

Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

Urania Temple of Die Goldene Dämmerung. Further temples were established in England, New Zealand and Paris. Notable members included scholar A.E. Waite, the poet William Butler Yeats, the actress Florence Farr, the author of supernatural fiction Arthur Machen, and the writer Allan Bennett. The Golden Dawn had a hierarchical degree structure based on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. The teachings of the Order included magic, alchemy and astrology. These were taught in theory in the outer order and put into practice in the inner order. The whole aim of Initiates in the Order was to ‘...extend the Consciousness in the direction of divine and superhuman things and, correspondingly restrict the “Automatic Consciousness” of animal Appetites and desires.’ (King, 1987).

Results

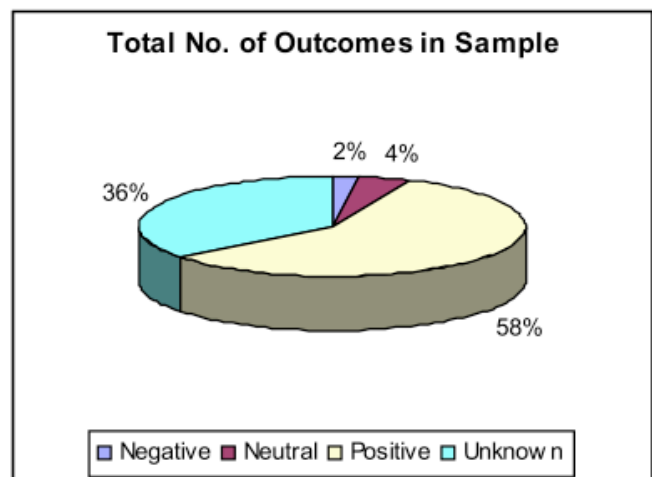
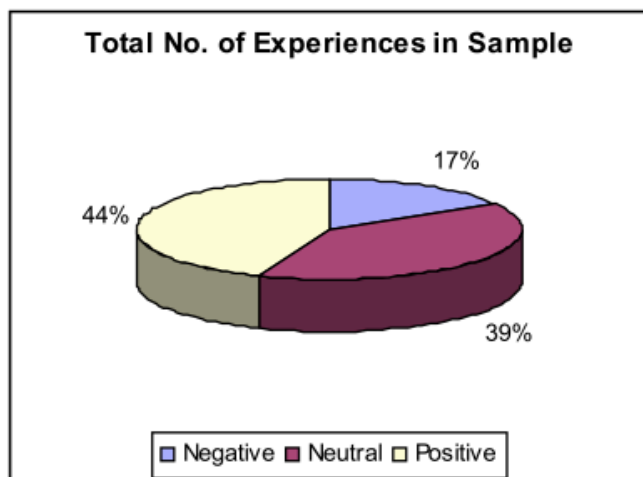
The experiences and their outcomes were judged to be either positive, negative or neutral simply based on the language used by the experiencers to describe them. In many cases the subsequent outcomes were not recorded. Positive, negative and neutral experiences were found. Although a significant number of negative experiences are reported, the majority had positive outcomes.

Positive experiences included empathy with the tradition and inner knowledge, a sense of guidance or destiny, and the numinous, ‘There was a feeling of reverent awe’. Also reported was the concept of being on a spiritual journey, ‘I realised that the search for Truth mattered more than finding it’ (RERC, 001817), feelings of unity, a sense of Being and the Self, inner transformation, ‘A new kind of resurrection begins in me – I am invaded by the all-powerfulness of spirit’ (Anderson, 1962); and love

and ecstasy, ‘I felt an invisible outpouring of love’ (Chapman, 1993). Altered states of consciousness were frequent including mystical type experiences, ‘I had a profound sense of a sudden major change of consciousness which manifested as frequent mystical-like experiences and a daily and pervasive feeling of numinosity’ (Regardie, 1971), and inner journeys, ‘...Kether, on the one occasion when I touched its fringe, appeared as a blinding white light, in which all thought went completely blank’ (Fortune, 1935).

Negative elements included physical danger; a sense of fear or oppression, ‘the atmosphere became positively oppressive, and we three could hardly breathe’ (Caldwell, 2000); and physical pain. There seemed to be a fear of psychic attack by some of the Golden Dawn members. Also, initiation and self-development are understood to be difficult paths to take; often the initiate would have to undergo unpleasant experiences to make further progress. Negative experiences also resulted from the unpleasant discoveries that people sometimes made about themselves whilst practicing self-observation, ‘You see your “flaws” very clearly, and your self-importance drops’ (Tart, 1992); and from the important role of suffering in Gurdjieff’s system.

Some accounts did not refer to positive or negative aspects and were therefore classed as neutral. Neutral experiences were mostly due to reports of paranormal phenomena. Such phenomena included unexplained scents, phantom bells, astral projection, ‘precipitation’ of handwriting, the mysterious appearance of letters, meetings with the elusive Mahatmas, and telepathy, ‘On this occasion I not only heard *but I replied mentally* and G. heard me and answered me’ (Ouspensky, 1949). One



experient commented, 'I don't count it as a "spiritual" experience, more a psychic one, but certainly Esoteric'. Descriptions of self-remembering and self-observation were also largely neutral, 'When I was feeling *I*, I could neither think nor speak; even sensations became dimmed. Also, one could only remember oneself in this way for a very short time' (Ouspensky, 1949). Similarly, many Golden Dawn accounts consisted of long neutral descriptions of astral travel.

Conclusion

The relatively large proportion of positive experiences and positive outcomes provides evidence that esotericism, or occultism, does not simply result in experiences of spiritual evil. Although there are a significant number of negative experiences, these are often followed by a positive outcome. This highlights the role and importance of suffering in spiritual experience. Perhaps these kind of experiences are related to what James (1902) referred to as the religion of the 'twice-born' or 'sick soul'. The sick soul senses a radical 'wrongness or vice in his essential nature... which requires a supernatural remedy'. Furthermore an 'urgent wondering and questioning is set up, a poring theoretical activity'. James says, 'The process is one of redemption, not of mere reversion to natural health, and the sufferer, when saved, is saved by what seems to him a second birth, a deeper kind of conscious being than he could enjoy before'. Negative experiences, for the sick soul, supply a wide range of experience, may be a 'key to life's significance' and 'open our eyes to the deepest levels of truth'. It should also be noted that there may be an inherent bias in people's willingness to report positive rather than negative experiences. Another possibility is that current members tend to provide positive accounts, whilst ex-members tend to provide more negative accounts. However, the percentages of positive, negative and neutral experiences from current and ex-members was found to be approximately equal.

There is no single experience that characterises the esoteric approach to spirituality. Theosophy tends to emphasise the importance of paranormal phenomena as evidence for a non-material aspect of reality. Fourth Way has a more psychological feel and accentuates self-reflection and meditative introspection. The Golden Dawn concentrates particularly on astral travel and other visions. Whilst different traditions emphasise different aspects of these experiences, it was found that the accounts are

generally similar to spiritual experiences reported from other, more orthodox, traditions. There seems to be a fairly large proportion of positive experiences in Theosophy and Fourth Way and a smaller proportion in the Golden Dawn. The large number of neutral experiences in Theosophy are due to paranormal type experiences which were simply observed and reported. Nevertheless, these often led to positive outcomes for the experient, such as confirmation of a non-materialistic world-view. Research into paranormal experiences carried out by Rosemary Breen (2008) found that 70% of respondents claimed their experience had altered their attitude to life and death. The large percentage of neutral experiences from the Golden Dawn is due to detailed descriptions of various astral realms. These experiences may also serve to confirm a non-material worldview but it is also important to remember the doctrine of 'as above, so below'; the Macrocosm reflects the Microcosm. Such experiences can therefore be personal, as well as cosmological, insights. The neutrality of these accounts was due to the dispassionate, almost clinical way in which they were described. This makes sense when it is remembered that the modern occult revival was attempting to approach religion in a 'scientific' way. Occult students were required to keep detailed journals of their experiments. Some accounts differentiated between 'psychic' and 'spiritual' experiences. Mostly these were seen as unrelated although there were one or two exceptions. The psychic or paranormal type experiences occurred in all three traditions but assumed the most importance in the séance-like phenomena of Theosophy. Anthony Duncan (1975) has suggested that in occultism psychic experiences are characterised by solemnity, darkness and fear, whilst spiritual experiences are characterised by love, light and joy. The latter all occur numerous times in the accounts surveyed but Duncan's characterisation of psychic experiences was not upheld.

Finally, many experients had actually been associated with more than one of the three traditions. Some of the accounts suggested that this spiritual eclecticism could be construed as a quest or journey, for example, 'I felt a concentration of force, a purging of the spirit, and a desire to go on with my quest' (Chapman, 1993). This may relate to Batson and Ventis' (1982) concept of quest religion.

In summary, esoteric or occult spirituality can be a source of positive experiences and outcomes. This is contrary to the popular conception of these

Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

traditions. Finally, there is no esoteric experience per se that can be characterised from the data. The experiences reported, whilst differing in emphasis, tend to be similar to accounts from other traditions.

Bibliography

- Anderson, M. (1962) 1991. *The Unknowable Gurdjieff*, Arkana, London/New York.
- Batson, D. & Ventis, L. (1982) *The Religious Experience: A Social-Psychological Perspective*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Blavatsky, H.P. (1877) 1988. *Isis Unveiled (Vols. 1&2)*, Theosophical University Press, Pasadena.
- Blavatsky, H.P. (1888) 1925. *The Secret Doctrine (Vols. 1&2)*, The Theosophy Company, Los Angeles.
- Blavatsky, H.P. (1889) 1968. *The Key to Theosophy*, Theosophical Publishing House, London.
- Blavatsky, H.P. (1889) 1992. *The Voice of the Silence*, Theosophical University Press, Pasadena.
- Breen, Rosemary. *The Nature, Incidence and Impact of Parapsychological Phenomena: Preliminary Findings*, February 2008, available online as at 9 March 2008 at www/esoteric-experience.org.uk
- Caldwell, D. 2000. *The Esoteric World of Madame Blavatsky*, Quest Books, Wheaton.
- Cardena, E, Lynn, S, & Krippner, S. (2001) 2004. *Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the Scientific Evidence*, American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.
- Chapman, Janine. (1993) *Quest for Dion Fortune*, Weiser, York Beach.
- Duncan, AD. *The Fourth Dimension: A Christian Approach to the Occult*, Mowbrays, London/Oxford 1975, P55.
- Faivre, A. (1987) definition of 'Occultism' in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade, p36, Vol 11, Macmillan 1987.
- Faivre, A. & Needleman, J. (1992) 1993. *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, SCM Press, London.
- Fortune, D. (1935) 1970. *The Mystical Qabalah*, Ernest Benn, London.
- Gurdjieff, G.I. (1950) 1999. *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, Penguin Compass, London/New York.
- Gurdjieff, G.I. (1963) 1985. *Meetings With Remarkable Men*, Arkana, London/New York.
- Gurdjieff, G.I. (1975) 1999. *Life is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'*, Arkana, London/New York.
- Jakobsen, M. (1999). *Negative Spiritual Experiences: Encounters With Evil*, Religious Experience Research Centre, Lampeter.
- James, W. (1902) 1985. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Penguin Classics, New York/London.
- King, F. (1987) 1971 Flying Roll XXVII in. *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic, and Alchemy*, Aquarian Press, Wellingborough (1971) 1987, P169.
- Gilbert, R.A. (1993) *Casting the First Stone: The Hypocrisy of Religious Fundamentalism and its Threat to Society*, p22, Element 1993.
- La Fontaine, Jean. (1998) *Speak of the Devil: Tales of Satanic Abuse in Contemporary England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge/New York.
- Malinowski, B. (1925) 1982. *Magic, Science & Religion and Other Essays*, Souvenir Press.
- Ouspensky, P.D. (1949) 2001. *In Search of the Miraculous: The Teachings of G.I. Gurdjieff*, Harcourt, New York/London.
- Regardie, I. *The Golden Dawn*, Llewellyn, St. Paul (1971) 2000, ppxix-xx.
- Sancho, J. (2001) *Beyond Entertainment?: Research into the acceptability of alternative beliefs, psychic and occult phenomena on television*, define Research.
- Tart, C. (1992) 2000. *The Dynamics of Waking Sleep* in Needleman, J. & Baker, G. *Gurdjieff: Essays & Reflections on the Man & His Teaching*, Continuum, New York.
- Waite, A.E. (1972) 1984. *The Book of Black Magic and of Pacts*, Samuel Weiser, York Beach.

Wheatley, D. (1972) *The Devil Rides Out*, Hutchinson & Co. Geneva.

Michael J. Rush graduated with a BSc (Hons) in Biomedical Science in 1997, an MA in Religious Experience in 2008, and a PGDip in Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology in 2011. He has a long-standing interest in occultism and Western Esotericism.



His article *On The Side of the Angels: Neuroscience & Religious Experience* was published as Occasional Paper #49 by the Religious Experience Research Centre. In 2010 his essay *If God Is A Delusion – Why Bother?* came joint third in *The Skeptic* magazine's Mary Evans essay competition. Mike is a committee member of the Alister Hardy Society and runs the AHS Chesterfield Group.

E-mail: mike@esoteric-experience.org.uk
Website: www.esoteric-experience.org.uk

Supernatural Abductions: UFO and Folklore Narratives

Franco Bejarano

You don't know what's going on. You feel sedated, numb, yet you still hold on to the little bit of consciousness you have going on. As you look up, strange blurry figures are looking down on you, figures which disproportionate un-human appearances fade against the blazing bright white background. You struggle, internally, as your frozen body does not allow you to move. You don't remember how you got there, the last time you were somewhat conscious you were about to fall asleep in your own bed. Sometime later on you wake up in your room, realizing you had a horrible dream, but as you look down you see little marks on your body, as if someone had been operating on you. A UFO enthusiast would tell you that you've been abducted by aliens, but take that same scenario and place it sometime in the 15th century; you had been abducted by fairies.

Introduction

Ever since oral tradition has been part human society stories of kidnappings and abductions on a supernatural level have been passed down through folklore. In pre-modern folklore most stories of such kind revolve around a supernatural being or monster, entities mostly known to the modern folklorist as fairies, because "even in folklore that uses the term 'fairy' there are many definitions of what constitutes a fairy. Sometimes the term is used to describe any magical creature, including goblins or gnomes: at other times, the term only describes a specific type of more ethereal creature".[1] However, there is a new folkloric entity that has pretty much taken over this role in these modern times; aliens. The concept of extraterrestrial life was first scholarly discussed around the time of the Greek philosopher Thales [2], around 600 BC, but it wasn't until the mid-1930's that aliens started appearing in mainstream

publications, and not until the 1960s that stories of alien abductions became widespread. A comparison of both fairy kidnappings throughout historical folklore and modern alien abduction experiences contain terrifying parallels. It is the similarity of folkloric entities that “has forced UFO researchers such as John Keel and Jacques Valee to the conclusion that medieval fays [fairies] and modern aliens are expressions of the same underlying reality.”[3]

When does it all start? Fairy abductions are as old as a religion itself. Supernatural kidnappings have been recorded for centuries; in Greek mythology, Zeus, for example, is portrayed as a deity fond of kidnapping mortals. The fuzz with alien abductions started mainly with the landmark case of Antonio Villas Boas, a Brazilian farmer who claims to have been abducted in 1957, and had the following happen to him:

“He was taken abroad a spacecraft where beings in spacesuits undressed him, took a blood sample from him and then covered his body in a thick, odorless liquid. He was left alone and shortly thereafter, a naked alien ‘woman’ came in, manually aroused him, had sex with him twice and stored some sperm in a container before exiting. Villas Boas also claimed that before she left, the woman pointed to her belly, and then towards the sky; he interpreted this to mean that he had impregnated her and that his child would be born somewhere in outer space.” [4]

Note should be taken that this is not the first recorded UFO sighting but the first international widespread case of an alien abduction.

“By 1985, some 1200 North Americans abductions were filled under the names of the abductees [...] 300 of these were carefully studied by folklorist Thomas E Bullard and 103 were considered by Bullard ‘high information cases.’ [...] [His] comparative studies suggest that there is a persistent structure to Abduction Report, with the same episode reoccurring in invariant order in 80% of the ‘high information’ narratives [...] [–] Capture, Examination, Conference, Tour, Loss of time, Return, Theophany and Aftermath.”[5]

Spirited Away

All reports of Alien Abductions start with the first encounter. People claim to have been abducted from a variety of places, forests, while driving, even in their own homes and while sleeping, but there is an element in the way they are captured that unites

almost all cases, a change in their state of consciousness. “The abductee experiences an intense blue or white light, a buzzing or humming sound, anxiety and the sense of an unexplained presence. He or she is then transported or ‘floated’ into a craft,”[6] just like how in renaissance times “witches supposedly were taken into the air for meetings with the devil.” [7] The abductee then either loses his memory, or remembers moving in a trance-like state; the environment is often surround with blinding lights and/or mist. British researchers have called it the “Oz Factor”[8], a shift in the state of mind where the environments seems to fall of perception, one becomes introspective, and transitions to a state of limited self-willed mobility.^[9] In fairy folklore the “Oz factor” also plays an important role when it comes to kidnappings. “According to Romanian data, fairies ‘charm’ their men with their song, [and] lull them to sleep. [...] Let us quote from a lively Hungarian memorate from Gyimes about a young man who fell into a trance under influence of the dancing and singing fairies: ‘[...] a whooshing wind came and three woman [...] made him dance, and dance, and dance forever.’ ”[9] The act of mystical creatures using mind altering powers to “abduct” humans is a universal pattern, a few examples can be found in the folklore of the Scottish selkies – a deadly water horse, mermaids, the Greek sirens, British fairies, the list could go on and on. The Oz factor seems to just be a new academic term for fairy Charm.

Out of all alien abduction cases, perhaps the most common or widespread scenario takes place while sleeping. Psychology’s “main alternative theory is that abductions are associated with sleep paralysis,”[10] a highly unexplored sleep phenomenon when one basically wakes up while the mind and body are still in dream mode, creating a perception of distorted reality. A folkloric comparative approach will reveal that aliens, the source of these nightly episodes according to modern perception, run parallel with the fairies of the past, this time through the concept the boogiemán, “the scary figure that would ‘get you’ if you were bad or left you bed at night.” [11] In both, the tales of the boogiemán and the alien abduction narratives, we have scary visitors that terrorize us at night. The concept of the boogiemán is said to have its origins in the stories of the Boggart, [12] a malevolent English fairy that hides or appears from under the bed or in the closet and scares its victims. The archetype of the Boggart is universal, in German folklore, for example, a type of fairy called Alp, “presses upon sleeping

people so that they cannot utter a sound. These attacks are called *Alpdrücke* (nightmares),” [13] and have been theorized as a folk explanation for sleep paralysis, which, as I mentioned before, is the psychological explanation for Alien abductions. Not only is the similarity between Fairy kidnappings and Alien abductions fully comparable on a folkloric level, but it's reinforced by psychology, as you can see by the Sleep paralysis theory.

The Experience

This is perhaps the most interesting part in the abduction narrative, because it gives us an insight into “the other world(s)”. As I mentioned earlier, when folklorist Thomas Bullard explored the narratives of the Abduction phenomena of the late 20th century, after the capture, he classified the abductees' experience as Examination, Conference, and Tour, with the examination being the highlight of the experience, and the last 2 being less common hazy elements.

Among modern abductees, sexual encounters are a common theme among the examination recollections, as reflected on Antonio Villas Boas' case (the Brazilian farmer) a few paragraphs ago, where he had sex with the alien twice. While in Villas Boas' case, and many others, intercourse does occur; alternatively, author Joan d'Arc says that:

“It is reported that males are forced to ejaculate semen by means of masturbation, induction of female imagery, by the use of a special instrument, or by introduction of a ‘female’ alien abductee. Conversely, female alien abductees are reportedly impregnated by sperm donor without actual sex. This allegedly follows the painful extraction on the fetus, which occurs at about 3 month's gestation” [14]

Whether the encounters actually involve intercourse or not, they do belong to a sexual nature, showing a common theme, crossbreeding, and folklore is no stranger to it. The Book of Genesis tells us that “the sons of God [angels] saw the daughters of men that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.” [15] European folklore tells stories about “the amorous relations between fairies and humans, to human wives stolen by fairy husbands [and vice versa], [...] [such as] the poetic story of a bride desired by a fairy husband and carried off into Fairy land, [...] [that is] the Irish Legend of Mífhair and Étaín.” [16] Deviating from Eurocentric folklore, the same concept can be found in Native American myths, such as the apache story of “The girl, and the water

sprit” where a girl is abducted, and taken as a wife, by a water fairy. [17] Another example comes from Chinese mythology, which depicts fairies (or animal spirits) usually taking same-sex partners, such as the tale of the “Old Farmer and a Dragon”, in which a sixty-year old farmer is forcibly sodomised by a passing dragon.[18] Researcher Dr. Richard L. Thompson explains that:

“Just as we find in UFO cases, it seems that sex desire and genetic considerations are involved in these abductions. In support of this, Vallee [UFO researcher] cited Edwin Hartland, a scholar of fairy traditions, as to the reasons people in Northern European countries gave for this abduction of children: ‘ The motive usually assigned to fairies in Northern stories is that of preserving and improving their race, on the one hand by carrying off human children to be brought up among the elves and to become united with them, and on the other hand by obtaining the milk and fostering care of human mothers for their own offspring.’” [19]

It is strong similarities like these that make the case of UFO and fairy/supernatural comparisons.

Unlike the examination pattern in UFO narratives, the themes of Conference, and Tour are extremely hazy and vague. The “conference” part of the narrative consists of interaction between the abductee and the aliens, while the “tour” aspect consists of the exploration or showing of the surrounding. Because in supernatural adductions in folklore the act of interaction and/or viewing of the surroundings are given elements, comparing it to UFO narratives would be redundant.

Coming Back

Bullard's 5th narrative element is “Loss of time”, most commonly known as the phenomenon of missing time. “Many people have come forward telling of perplexing experiences wherein they have seen a UFO [...] only to find out later an hour or two has escaped them, and no memory of the “missing time,” [20] such as the famous, highly documented, and investigated case of Barney and Betty Hill. On the evening of September 19, 1961 around 10 p.m., the Hills were driving through the isolated U.S. Route 3 in New Hampshire, when they saw a light in the sky move frantically. Having stopped the car to walk their dog, Barney got a closer view of the light with a pair of binoculars and swears to have seen a flying saucer. They continued driving as the object got closer to them, until it descended 80–100 feet above the Hills; Barney got out of the car, but when he realized their

intentions of capture, he got back and stated driving at fast speed. Almost immediately the Hills found themselves 35 miles from where they originally were, with no memory of what had happened, or how they got there. The last thing Mrs. Hill remembers is the car vibrating and the sound a microwave beep. [21] Hundreds of documented cases have shown the same pattern, but of course this is nothing new. In a Welsh folk tale, Rhys and Llewellyn were two servants that were walking home from work at night, when all the sudden Rhys started hearing a sweet melody; he decides to follow the music, while Llewellyn decides to go home. Months pass without Rhys being seen, and Llewellyn decides to look for him in the spot where the alleged music was playing. Rhys was found dancing within a fairy ring, later claiming that he had only been there for 5 minutes. [22] A similar story comes from the Chinese Western Jin Dynasty. Two cousins went out searching for food, but soon forgot their duties; among the forests they found a cave with two elderly fairy creatures playing chess. They watched until the match was over, but when the two cousins turned around and started going back, one of the old fairies told them things were going to be different. When the two cousins went back to their village, they found out 500 years had actually passed. [23] It is common belief that humans, upon entrance to "Fairyland", or any other type of other world, suffer from time dilatation, and the UFO abduction phenomenon is the perfect example of it.

The missing time experience also accompanies certain side effects. The 6th element in a UFO narrative is known as the return. This deals with the state in which abductees are returned to earth, both physical and mental. Abductees are often returned in different locations, such as in the case of Travis Walton. On November 5, 1975, Travis was abducted in the middle of the forest in the small town of Snowflake, Arizona. Travis and his fellow logging crew were driving through the forest, when they encountered a weird light a few yards off the side of the dirt road. When Travis got out of the car and tried to approach the light, he was hit with a blazing light that completely paralyzed him, and threw him several feet back into the air. His crew drove away in fear, but later went back the same night with help; Travis wasn't there anymore. An intense search party was organized; Travis later reappeared 5 days later, unaware of the missing time, 30 miles where he had been abducted. He later remembered strange beings looking down on him while semi-conscious. [24] Japanese folklore tells us a similar case:

On the evening of September 30th 1907 a child in a village in Aichi prefecture disappeared just as everyone was busy preparing the white rice cakes to be offered to the god at a festival the next day. When the celebrations were over and the child was still found to be missing, a frantic search was made throughout the village. For some hours all efforts proved fruitless. Then suddenly a loud thump was heard on the ceiling of the child's own house. They climbed up to see what had caused the noise, and found the child stretched out unconscious, his mouth covered with white rice. When at length he recovered his senses he told them that he had been standing under the big cedar tree in the shrine precincts when a stranger had appeared and taken him away. [25]

In Japanese folklore, it was assumed that if a person suddenly disappeared he/she would have been taken by a god for a short journey, however, if all search for the missing person was fruitless, then it was assumed he/she had been carried off by a fairy creature. In addition, it was common for such abductees to end up in inexplicable places. [26] In both types of narratives we get individuals that have experienced missing time, and come back telling stories of supernatural beings, but don't actually know how they got to where they were.

Right after an alien abduction, it is common for abductees to find something wrong with their bodies, often finding bruises, or strange marks on their skin. For example, in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Hill that was explained earlier, warts popped up in a near-perfect circle near Mr. Hill's groin", [27] five months after his abduction. Surprisingly enough, Dr. Gregory L. Little states that "according to fairy lore, fairies create a circular cluster of small bruises as their mark. The phenomenon is known as 'fairy bruising' and is a sign of either favor or disfavor. The ring of bruises is often found around the genitals. They did this, according to various 17th century accounts, by pinching their victims." [28] A fairy bruise is an alternative form of a witches' mark. It was believed that witches were marked by the Devil himself, usually in private or unseen parts of the body; the marks were a catalyst for the Devil's influence. In alien abductions, these marks are assumed to be scars from experimental operations, or perhaps a way for aliens to stamp their victims, such as in the case of Jesse Long. In 1957, Jesse claims to have been abducted at the age of five, along with his younger brother. He says that during his capture a small item was surgically inserted into his left shinbone, which not only caused pain throughout his life, but also

claims to be linked to the several abductions he experienced after his childhood. After 34 years, Jesse had the foreign item surgically removed in 1991. While some dismissed the item as simply a small sharp of glass, when it was brought for testing, the material was identifiable and had unique characteristics.[29] Just like witches were controlled by the Devil through marks, modern alien implants serve the same purpose, allegedly.

Theophany & Aftermath

A rarer, yet solid element in the abduction narrative is the pattern of theophany, a manifestation or mystical experience regarding deity to a human relations. While the majority of alien abductees describe the experience as terrifying, there are those who think of it as enlightening, and a religious experience. Anthropologist and researcher Jack hunter writes:

“An example of how such a personal and spiritual transformation can develop from a highly frightening and negative experience comes from an informant with whom I have been in contact. Referring to her terrifying life-long abduction experiences she writes: ‘I’m sure it’s had some impact on me ... It has made me more aware of the differences in what is truly God and what isn’t.’ She interpreted her abduction experiences as manifestations of evil, and through this discovered a greater faith ‘in what is truly God’ [...] [Contrastingly], the Betty Andreasson abduction case of 1967 provides a fascinating perspective on the blurring of distinctions between religious and abduction experiences. Betty Andreasson interpreted her abduction experiences as visitations from angelic beings (the opposite reaction to the abduction case mentioned earlier)” [30]

It is understandable how one could take this as a spiritual concept. In folklore and mythology, gods have been known for similar encounters of enlightenment as well, such as the Japanese story told earlier, and in fact “in the Middle Ages abductees would experience some new revelation, uncanny knowledge or a new skill, modern abductees often report returning with psychic powers or messages of impending ecological disasters”. [31] Though cases of enlightenment or future-seeing are rare in both folklore and UFO narrative, they have occurred, such as the 1979 case of Filberto Cardenas, a Cuba exile living in Florida. Kidnapped in front of his family, Cardenas recalls being shown images of the future. Among the messages, transmitted by one of the aliens named Kiostros, highlighted the event that came

next, the tragic end of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. That would happen in 1981. An even more surprising is that a movie star and his wife would become president and first lady of the United States, which occurred in January of that year when Ronald Reagan and his wife (Nancy Reagan), both movies actors, went to the White House. He also announced a war in the Middle East, which would involve Saudi Arabia and Israel. In addition, the disappearance from the map of one of the oil producing nations, the small nation of Kuwait. The most significant of these predictions is that it was made years before when hardly anyone had heard of Kuwait.[32]

Whether real or not, the elements of both types of narrative, folkloric and modern, are without question subject to crucial similarities. The phenomenon of fairies, gods, and UFO abductions are reflections of the same underlying reality. What that reality is, is still in question.

Notes

1. Gertrude M. Faulding, *Faeries* (London: B.T. Batsfords, 1912), VII.
2. Philip M. Parker, *Harbouring: Webster's Quotations, Facts and Phrases* (San Diego, ICON Group International, 2008), s.v “Cosmic Pluralism.
3. John Michael Greer, *Monsters, An Investigators Guide to Magical Beings* (St. Paul, MN, Llewellyn Publications, 2001), p.90.
4. Stephen J. Spghesi, *UFO book of lists* (New York, Citadeal Press, 2000), p77.
5. Jonathan Z. Smith, “Close encounters of Diverse Kinds.” In: *Religion and Cultural Studies*, ed, Susan L. Mizruchi (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2000), p.5
6. Susan Blackmore and Marcus Cox, “Alien Abductions, Sleep Paralysis and the Temporal Lobe.” In: *European Journal of UFO and Abduction Studies*, (2000), p113 -118
7. Gregory L. Little, “UFO Abductions Through The Ages.” Think about it. Last accessed Friday, January 14, 2011. <http://www.think-about-it.com/abductions/AlienAbductionsThroughTheAges.htm>
8. Joe Nyman, "A Composite Encounter Model." In: Pritchard, Andrea & Pritchard, David E. & Mack, John E. & Kasey, Pam & Yapp, Claudia. *Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference* (Cambridge: North Cambridge Press, 1994) p. 83-85.
9. Éva Pócs, “Possession Phenomena, Possession Systems. Some East-Central European Examples.” In: *Demons, Spirits, Witches Vol. 2*, ed, Gábor

Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

Klaniczay, Éva Pócs (New York, Central European University Press, 2005) p103.

10. ^ Blackmore & Cox, "Alien Abductions, Sleep Paralysis and the Temporal Lobe", 200.

11. Simon J. Bronner, American children's folklore (Little Rock, Arkansas, August House, 1988) p.143

12. Chris McNab, Ancient Legends/Folklore. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2007.

13. Monstrous.com. "Faerie A-E," Last accessed Saturday, December 25, 2010. http://faerie.monstrous.com/faerie_a-e.htm.

14. Joan d'Arc, Phenomenal World (Escondido, CA, The Book Tree, 2000), p 12.

15. Gen. 6:1-4 (King James Version).

16. Katharine Briggs, The fairies in tradition and literature (London, Routledge Classics, 2002), p147.

17. Harry Hoijer, "The girl and the water spirit" in: Chiricahua and Mescalero Apache Texts. University of Virginia Library. Last accessed Thursday, December 30, 2010. <http://etext.virginia.edu/apache/frames/ChiEn37.html>

18. Xiaomingxiong, "Chinese Mythology " in: GLBTQ Encyclopedia. Last accessed Thursday, December 30, 2010. http://www.glbtq.com/literature/chinese_myth.html.

19. Richard L. Thompson, Alien Identities, (Alachua, FL: Govardhan Hill Publishing, 1995)

20. James L. Thompson, Alien Encounters, (Horizon Publisher, 1995). p84

21. ^ James L. Thompson, Alien Encounters. p87

22. Wirt, Sikes, British goblins: Welsh folk lore, fairy mythology, legends and traditions, (Boston, James R. Osgood & Company, 1881) p 70-71.

23. Roberto Rosaspini Reynolds, El Magico Mundo de Los Duendes (Buenos Aires, Ediciones Continente, 2001) p22.

24. Weird Travels. Episode no. 6, first broadcast January 27, 2006 by Travel Channel. Directed by Emre Sahinand.

25. Carmen Blacker, "Supernatural Abductions in Japanese Folklore," Asian Folklore Studies II, Vol 26 (1967): p. 112

d errt

26. ^ Carmen Blacker, "Supernatural Abductions in Japanese Folklore." p 111

27. Jerome Clark. The UFO Book: Encyclopedia of the Extraterrestrial (Detroit, Visible Ink, 1998). p 282

28.^Gregory L. Little, "UFO Abductions Through The Ages."

29. Encounters of the Fourth Kind, first broadcast in 1989 by NBC. Directed by Drew Cummings

30. Jack Hunter "Paranormal Experience," Paranthropology, <http://paranthropology.weebly.com/paranormal-experience.html>

(accessed January, 15, 2011).

31. Jenny, Randles. Alien Contacts & Abductions (New York City: Sterling Publishing Group, 1994) p 151.

32. Ufoevidence."Filiberto Cardenas Abduction and Contact Case". Last accessed May 6, 2011. <http://www.ufoevidence.org/cases/case695.htm>

Franco Bejarano is an amateur independent researcher, folklorist, and college student interested in all kinds of social sciences and humanities. He has a blog at <http://culturepotion.blogspot.com/>

Reflecting on Paranthropology

Jack Hunter



This short paper is inspired by some of the recent discussion threads on the *Paranthropology* Facebook group. These discussions have revolved primarily around the problem of defining what exactly “paranthropology” is concerned with, and how best to approach this concern. The discussion developed from Fabian Graham’s questioning of whether psychedelic research should be included under the “paranthropology” umbrella. Graham’s worry was that the focus of *Paranthropology* was shifting more towards a psychological/parapsychological perspective and away from the ethnographic and anthropological approach it had originally aimed to promote. This worry was further motivated by the observation that academic anthropology, as a whole, has suffered quite significantly in recent years having been engulfed by sociology and archaeology departments in several universities. The concern was, therefore, that this new and exciting branch of anthropological enquiry into the paranormal might also become separated from the discipline, which would undeniably be a great shame. I suggest that the ethnographic and, more generally, anthropological method should remain central to the paranthropological endeavour. The reasons for this are numerous, and I have preliminarily discussed some of them in this journal (Hunter, 2010b) and elsewhere (Hunter, 2009; 2010a), but here I should like to go into a little more detail regarding specific methodologies and theoretical positions.

Firstly it would be reasonable to give an overview of what we are referring to when we use the term paranormal (see Marton, 2010 for a more thorough examination of paranormal terminology). The term in popular usage refers to a wide range of unusual experiences and ostensible phenomena often held to be supernatural in nature. The term, therefore, covers a very wide spectrum - from belief in and experiences of ghosts, magic, haunted houses and mediumship, to experiences of telepathic communication, alien abductions and out-of-body experiences. The term paranormal also broadly refers to other less extreme, but no less meaningful, experiences such as dreams, déjà vu and unusual coincidences. Paranthropology, therefore, is

concerned with this broad spectrum of experiences that are widely classed as “fringe” or “unusual” in western culture. This, however, is not the case in every society. Paranthropology, therefore, is concerned with an anthropological examination of these types of phenomena.

It is also important to note that paranthropology (as in an anthropological approach to the paranormal), is by no means a new area of anthropological inquiry. Writing over thirty years ago, in 1974, Joseph K. Long expressed the debt of modern paranthropologists to the work of early pioneers such as Andrew Lang (1844-1912), Ralph Linton (1893-1953), Robert Lowie (1883-1957), John Swanton (1873-1958), George Devereux (1908-1985) and others (Long, 1974, p.3).

There are numerous potential directions that a modern anthropological approach to the paranormal could take, ranging from rational material approaches to much more experientially oriented approaches (McClenon, 1991; Bowie, 2010). At the most materialistic end of the spectrum paranormal phenomena are generally reduced to fit comfortably within the dominant western scientific paradigm - more specifically, in most cases, the medical-materialist perspective (as is often the case with research into spirit possession, mediumship and related phenomena). If we take spirit possession as an example we see an attempt to reduce the phenomena and experiences associated with spirit possession practices to symptoms of underlying psychological and neurophysiological disorders. This approach essentially removes any ontological value from the experience of mediumship, and is used to imply that the phenomenon is nothing more than disease and/or psychological self-delusion. Commentators on the neurophysiology of spirit possession/mediumship (as well as religious experience more generally) have, however, warned against jumping directly to such conclusions, pointing to the widespread, near universal, evidence of mediumistic practices and experiences in non-pathological individuals (Klass, 2001; Hageman *et al*, 2010, p.85). The significant theoretical difficulties in ascribing causes and effects based on neurophysiological techniques have also been highlighted as reasons to be wary of taking

neurophysiological data at face-value (Hageman *et al*, 2010, pp.86-87). Hardcore reductive medical-materialist approaches to paranthropology, therefore, do not offer an holistic view of the phenomena we are concerned with. They evidently have their place within the wider view of paranormal experiences, but clearly fall short of a complete explanation.

Narrative approaches to the study of paranormal experiences allow researchers to take a phenomenological view, treating the descriptions of experiences “as experienced” without attempting to determine whether or not that experience was of “something real”. The folklorist David J. Hufford (1983) emphasized the utility of narrative approaches for the study of anomalous experiences in “*The Terror that Comes in the Night*”, his seminal work on the Old Hag tradition of Newfoundland. In the book Hufford argues in favour of the “experiential source hypothesis”, in which experiences are considered to be “the *causes of* belief rather than being *caused by* belief” (1982, 251), the latter, i.e. that experiences arise from cultural expectation, has been the generally accepted explanation of paranormal experiences in the folkloric literature. The shift to an experience-centred approach, therefore, is quite a significant one in that it allows for the objects of experience to be treated at face-value without any attempt at explaining them away (see Dyne, 2010 for more on narrative approaches). In describing the benefits of a narrative approach to the study of supernatural beliefs the folklorist Gillian Bennett (1987) writes: “Stories such as these are the most effective way of showing what people actually believe - they save many paragraphs of explanation and discussion because they are more direct and vivid than any commentary can ever be” (1987, p. 22).

Sociological approaches to the study of the paranormal generally focus on belief from statistical perspectives, examining belief primarily through quantitative methodologies. As with phenomenological and narrative approaches, sociological inquiries are not necessarily concerned with the ontology of the objects of the beliefs under study, rather this issue is bracketed out thus treating the phenomena as social facts (Gilbert, 2010, p. 10). Some preliminary attempts have been made in utilising sociological perspectives to highlight aspects of the underlying ontological issues (cf. Ouellet, 2010), but these are still in their infancy.

Anthropologists, as representatives of western scientific academia, have traditionally found it quite difficult to discuss their own field encounters with the

paranormal in the professional literature (Richards, 2003). This difficulty has arisen from the rationalisation, and concomitant de-supernaturalisation, of western society: western academia in particular has a very strong taboo against discussing paranormal experiences in a serious manner (Hansen, 2001, pp. 185-188), and mainstream anthropology, from the time of Tylor and Frazer onwards, has attempted to align itself to this position (Bowker, 1973 p. 58; Evans-Pritchard, 1965, p. 15). Nevertheless, several anthropologists have ventured to express anomalous experiences encountered during their fieldwork (Tuner, 1993; 1998; Biscop, 2010; McCaul, 2010). Paul Devereux (2007) provides an interesting overview of some of the most impressive cases of paranormal experiences reported by field anthropologists, and suggests that such examples might, in some way, lead to a transform in western science’s dominant materialistic paradigm: a perspective that takes into account alternate modes of living in, and ultimately experiencing, the world (for more examples see Hunter, 2010c). James McClenon & Jennifer Nooney (2002) have looked at these same reports as useful data for re-evaluating anthropological theories of religion. They suggest that, as trained objective observers, field anthropologists are in a particularly good position to provide accurate first-hand accounts of the types of phenomena that likely lie at the heart of religions worldwide - their experiences, therefore, are extremely useful data sets.

I think it is important that we engage in these types of discussions. They can help us to pin-point more precisely what we mean by the term “Paranthropology”, which is clearly of key significance to us. I agree with Fabian Graham that it is important to ensure that we maintain an ethnographic, and more broadly anthropological, focus in our endeavour to understand the paranormal. We need to take into account the wider social and cultural influences on paranormal experiences and phenomena - it is counter-productive to ignore these aspects - and we need to understand the role of participation and experience in the mediation of these phenomena. We also need to be aware of significant cross-cultural components, i.e. how paranormal experiences of one form or another appear to occur almost universally in human societies. At the same time, I also think, as do others (cf. de Martino, 1972; Giesler, 1984; Luke, 2010), that it is essential for ethnographers participating in paranormal cultures to have an awareness, if not an

Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

understanding, of the evidence from the past 150 years of psychical and parapsychological research. This body of research has revealed, through a rigorous application of the scientific method, that human beings do possess exceptional abilities. Traditional anthropological approaches have generally failed to take these findings into account when attempting to understand the magico-religious beliefs and practices of various cultures around the world. To me, at least, it seems clear that the parapsychological, socio-cultural and experiential domains are fundamentally interlinked, and through artificially splitting them up we are losing sight of what is really happening in these situations. I also think that psychedelic research has a place in paranthropology because it is clear from the ethnographic literature that psychoactive substances are also enmeshed within this parapsychological-socio-cultural-experiential matrix. We need multiple perspectives and interdisciplinary input if we are going to get anywhere near understanding the significance of this matrix for human consciousness and cultures.

References

- Bennett, G. (1987). *Traditions of Belief: Women, Folklore and the Supernatural Today*. London, Penguin Books.
- Biscop, P.D. (2010). The Anomalous Anthropologist: Field Experience as an Insider Medium/Anthropologist. *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 6-7.
- Bowie, F. (2010). Methods for Studying the Paranormal (and Who Says What is Normal Anyway?). *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 4-6.
- Bowker, J. (1973). *The Sense of God: Sociological, Anthropological and Psychological Approaches to the Origin of the Sense of God*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- de Martino, E. (1972). *Magic: Primitive and Modern*. London, Tom Stacey Ltd.
- Devereux, P. (2007). The Moveable Feast. In T. Pfeiffer, J.E. Mack, & P. Devereux (eds.) (2007). *Mind Before Matter: Visions of a New Science of Consciousness*. Winchester, O Books.
- Dyne, R. (2010). Ghostly Experiences: More than Imagination, More than Just a Good Story. *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 27-29.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (1965). *Theories of Primitive Religion*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Giesler, P. (1984). Parapsychological Anthropology: I. Multi-Method Approaches to the Study of Psi in the Field Setting. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*. Vol. 71, No. 4, pp. 289-330.
- Gilbert, H. (2010). A Sociological Perspective on 'Becoming' a Spirit Medium in Britain. *Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 10-12.
- Hageman, J.H., Peres, J.F.P., Moreira-Almeida, A., Caixeta, L., Wickramasekera II, I. & Krippner, S. (2010). The Neurobiology of Trance and Mediumship in Brazil. In S. Krippner & H.L. Friedman (eds.) (2010). *Mysterious Minds: The Neurobiology of Psychics, Mediums and Other Extraordinary People*. Oxford: Praeger.
- Hansen, G.P. (2001). *The Trickster & the Paranormal*. Xlibris.
- Hufford, D.J. (1982). *The Terror That Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Hunter, J. (2009). Anthropology & the Paranormal: Approaches to the Investigation of Paranormal Beliefs and Practices. *Anomaly: Journal of Research into the Paranormal*, Vol. 46, pp. 24-36.
- Hunter, J. (2010a). Anthropology and the Ontological Status of the Paranormal. *Rhine Online: Psi News Magazine*, Vol. 2, No 2, pp. 4-5.
- Hunter, J. (2010b). Anthropology and the Paranormal: What's the Point? *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 2-3.
- Hunter, J. (2010c). Ethnographic Encounters with the Paranormal. *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 12-15.

Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

Klass, M. (2001). *Mind Over Mind: The Anthropology and Psychology of Spirit Possession*. Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield.

Long, J.K. (1974). *Extrasensory Ecology: Parapsychology and Anthropology*. London,

Luke, D. (2010). A Brief History of Anthropology and Psi: A Parapsychologists View. *Time and Mind*. Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 245-265.

Marton, Y. (2010). A Rose by Any Names is Still a Rose: The Nomenclature of the Paranormal. *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 11-13.

McCaul, K. (2010). An Experiential Paradigm for the Anthropology of Consciousness. *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 7-10.

McClenon, J. (1991). Social Scientific Paradigms for Investigating Anomalous Experience. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 1-203.

McClenon, J. & Nooney, J. (2002). Anomalous Experiences Reported by Field Anthropologists: Evaluating Theories Regarding Religion. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 46-60.

Ouellet, E. (2010). Parasociology: Integrating the Concept of Psi into Sociology. *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 4.

Richards, C. (2003). Problems Reporting Anomalous Observations in Anthropology. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 5-18.

Turner, E. (1993). The Reality of Spirits: A Tabooed or Permitted Field of Study? *Anthropology of Consciousness*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 9-12.

Turner, E. (1998). *Experiencing Ritual*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania University Press.

Commentaries

Mark A. Schroll, PhD.

This commentary supports the views put forth in Jack Hunter's paper "Reflecting on
Vol. 2. No.3

Paranthropology;" it begins with a reflection on how I became interested in psi research. Followed by asking us to re-think and reexamine our view that paranormal phenomena are supernatural; which also leads us to reflect on how the paranormal should be defined. Following this is a brief discussion of psi and anthropology. I conclude with a cautionary and sceptical approach to our scientific-inquiry-of-psi that includes within it our need to reclaim the social responsibility of the scientist.

Introduction

My interest in psi research began at age six following an experience of dream telepathy. The details of this dream and the consequences it had on my life will be told in another article. For now the point I wish to make is this experience led to the insight that to explain anomalous or psychic phenomenon we needed a new way of thinking about science and religion. Over the next 18 years this inquiry was my central focus (until earning Bachelor of Science degree's in Psychology and Sociology). Through fortuitous circumstances this phase of my education brought two essential insights. One, that this new way of thinking about religion and science was the core foundation of *transpersonal psychology*, which coalesced into a field of study in 1969. And two, that understanding anomalous or psychic phenomena would require a *physics of psi*.

Concurrently at this point in my life I had become very critical of science's limitations and its failures to bring forth a better world, end suffering, illuminate the mystery of consciousness and understand its capabilities. Still, at the same time, I wanted to inquire more deeply into my own experiences, continuing to believe that our understanding of psi phenomena was a pathway to transpersonal knowing. This led to my broader inquiry into transpersonal studies and the philosophy of science over the next 14 years, leading to the completion of my Ph.D. Asking, how does science enrich us? A question we can only fully answer by including paranthropology: our investigation into humankind's primordial practices for exploring alternate states, stations, and domains of awareness known as the anthropology of consciousness—which has continued to engage my inquiry over the past 14 years to the present.

Paranormal: Is It a Supernatural Phenomenon?

Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

"The term [paranormal] in popular usage refers to a wide range of unusual experiences and ostensible phenomena often held to be supernatural in nature. The term, therefore, covers a very wide spectrum" (Hunter, 2011).

In response to Hunter's discussion of the term paranormal, I agree with his inclusion of the wide spectrum of phenomena associated with its inquiry. Still, it is important to mention the concerns that Stanley Krippner has raised regarding the word "supernatural." Krippner points out:

My feelings about psi phenomena are that they're alleged interactions between organisms and other organisms, or organisms and their environment that appear to violate mainstream science concepts of space, time, and energy. Furthermore psi phenomena apparently exist, but they are not supernatural, they are natural; they are not paranormal, they are normal. They're anomalies; we just haven't figured out how they fit into the scheme of things (Schroll: 4, 2010b).

This cautionary approach to the paranormal raises the question as to whether or not Krippner has succumbed to the paradigmatic influences in western society toward "de-supernaturalisation?" Could Krippner's definition be representative of Hunter's reference to the general "taboo against discussing paranormal experiences in a serious manner?" Not at all; Krippner is clarifying the conceptual problems we get ourselves into when we suggest that anomalous phenomena are "supernatural." The roots of this problem tend to be referred to as the mind/body problem and associated with Descartes. "Supernatural" implies some immaterial agency or influence that goes beyond natural laws, which raises the question of how this immaterial agency is able to influence matter (interact with our brain/body/senses). David Bohm offered a solution to this problem that he referred to as *soma-significance: a new notion of the relationship between the physical and the mental* (Bohm, 1986). A discussion of soma-significance exceeds this article's limits, yet to offer some partial closure to this problem, instead of referring to supernatural, I prefer to use the term transpersonal.

Another Attempt at Defining Psi

This brings us back to defining what it is we mean by "psi." First, it is important to point out that not everyone who shares an interest in the paranormal likes using the word "psi," such as Wendy E. Cousins. Cousins' has pointed out in our correspondence that:

I'm interested in "old style" psychical research "and the powers latent in the human mind" as per the original SPR aims. I think that the universe and time are much more weird than we think and one day physicists will be able to show why, but as for the everlasting quest to track down and bottle an elusive force called "psi" by means of sliced up ping-pong balls and statistics, I don't think its ever going to happen and parapsychology should move on to other things (Cousins, personal correspondence, August 30, 2010).

In spite of its perceived limitations, Krippner tells us that:

The word "psi" is a general term that includes a variety of reports and experiences. What they have in common is that their existence is unlikely from the point of view of mainstream science's contemporary understanding of the physical world. "Psi" is used by parapsychologists to encompass so-called "extra-sensory perception," "psychokinesis," and the purported post-death survival of part of one's personality. The term acknowledges that the mechanism of these reports and experiences is unknown—it may be sensory, extrasensory, or something currently inconceivable, such as a yet-undiscovered form of energy (Kierulff & Krippner: 30, 2004).

This kind of phenomena, this kind of energy, cannot currently be accepted within the framework of EuroAmerican science. It violates the concept of action-at-a-distance: How can there be a physical manifestation of "energy" beyond what is referred to as "localized" events in physics? What is the medium, the means of transmitting this kind of energy? This is the real scientific problem of accepting these kinds of phenomena. Either you have to say that the type of energy we are talking about here has no connection to the material world (i.e., supernatural), or you have to postulate some kind of energy, some means of signal transmission that is not now known (i.e., Bohm's soma-significance). Many of us are to some extent familiar with Rupert Sheldrake's concept of *morphogenetic fields* or *M-Fields* (Sheldrake, 1988), whose work in biology is consistent with Bohm's *transpersonal physics* (Schroll, 2010b).

Despite the concerns that Krippner and I have raised regarding the definition of "psi," Cousins' interest in the paranormal as "psychical research" reflects the broad spectrum of phenomena that Hunter described; whereas "psi" appears to center its focus on anomalous phenomena that can be easily replicated in laboratory experiments. Cousins' and Hunter's broader interests in psychical research raises

one obvious reason for the need to examine the paranormal from an anthropological orientation, because its ethnoautobiographical perspective provides a transpersonal view of field research. And yet, I understand why many people have chosen to try and investigate "the powers latent in the human mind" using ping-pong balls (also known as a method for inducing *ganzfelds*, or *homogeneous retinal images*). Naturally occurring *ganzfelds* would be deserts, oceans, and landscapes covered with snow. I too conducted an experiment using *ganzfelds* as an undergraduate. "Sensation and Perception" as a laboratory course allowed me to do this, instead of torturing rats via animal experimentation. Nevertheless, I was at the same time becoming increasingly skeptical of the limitations of statistics, and argued for participant observation, qualitative field studies and ethnographic methods. This process of questioning eventually led me to the broader inquiry associated with the anthropology of consciousness, or paranthropology.

Psi and Anthropology: Toward a New Kind of Science

Hunter has provided us an excellent overview of paranthropology's interdisciplinary inquiry into psi and anthropology (Hunter, 2011). I have previously discussed my views on the historical developments of the anthropology of consciousness (Schroll, 2010c), to which I will add that expanding EuroAmerican science's methodological framework will be necessary to promote this interdisciplinary inquiry. Speaking to these concerns, I have noted that:

Edith Turner's (2006a, b) historical *tour de force* of consciousness studies emergence throughout the last 100 years (focused primarily on examples from the field of anthropology) offers a well-argued thesis that we need a new kind of science. Defiantly, Turner asks: "What right has anthropology's authority system to dictate in any way whether or not psi exists?" (Turner, 2006a:53, b). This kind of ethnographic bigotry calls into question the very nature of anthropological inquiry, whereas Turner counters that it will not keep new generations of anthropologists from encountering instances of psi/spirit during their field research, even though a smug postmodern countenance continues to dominate mainstream conversations. This question reflects the essence of Turner's thesis, that our inquiry of psi/spirit, liminality, *communitas*, and experiences of transpersonality are only acceptable if we keep quiet about them and/or translate them into recognizable

phenomenon that fit the conceptual limits of EuroAmerican science (Schroll: 3, 2010a).

This is why I have argued that to develop the receptivity and interdisciplinary inquiry to support our investigation of psi and anthropology, *we need a new kind of science* (Schroll, 2010a). Charles T. Tart agrees, calling for what he refers to as *essential science* (Tart: 38-43, 2009).

Conclusion: A Nagging Scepticism of Science

Nevertheless, I continue to be very wary and distrustful of science because it tends to transform all of its best knowledge into weapons. Critics point out science and scientists do not necessarily condone this practice; often choosing instead to say that it is the result of technology's application of scientific knowledge. Psi research is no exception. The now declassified two-decade US government psychic research program investigated remote viewing as a form of espionage. This research is explained in Dale Graff's book *Tracks in the Psychic Wilderness* (Graff: 206, 1998). Telling us he became a physicist for the Defense Intelligence Agency and director of all Department of Defense remote viewing activity, for which he chose the name "Project Stargate." The only reason this knowledge and application of psi was discontinued is not because it failed to work, but because GPS tracking systems and spy satellites have less human error. Consequently I have chosen not to pursue a strictly science-oriented inquiry of parapsychological phenomenon because our current paradigm continues to be controlled by "dominator consciousness." My concerns were summed up by Lourdes Giordani in a review for *Anthropology News*:

Concerned about the negative implications of materialistic philosophical approaches, the misuse of science and technology, Mark cautioned us about the potential misuse of consciousness research. Mark even questioned whether we should publish some of our research given that it could be co-opted by the military-industrial complex (Giordani: 51, 2002).

These and other technological applications of scientific knowledge into weapons of mass destruction by every industrial nation on our planet has resulted in my asking: Can it therefore be said that science has forsaken its ethical responsibility? *Yes* is the answer to this question, which is displayed in banner headlines in the daily news throughout the world, and, with our silent compliance, these practices will continue. Consequently this has led me to spend an increasing amount of time focusing on

Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

ways to create a more coherent culture, which I would hope would be shared as a concurrent concern for all of us interested in psi or psychical research. Specifically this has led to my interest in the deep ecology movement, ecopsychology, and what I (following Arne Naess and Alan Drengson) refer to as *transpersonal ecosophy* (Schroll, 2011).

References

Bohm, D. (1986). "A new theory of the relationship of mind and matter." *Journal of the American Society of Psychical Research*, 80 (2), 113-135.

Giordani, L. (2002). Review of 2002 SAC Tucson conference (Part 2). *Anthropology News*, 43 (9): 50-51.

Graff, D. (1998). *Tracks in the psychic wilderness*. Boston: Elemental Books.

Hunter, J. (2011). Reflecting on Paranthropology. *Paranthropology*, 2 (3),

Kierulff, S. & Krippner, S. (2004). *Becoming psychic: Spiritual lessons for focusing your hidden abilities*. Franklin Lakes, NJ: New Page Books.

Schroll, M. A. (2010a). "Toward a new kind of science and its methods of inquiry." *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 21 (1), 1-29.

Schroll, M. A. (2010b). "The physics of psi: An interview with Stanley Krippner." *Transpersonal Psychology Review*, 14 (1), 3-15, 2010.

Schroll, M. A. (2010c). "The anthropology of consciousness: Investigating the frontiers of unexplainable personal and cultural phenomena." *Paranthropology*, 1 (1), 6-7.

Schroll, M. A. (2011). "Editor's introduction: From primordial anthropology to a transpersonal ecosophy." *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 22 (1), 4-8.

Sheldrake, R. (1988). *The presence of the past: Morphic resonance and the habits of nature*. New York and Canada: Times Books/Random House, Inc.

Tart, C. T. (2009). *The end of materialism: How evidence of the paranormal is bringing science and spirit together*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Turner, E. (2006a). Advances in the study of spirit experience: Drawing together many threads. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 17 (2): 33-61.

Turner, E. (2006b). Discussion: Altruism, spirituality merging with a fellow human being's suffering. *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, 41 (4): 933-939.



Mark A. Schroll, Ph.D., Research Adjunct Faculty, Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Palo Alto, California. Co-Editor of a Special issue of *The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy* invites your submissions. We are issuing this call-for-papers to explore the concept of ecosophies of communication and ecology of

mind based on the legacy of Gregory Bateson and Arne Naess. *Ecosophies* (the wisdom of place and your unique relationship to it) and *ecology of mind* (your modes of knowing the co-evolutionary experience of Being). We seek intellectual contributions that embody our emotions—unifying mind and body, nature and culture. Contributions ideally should transcend the divisions of natural and social science and the humanities, in short, contributions that have their heads in the clouds and their feet on the ground. This link takes you to submission details <http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/index>. On arrival, click the "more button." Email: rockphd4@yahoo.com.

Commentaries

Fabian Graham

A major issue here is the problematic involved in applying anthropological methodology to paranormal phenomena. Anthropology deals with different units of society: from individuals, families and focus groups to entire social systems, all seen through the anthropological lens of ethnography and social theory. Paranormal phenomena themselves fall into none of the above categories, and social theories commonly employed by anthropologists are analytical tools for exploring social and not discarnate phenomena. The danger is therefore for anthropologists to present the paranormal from the perspective of the human actors as opposed to the

discarnate entities. While these presentations would contribute towards the larger field of the anthropology of religion, a field which is abundantly rich in ethnographic material interlaced with social theory, they would not necessarily enrich the field of paranthropology.

This leads to the second issue, the need to define the parameters of paranthropology, and thus to distinguish it from the more established fields of the anthropology of religion and of parapsychology.

The original discussion on defining the boundaries of paranthropology arose due to an objection raised to articles relating to drug induced experiences being frequently posted in a paranthropological forum. It was suggested that these topics both deserved and received significant scientific investigation, placing them within the methodological and subject boundaries of parapsychology. The opinion was also expressed that in no way do drug induced experiences, no matter how real or 'spiritual' they may feel on a subjective basis, fall into the area of the paranormal investigation as the cause of them is both observable, measurable and reproducible. This is not to deny their importance to either the individual concerned or to the scientific study of them by parapsychologists, but, if they are experiences that can be chemically induced, it was suggested that this places them firmly outside the field of paranthropology.

So where should the boundaries of paranthropology be drawn? In the article 'Reflecting on Paranthropology', it is claimed that "The term paranormal also broadly refers to other less extreme, but no less meaningful experiences such as dreams, déjà vu and unusual coincidences", but isn't it questionable whether or not these are actually paranormal? Coincidences are just that, the probability for most events being calculable. Moreover, which adult has never had a dream nor experienced déjà vu at some time in their lives? "Para" suggests being beyond or apart, and numbers alone would suggest excluding such events from being defined as paranormal, rather associating them with mundane social reality.

Including science as a form of progressive and developing belief system, this brings us back to differentiating between the anthropology of religion, ethnographic research of belief systems, parapsychology and paranthropological research. If paranormal phenomena are only researched within the confines of belief systems or under the influence of mind altering substances, this deprives the

phenomena themselves recognition of possessing an independent existence, and once again, becomes the study of socially constructed belief systems or psychological reactions to artificial stimuli, both falling under the umbrella of the anthropology of religion or parapsychology. However, by removing the term 'belief' and assuming that the paranormal phenomena exist as realities irrelevant of chemicals or constructed belief systems, the field of paranthropology begins to define itself in relation to the phenomena themselves, and not to the belief systems, scientific and religious, that have evolved to support the phenomena.

In the same way that magic ceases to be magic when it can be explained by science, the same is true of paranormal phenomena: they too cease to be paranormal when they can be explained, and are therefore normalized. To further knowledge and increase understanding of such phenomena to the extent of normalizing them may be adopted as a possible goal and even responsibility of paranthropology.

Experience of the phenomena themselves, rather than merely observing or analyzing belief systems adds legitimacy to any ethnography of the paranormal. What has been called the experience-centred approach may well be adopted as the guiding light for serious paranthropological research. Taken to a logical conclusion, the paranthropologist researching near death experience should ideally experience near death experiences; those researching spirit possessions ought to experience being possessed, and those researching contact with the dead have a duty to learn the arts necessary to initiate such contact. Paranthropology by necessity requires a "hands on" methodology, and as such, is a brave new subject for those fascinated enough to commit themselves to a drug free experiential journey into the paranormal and into the unknown.



Fabian Graham is an anthropologist. His area of research is spirit mediumship in popular Chinese religion, in particular spirit mediumship in Taiwan and Singapore.

Application of An Ethnographic Methodology for the Study of Spirit Possession

Terence J. Palmer

In my own doctoral thesis I argued the case for a revised epistemology for Spirit Release Therapy (SRP) according to the conceptual framework of F.W.H. Myers, the 19th century co-founder of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR).¹ In my thesis I support the adoption of the radical empiricism of William James (1912) and a participant / observer method in anthropological research according to the model proposed by social science theorist Paul Diesing (1971). Whilst my thesis was limited to examining Myers' conceptual framework, I was unable to examine in any great detail the participant / observer method other than making brief references to some anthropologists, such as Alberto Villoldo (2005), who have applied it in their field work on shamanism and soul loss. A central theme of my thesis is the proposition that personal experience of spirit possession is an essential factor in a revised epistemology that enables scientific enquiry to accommodate possession phenomena. This may seem to be a radical approach in the extreme and one that would understandably be rejected by all but the most adventurous (or mad) researcher. However, this proposition is not as outlandish as it may at first appear, and in this article I apply (in retrospect) the ethnographic methodology proposed by anthropologist Fiona Bowie (2010) of the Afterlife Research Centre at Bristol University to two cases that I have encountered in my own clinical practice. The first case is one of possession where a client who was undergoing hypnosis for personal development became an instrument of communication for a discarnate entity. The second case is where I became possessed by a discarnate entity as part of my own experiential learning in how to direct earthbound souls to the Light. There are very real difficulties in transcribing personal experience into a scientific framework, and this second case is representative of this difficulty. It was so difficult in fact that the only way I could report it was in the third person. Such was the intensity of the emotions experienced that even to this day I find it extremely difficult to convey the experience to others. This is the emotive power of what Bowie would call the *ethnographic method*.

Are Spirits Real or Imagined?

The primary question raised by Frederick Myers in the late 19th century was whether man has a soul and whether it survives the death of the body (Myers, 1903a). In my own thesis on Myers work I pose a related question; 'do discarnate spirits have an ontological status or are they the products of the creative imagination?'

If the possession hypothesis is to be upheld, there are certain assumptions and ontological factors that need to be established before the hypothesis can be tested. Should it be true that spirits influence the living, whether they are spirits of the dead, spirit guides, angels, demons or elementals, then it implies that there must be a realm where the discarnate consciousness of spirits exists. If there is *not* a realm where the consciousness of spirits exists then it can only be left to say that all notions of spirits or spirit realms are hallucinations or delusions created by the human imagination, and this is the prevailing view of mainstream psychiatry. This view is challenged by the evidence presented by research conducted with spiritualist mediums (Schwartz, 2002) and healers (Sicher & Targ, 1998). Evidence is also revealed in the consulting rooms of practitioners of Spirit Release Therapy (SRT) (Baldwin, 1995; Crabtree, 1985; Fiore, 1987; Hickman, 1994; Modi, 1997; Naegeli-Osjord, 1988; Wickland, 1924), and it is in this area where spirits are released from the living under clinical conditions that Bowie's ethnographic method of cognitive and empathic involvement may have true value.

Methodological Parallelism

Whether there is a spirit realm that is on a continuum with our known physical universe according to Myers (1903b), or a part of William James' pluralistic universe (1909), or another dimension that is beyond our concept of space and time, is a question that continues to reach into every debate about the nature of objective reality. Contemporary psychology has created for itself a methodological parallelism that appears to run along three parallels rather than two.

Mainstream psychology is concerned with cognition and behaviours that are epiphenomenal. Parapsychology challenges the mainstream by attempting to produce theories to explain psi phenomena without discounting epiphenomenalism. It could be argued that psi research is really a black sheep of the mainstream because it needs to be accepted, just as the infant psychology of the 19th century needed to be accepted by mainstream science. In complete contrast however, is research that recognises the possibility that consciousness is fundamental and not produced by or dependent on a brain. This is the stance that Myers took, and it is the stance that some modern researchers such as Russell Targ (2004) and Charles Tart (2000) have adopted in their search for theories to explain the nature of consciousness itself. A solution to the impasse created by psychology may be the ethnographic method proposed by anthropologist Fiona Bowie (2010) which requires the researcher to engage with the object of study in 'cognitive, empathetic engagement' (ibid, p. 4).

The Hypnotised Client

It was not my intention to investigate the ontological status of discarnate entities in my early career as a hypnotherapist trained in Ericksonian hypnotherapy. The therapeutic method involved helping a client solve a psychological or emotional problem by way of accessing their own hidden resources. The following is taken from my original unpublished account of the case of a young man who came to me for help with his self-confidence:

As the young man was coming out of his trance he made an observation that he experienced an odd sensation that someone else wanted to speak; someone other than himself. I asked him if he was willing to go back into trance in order that we may investigate this odd sensation and uncover its meaning. He agreed and re-entered his trance state. After a very few moments he opened his eyes and looked at me. His entire countenance had changed from a shy young man to that of an older and wiser person. His physical features hadn't altered, only his expression and the gleam in his eyes. There was wisdom in those eyes. He introduced himself as Xiang Pi, a Chinese scholar from the 14th century AD.

I was fascinated by this and engaged this person in conversation. His manner was polite and formal but with a hint of friendliness. He thanked me for inviting him and suggested that we continue our conversation another time. After the client returned from his trance he related his experience to

me. He explained that he felt very restful and relaxed, and it seemed as if he were in a long corridor with someone at the other end who was speaking, although he couldn't quite make out what was being said. I conveyed to him the essence of what had taken place and we agreed that the experience was both interesting and stimulating. We agreed to participate in further investigations.

I had two or three more conversations with Xiang Pi on matters of importance concerning the client's circumstances and those of others to whom I was providing therapy. All the time the client was in deep trance. We discussed things that concern us and I found the conversations most stimulating and rewarding. Then one night Xiang Pi asked if I minded and could he invite someone else to talk to me. I agreed and as Xiang Pi withdrew the young man's countenance returned to that of a man in deep trance, as was usual. After a few short moments he sat up and opened his eyes. Again his countenance changed and I knew I was facing yet another person. This one was different from Xiang Pi and he looked at me with even greater wisdom coming from his eyes. He smiled a genuine smile and introduced himself as Lao Tzu. The name meant nothing to me but I welcomed him with the same courtesy with which I had welcomed Xiang Pi and we entered into conversation. At the conclusion of that first conversation with Lao Tzu he bade me farewell and referred to me as 'fellow traveller'. Although I had no idea who he was, this address as fellow traveller gave me a sense of being honoured.

For several days the young man was pleased to accommodate my interest in the Chinese philosopher whilst he remained in trance and I had many opportunities to engage Lao Tzu in conversation late into the night. He began to offer advice on the book I was writing and suggested areas that could be expanded upon and that I should summarise each chapter. He knew exactly what I was writing, and sometimes even offered very specific advice on points where I was having difficulty explaining myself. The information was valuable to say the least and I was given terrific insights to the workings of something that still didn't have a name. That was to come later.

Having done all I could do on the book at that time, I started college to qualify to go to university. One day in a class on counselling, the lecturer passed out some handouts that included a quote from Lao Tzu. I was astonished to find the name of the person I had been having conversations with here in print. I asked the lecturer who this Lao Tzu was. She replied that she didn't know. A fellow student said he knew and suggested that I may like to borrow of book that he had in his possession. The next day he gave it to me. It was the Tao Te Ching. My astonishment was complete.

Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

When I got home the first thing I did was to ring my client and ask him to come over. When he arrived I asked him, "Who is Lao Tzu?" He replied, "Isn't that the Chinaman you talk to when I'm in trance?" I said, "Yes, but who is he? Do you know who he is?" He replied that he had no idea. Then I showed him the book.

The comment on the back cover stating that the Tao Te Ching was the most widely translated book second only to the Bible was the ultimate astonishment. We had no idea that the name of Lao Tzu was synonymous with one of history's wisest and greatest philosophers. To be honoured in this way by such a great mind was indeed to be privileged.

I asked him to go into trance and prepared myself to talk to Lao Tzu, but this time my apprehension was that of a schoolboy preparing to meet a head of state. As his trance came to its deepest, Lao Tzu emerged, and his expression spoke volumes. His eyes shone and the smile occupied every muscle of the young man's face. "Why didn't you tell me who you were?" I asked. He replied, "Is it not always better to discover things for yourself?"

An observation worthy of comment is that most of the translators of the *Tao Te Ching* are sceptical of the authenticity of the work as being of the one man, and whether or not Lao Tzu actually existed. Well, needless to say I have it on good authority that the man did exist, and still does – in a dimension that is connected in some way with our four-dimensional space-time continuum.

The important element of this case is the fact that neither the client nor I had any prior knowledge of who Lao Tzu was. Secondly, the thoughts that were entering my mind as I was writing a monumental work of philosophy whilst I was an uneducated layman were being put there by a discarnate consciousness. The client was being possessed by the consciousness of Lao Tzu to the degree that he could speak by use of the host's brain infrastructure and body. In contrast I was merely being influenced in my thoughts and ideas. This was my first experience of positive possession (invited) in the case of the client, and creative inspiration in my own subjective experience.

Running Bear and the Heavenly Host

The next case is the result of a request from a client for me to help her deal with episodes of unexplained anger. She entered easily into trance and I was confronted by the consciousness of a very angry man

who wanted to kill. I did not know how to deal with this and took it upon myself to learn. I attended an experiential training course in spirit release methods, and the following account is from an unpublished autobiography written in the third person:

Running Bear, Medicine Chief of the Blackfoot tribe of the Sioux Nation, stood before the host. For as far as his eyes could see were all the bluecoat soldiers and their generals, and all the medicine men, chiefs and warriors who had perished in the Indian Wars of North America. His rage consumed him and he wept. He had been summoned to the Light after a hundred and fifty years of roaming the earth, bound by hatred and his quest for revenge. The Light was all around. There was nothing but the Light, the soldiers and the warriors. A disembodied voice said, "It is time to forgive. The soldiers ask your forgiveness for what they did to you." Running Bear raised his hands in a gesture to embrace the host and, with exasperation from the depths of his tortured soul, cried at the top of his voice, "AND WHAT ABOUT MY PEOPLE?"

The disembodied voice spoke again, "They ask for forgiveness for what they did to all your people. They are sorry. They knew not what they were doing. They fought from fear and they knew nothing of the right way. They are here now, in the Light, and they know, and they are sorry."

"How can I forgive?" asked Running Bear. "So much suffering and so much waste. What was it all for? How can I forgive?"

"They forgive you," said the voice. "Here, in the Light, all is forgiven. You are here now with all others. We are all One. You have been separated from your brothers. Here we are all One. This is the Great Oneness. It is time. Say you forgive."

Running Bear wept a grief for genocide. Such a grief that no one man should bear alone, could bear alone, and he opened his mouth to express his awe, "Such big medicine." He tried to put aside his anger, his rage, the rage of an entire nation who had suffered immeasurably at the hands of the ignorant, the greedy, the fearful and the malicious, to one side, and he opened his mouth to speak words of forgiveness. It was hard, but he tried, "I.... I.... I forg..... I forgive...." He wept again and his body trembled. He fell to his knees and he forgave. When he had recovered enough to speak again, he said through gritted teeth, "What was it all for? So much suffering. Are we to start all over again?"

The disembodied voice said, "We are all One again. Your journey of separateness is over and you have come home. Rest

now and be at One with all your brothers, red and white, in forgiveness and universal love.”

The disembodied voice said, “Now James, bring all of your consciousness back into yourself. Be centred and grounded and come back to full conscious awareness in your own time.”

James returned to conscious awareness and found himself once again in the room with nine other people. His body was still trembling from head to foot, his face was streaked with tears and his hands were burning. As he unfolded his legs from the lotus position on the sofa and put his feet on the floor one of his teachers sat in front of him and held his ankles to help ground him back into this material world. He had been to the Light to help return a lost soul – the soul of Chief Running Bear of the Blackfoot Tribe of the Sioux Nation. This is where his search for answers had led him. He was being trained as a spirit release practitioner by the UK division of the Hickman Academy for Depossession.

James had previously thought that he had experienced anger, but never in his wildest dreams could he ever have imagined such a rage could exist in the breast of a man. He asked his teachers, and the rest of the class, if he could excuse himself. He put on his shoes and coat and stepped outside into the grey drizzle of a January afternoon and walked a little. He found himself at a pub a short distance from the house where the course was being held and bought himself a large scotch. Never before had he experienced such a powerful emotion and he needed time to recover. In fact it took James all of two weeks to recover properly. After the course had finished he had gone back to work, but he would feel the pain of the experience for a long time to come. Each night for two weeks he would experience, with tears streaming down his face, in diminishing strength, the grief of genocide, and the anger of Running Bear. But in parallel with the pain of the experience, he felt the peace of Running Bear’s ritual of forgiveness. At last he had some real answers. If the ability to forgive had the power to overcome the grief and rage of genocide then there was hope for the world after all. Forgiveness was the key.

James’s experience, in fact the whole philosophy behind the experience, could still be irrelevant in relation to the real world in which he lived and worked. Was what he had experienced real, or was it just a figment of his imagination, or the result of suggestion whilst in a hypnotic trance? Scepticism of the mystical is something the modern world of technology and medicine have taught us all, and James’s own scientific training in psychology was still at the opposite end of the spectrum to his own spiritual healing powers. His faith in his powers and his faith in God had been shattered by his failure to help xxxxx. But two weeks after the healing of Running Bear, James was

attending his local spiritualist church, and the visiting medium came to him and said, “I have an Indian here for you. He is big and he wears a beautiful war bonnet. He is giving you his peace pipe and he is smiling. He says ‘thank you’.” It was then that James knew that what he had experienced had been real. His own consciousness, his spirit-self had actually been in the mysterious Light and he had been the carrier of the spirit consciousness of Running Bear. He had rescued the Chief and taken him home. James’s faith in the mysterious workings of the mind of God had been restored and he knew. It was not a belief any more – it was ‘the knowing’, and he was well on his way, going with the flow of the mysterious cycle that had begun a year and a half earlier. This was the cycle that broke all boundaries, and he was beginning to understand (unpublished).

Possession experiences are life-changing and take the experiencer into realms that are beyond the intellect. Writing in a style that demands the objectivity of the detached observer is completely different from conveying the subjective reality of experience, and this is just one of the difficulties in presenting data from anthropological or psychological studies. I would argue that Bowie’s method of cognitive and empathic engagement with the possession experience needs to be expressed as an emotive experience and should not be transcribed or translated into academic terminology. To do so would deprive the experience of its meaning and reduce it to a dry and meaningless phenomenology.

References

- Baldwin, W. J. (1995). *Spirit Releasement Therapy*. Terra Alta, WV: Headline Books.
- Bowie, F. (2010, Sept). A methodology for Studying the Afterlife: Cognitive, Empathic Engagement. In (Bowie, F., Ed.) *Afterlife Research Centre, Bristol University* (Bowie, F., Ed.). Retrieved 26/5/2011, from <http://www.box.nct/shared/lpmolhnus1>.
- Crabtree, A. (1985). *Multiple Man: Explorations in possession and multiple personality*. New York: Praeger.
- Diesing, P. (1971). *Patterns of Discovery in the Social Sciences*. Chicago: Aldine Atherton Inc.
- Fiore, E. (1987). *The Unquiet Dead*.
- Hickman, I. (1994). *Remote Depossession*. Kirksville: Hickman.

Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

James, W. (1909). *A Pluralistic Universe*. New York: Longmans, Green & Co.

James, W. (1912). *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. New York: First Bison Books.

Modi, S. (1997). *Remarkable Healings*. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing.

Myers, F. (1903a). *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (2 vols). New York: Longmans, Green & Co.

Myers, F. (1903b). *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*. (Edited by S. Smith). New York: Longmans, Green & Co.

Naegeli-Osjord, H. (1988). *Possession and Exorcism*. Gerrards Cross: New Frontiers Centre & Colin Smythe.

Schwartz, G. & S., W.L. (2002). *The Afterlife Experiments*. New York: Atria Books.

Sicher, F., & Targ, E. (1998). A randomised double-blind study of the effect of distant healing in a population with advanced AIDS: Report of a small scale study. *Western Journal of Medicine*, 6(168), 356-363.

Targ, R. (2004). *Limitless Mind*. Novato, CA: New World Library.

Tart, C. (2000). *States of Consciousness*. Lincoln, NE: IUniverse.com, Inc.

Villoldo, A. (2005). *Mending the Past and Healing the Future with Soul Retrieval*. London: Hay House.

Wickland, C. A. (1924). *Thirty Years Among the Dead*. Mokelumne Hill.

Following a career in business, my search for answers relating to the paranormal was initiated during a series of personal mystical experiences whilst living in the mountains of Crete in the early 90's where I discovered my own gifts as a natural healer. Without any knowledge or explanation for these experiences my quest for answers began with studying for a



degree in psychology from Christ Church University College where I learned the basics of scientific method. During the same period I was granted a qualification as a hypnotherapist from the Proudfoot School of Hypnosis and Psychotherapy. After graduation I began working as a hypnotherapist with referrals from a general practitioner when I began to encounter patients with challenging symptoms and subjective experiences that did not respond to conventional clinical practice. This meant that I had to extend my search for explanations into areas beyond the conventions of mainstream psychology. I studied at Kent University for a Masters degree in the Study of Mysticism and Religious Experience where my dissertation was entitled, "Dissociation – Mystical and Clinical Perspectives". During these studies I also trained as a spirit release practitioner with the Hickman Academy and the Spirit Release Foundation where I learned how to treat those who were being adversely affected by discarnate spirit entities. I am currently researching the work of the 19th century co-founder of the Society for Psychical Research, F.W.H. Myers for my PhD thesis which provides the answers I was looking for many years ago. I am a member of the Society for Psychical Research, the International Society for the Study of Dissociation and Trauma, the Scientific and Medical Network, the Spirit Release Foundation and the Royal Society of Medicine. I have written proposals to conduct research into the phenomenology of auditory hallucinations in schizophrenia.

Capturing Intention?: PIP Photography and Shamanic Intervention

Zoe Bran

"We believe that we are showing up an energy interaction with light, which is giving us an insight into the energy counter-part of the body." - Dr Harry Oldfield, Inventor of PIP

While staying at an Ayurvedic health centre for local people and less well-off tourists several years ago, I was invited by the centre administrators to have my aura photographed before and after a one-week Ayurvedic treatment plan. The purpose as I understood it was to measure improvements in general health and energy visible in the auric field as a result of altered diet, meditation and body treatments. I was not particularly interested in my 'aura' and promptly forgot the offer.

During my week at the centre, however, I learnt that the purpose of the photography was to explore the camera's ability to pinpoint areas of physical and mental ill-health before they manifested in the physical body. The photographic lab had been set up in the centre by Dr Thornton Streeter, a British scientist and founder of the UK's [Centre for Biofield](#)

[Sciences](#), a company specialising in non-invasive diagnostic equipment and treatments. At the end of my stay I was curious enough to agree to be photographed.

As it turned out, it was not my aura that was being photographed, but my electromagnetic field. I had expected the cloudy images of colours around a subject that most aura photography produces and was surprised by the great swirling bands of colour that emerged on the computer screen. A number of images were taken using the **PIP - Polycontrast Interference Photography** scanning process which shows the energy field, chakra and meridian systems, in colours and patterns. According to the Centre for Biofield Sciences, PIP "reveals the interference and transference of light patterns, at and beyond the visible spectrum and shows energy dynamics at work in a live real time image. The process uses a software programme with a video feed and takes a scan of energetic and light interference at and beyond our visual range. An image is displayed 'live' on a monitor where signals from the camera are





graded into clearly visible colours.” More information about the interpretation of colours and forms can be found in the [PIP Manual](#).

During my stay at the health centre I had been told how the PIP photography made it possible to see changes in a person's EMF while they were meditating or doing healing work and this prompted me to consider if any changes might be manifested during shamanic work. I had no idea of what the outcome of my small experiment might be and thought little or nothing would happen. I recall feeling somewhat embarrassed as I walked into the lab with my rattle, and there was a definite air of scepticism on the part of the photographers. I mean, serious yogis showed changes in their fields; who was I fooling with my rattle?

Indeed, Dr Streeter was sufficiently underwhelmed by the prospect that taking the photographs and interpreting them was left to his assistant. About 10 images were taken against a plain white wall and from various angles. I remember that there were voices from the laboratory balcony and there were passers-by in the adjacent corridor; the only people in the laboratory itself, behind locked doors, were the assistant and me.

In the first photograph I'm standing looking at the camera not thinking or doing anything particular. The two most notable points in this image include the dark area around my throat and jaw which I was told reflect hyperthyroidism and amalgam fillings, the latter being commonly seen in Western subjects. The second notable point is the egg-shaped

electromagnetic field to my left hand side. It appears to be 'linked' to mine in some way yet is clearly separate having a different shape and colour range. When I saw this for the first time I assumed it was a distortion of the light and the assistant was unable to comment on it. However on closer inspection I noticed that the overhead light cable was not distorted.

There are 30 – 40 seconds between the first image and the second. I have not moved from the spot but have picked up my rattle and begun to call my Upper World teacher to me with the intention of touching my left palm to his right palm. I recall focusing my intention clearly, but I was certainly not in any deep 'trance' state within such a short time, with a person I did not know taking photographs and tapping a keyboard and while surrounded by chatter and footsteps beyond the room. I remember that the lab assistant was very surprised by the changes that occurred as I rattled, but I do not think she had ever seen a secondary EMF manifesting in a photograph before and did not address it. At the time it was the change of colour and brightness that most surprised me. There was such a very clear alteration which I read as my intention captured on camera. Only much later did I notice that as *my* field changed the one beside me changed even more, and differently, and that the gap between us, appearing in Image 1 as a 'fold' in a curtain, shrinks as the two fields move closer together in Image 2 and almost begin to merge. In larger format, a distinct gold circle can be

seen on my left palm where it 'touches' my teacher's palm and also around the hand holding the rattle.

Only recently did I seriously begin to investigate what the secondary EMF might be. Because PIP is not yet widespread and there are few practitioners available for comment, it was mostly a matter of guesswork. The [PIP Manual](#) however does comment briefly on this phenomenon,

"Attachments and Spirit Guides: Cases have been witnessed and documented with PIP where unknown phenomena are seen (some of these are covered in Harry Oldfield's Invisible Universe ...). Such instances are rare though certainly worthy of further research and perhaps validation of PIP's ability to detect the unseen and mysterious. Such cases include entities, which can attach themselves to an individual's biofield. This can be a symbiotic and a beneficial arrangement or it can be more like a possession of an evil spirit. Entities can also be bright perhaps emitting from crystals or water bodies as sprites." [PIP Manual](#) P31.

Very recently I contacted Dr Harry Oldfield, a colleague of Dr Streeter and the inventor of the PIP system, and asked for his reading of the two photographs, particularly of the secondary EMF. He kindly gave his permission to quote him here: *There are very clear energetic changes to be seen with the second image and clear higher energy connections that have been induced, in my opinion, by external secondary auric field intervention. This has, it seems, temporarily cleared the throat chakra and all the red auric field congestion from outside the body substituting the golden colour. You know the circumstances of your thoughts and experience at the time of these pictures which is, in the eyes of science, a very internal, subjective process, however with our technology and in our pictures we can clearly see that there are real energies involved.*

I was surprised by Dr Oldfield's interpretation, having always assumed the change from Image 1 to Image 2 to have occurred through the intervention of my focused intention and rattling, yet he seems to be suggesting that the change in the second image has been induced by a 'secondary auric field intervention'. I still have not entirely understood this, as the secondary EMF is present in the first image also, yet no intervention appears to be taking place.

Now, several years after I stood for the camera, I wonder if the secondary field, whoever/whatever it is, is still with me or if I am alone? Could it be some part of myself in external form? Is it, as Dr Oldfield's manual suggests, an attaching spirit? If so the presence of light suggests that it is not something I need to be concerned about. Working as a shamanic practitioner has, for me at least, nothing at all to do with mediumship, clairvoyance or any form of

psychic ability. I have never seen a ghost, nor wanted to and I have never been aware of any presence around me. There is however something very beautiful about the changes in the colours, the extraordinary brightness that seems to emanate as my consciousness alters. Traditional shamanism often speaks of 'fire in the head', the fierce leap of consciousness from ordinary to extra ordinary during the shamanic journey, from which the haloes of Christian saints and other religious figures are thought to have derived. Is this image, which I do not believe to be uniquely personal to me, an image of fire in the head? Is it a moment in which technology and spirit come together in a mutually revealing exchange?



Dr. Zoë Brân was Chair of the Health Education Group of The Terrence Higgins Trust from 1987-1989 and her pioneering doctorate explored AIDS and civil rights. As a writer and university lecturer, Zoë has covered topics as diverse as journalism, sex, Creative Thinking and shamanism. Her books of travel literature describe troubled areas of the world, including Burma, Bosnia and Cuba and she is currently working on her first book about shamanic practice. Director of Shaman UK, an organisation which aims to promote public awareness and understanding of shamanism, Zoë is one the UK's leading Core Shamanic practitioners and educators. Her weblog www.shaman.uk.net has a worldwide readership. Zoë lives in London with her lurcher and familiar spirit, Arlu.

Anthropology, Evolution and Anomalous Experience

James McClenon

Anomalous experiences are uncommon perceptions “believed to deviate from ordinary experience or from the usually accepted explanations of reality” (Cardena, Lynn, & Krippner, 2000, p. 4). Over the past three decades, I have investigated anomalous experiences and their correlates through anthropological, folklore, and survey research. Projects included interviewing parapsychologists in the USA and Europe (McClenon, 1984), observing dozens of Asian shamanic practitioners (McClenon, 1994), random sample surveys regarding anomalous experience of college students in the USA, Japan, and China (McClenon, 1993, 1994), and collecting thousands anomalous accounts using folklore research methods (McClenon, 2000, 2002).

I encountered three basic categories of anomalous perception: (1) Primary experiences are spontaneous and unplanned. Examples include apparitions, paranormal dreams, waking extrasensory perceptions, psychokinesis, synchronicity, out-of-body and near-death experiences. Anthropologists can collect accounts of primary experiences through interviews. These accounts have universal, core features with anomalous qualities. (2) Secondary experiences occur within the context of a performance, ritual, or group activity such as those conducted by shamans, mediums, fortune tellers, sorcerers, Ouija board practitioners, and religious groups. Some reports involve precognition, clairvoyance, or psychokinesis but most accounts have normal explanations. Many secondary perceptions can be attributed to unconscious muscular movements, deception, misdirection, sleight-of-hand, or unusual physiological processes (heat immunity feats, pain denial, feats of strength, special dexterity). Many shamanic traditions include trickery, designed to stimulate belief. (3) Tertiary experiences result from psychological and physiological processes occurring within the observer. Examples involve spiritual healing and effective curses. Although some tertiary experiences seem truly anomalous, most should be attributed to hypnotic and placebo effects, based on expectation and belief.

I sought to determine universal features within the biographies of the shamanic practitioners I

interviewed in Okinawa, Taiwan, China, Korea, Philippines, Thailand, India, and Sri Lanka. Although ideologies and ritual practices varied widely, all practitioners described primary, secondary, or tertiary anomalous experiences. These anomalous experiences generate parallel folk beliefs regarding spirits, souls, life after death, and magical abilities, the ideological foundation for shamanism, humankind’s first religious form. This observation coincides with Hufford’s (1982) experiential-source theory, the argument that recurring patterns within folk religious beliefs are not merely products of culture but spring from universal features within anomalous perceptions. Although people’s formal religious beliefs are shaped by socialization, folk religious beliefs have similar elements derived from the physiological processes governing anomalous experience.

Survey literature reveals that incidence of anomalous experience is correlated with psychological variables related to shamanism (McClenon, 2002). Shamanic variables include dissociation, absorption, and hypnotizability, traits contributing to shamanism’s physiological basis (Winkelman, 2010). Genetics research supports this argument. Twin studies reveal that religiosity, spirituality, absorption, and hypnotizability have genetic basis and that all these variables are correlated with each other (Koenig, et al., 2005; McClenon, 2002; Waller, et al., 1990).

Based on this evidence, I devised the ritual healing theory, a scenario describing how genes related to shamanism became prevalent. The theory argues that ritual healing, effective due to placebo and hypnotic processes, provided survival advantages to Paleolithic people over many millennia. As a result, shamanic ritual selected for genes contributing to the modern human capacity for anomalous experience and spirituality (McClenon, 1997, 2002).

This theory fits what we know about human evolution. Many animals exhibit rudimentary forms of hypnotic behavior, referred to as *animal hypnosis*. Some animals, exposed to repetitive or threatening stimuli, “play dead,” revealing a dreamy, dazed appearance. Primates exposed to repetitive (ritual) stimuli exhibit altered states of consciousness

equivalent to human hypnosis (McClenon, 2002). The ritual healing theory argues that the human hypnotic capacity is a modified response to trauma, shaped through evolutionary processes.

Human hypnotic susceptibility is based on the capacities for dissociation and absorption (Heap, Brown, & Oakley, 2004). Absorption and dissociation provide humans protection against the effects of trauma. Humans exposed to high levels of trauma, such as childhood sexual abuse, often reveal pathological forms of dissociation. People exposed to average stress exhibit healthy levels of absorption, dissociation, and hypnotizability. These functional traits are correlated with creativity, spirituality, and anomalous experience (Cardena, Lynn, & Krippner, 2000; McClenon, 2002).

The human evolutionary scenario shaped hominid use of altered states of consciousness. *Homo erectus* gained control of fire 0.2 to 1.7 million years ago. This led to changes in dietary and social forms, and, over time, greater use of symbolization. Pre-language hominids watched hypnotic flames while chanting and singing, activities that led to increasingly greater control of vocal apparatus. Those benefiting from resulting altered states of consciousness had survival advantages. In all probability, this process involved sexual selection; hominids with greater control over their vocal apparatus were probably preferred as mates and, over time, hominids developed ever greater vocal control. Links between music and romance among modern humans support this hypothesis. Physiological evidence also favors this argument. Musical and linguistic abilities involve separate developmental stages and brain mechanisms, suggesting that singing preceded language on the evolutionary timeline (Mithen, 2005).

Homo sapiens cave and rock art, from about 30,000 years ago, indicate use of shamanic altered states of consciousness (Lewis-Williams, 2002). Paleolithic musical instruments found in these caves support this argument. Shamanic rituals provided survival advantages due to hypnotic and placebo processes. Clinical evidence indicates that hypnosis can provide powerful benefits, alleviating disorders prevalent among Paleolithic peoples (Barber, 1984; Heap, Brown, & Oakley, 2004; McClenon, 2002). These disorders included childbirth complications, psychological problems, pain, burns, and blood loss following accidents – problems proven amenable to hypnotic treatment through clinical trials (McClenon, 2002). Hypnotic benefits often exceed what is thought

“normal” and, as a result, hypnotic effects are often attributed to spiritual forces. Ancient spiritual healing provided the foundation for all pre-historical medical systems. Ancient folk beliefs included conceptions of the afterlife (McClenon, 2002; Shushan, 2009).

Anthropological observations support this theory (McClenon, 1994, 2002). Shamanic biographies imply that practitioners are recruited from the population of people with high propensity for absorption, dissociation, and anomalous experience. Such people tend to be empathic, yet psychologically vulnerable, often suffering from ailments with psychological characteristics. Their biographies reveal recurring patterns; they find that ritual healing alleviates their disorder and that their cure requires them to assume shamanic roles. As part of this process, they perceive compelling anomalous events producing powerful beliefs regarding spirits, souls, life after death, and magical abilities. As a result, they become able to perform rituals producing hypnotic and placebo effects in others (McClenon, 2002; Winkelman, 2010).

An emerging clinical paradigm coincides with these arguments. It portrays psychosis and spirituality as a continuum with spiritual experience viewed as healthy psychoticism (Clarke, 2010). This argument suggests that some people suffering from psychosis can benefit from ritual strategies since spirituality can contribute to psychological health through increasing cognitive organization. The ritual healing theory contributes to this paradigm, predicting that the propensity for anomalous experience is correlated with spirituality, psychosis, anomalous experience, and schizotypy (non-clinical forms of psychosis prevalent within general populations; Chapman, Chapman, & Kwapil, 1995; Claridge & Beech, 1995). People who cannot control their propensity for anomalous experience are often labeled as psychotic. Those who gain control of their anomalous capacities achieve psychological stability through spirituality. This theory suggests that, when used properly, spirituality contributes to psychological health.

The ritual healing theory also provides hypotheses for genetics researchers. Geneticists seek to define phenotypes, observable characteristics resulting from the interaction of the environment and collections of genes (genotypes). If a phenotype is validly defined, researchers can locate families with high frequency of the characteristic. They then compare DNA from family members having the

phenotype to members who lack it; through replication among different ethnic groups, this method allows identification of alleles associated with the phenotype. Once alleles are identified, researchers can uncover the mechanisms by which these alleles affect phenotypes, a process termed *reverse phenotyping*. This results in more precise definitions of each phenotype (Schulze & McMahon, 2004).

The ritual healing theory predicts that alleles governing dissociation, absorption, hypnotizability, and other variables have been selected by shamanic healing. These alleles could be identified using existing genetics paradigms. Cross-cultural studies can reveal the degree that present psychological scales coincide with valid phenotypes. Scales hypothesized to be associated with shamanism include: Tellegen Absorption Scale (Tellegen & Atkinson 1974), Transliminality Scale (Lange, Thalbourne, Houran, & Storm, 2000), Dissociative Experience Scale (Bernstein & Putnam 1986), Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility, Form A (Shor & Orne, 1962) and other hypnosis scales, standardized scales measuring childhood difficulty and trauma, scales measuring mental health, and scales measuring incidence of schizotypal and anomalous experience. The theory argues that childhood stress and trauma *turn on* genes associated with these variables, causing them to be correlated with each other. Data from community surveys should reveal correlational clusters of variables, providing clues regarding underlying genotypal architecture. Such studies would facilitate definitions of phenotypes, contributing to identification of susceptibility alleles. Reverse phenotyping would reveal the elements within hypothesized scales that pertain to valid phenotypes. Resulting findings could allow clinicians to design therapy strategies matching biological propensities.

The ritual healing theory allows testable hypotheses regarding universal features within anomalous experience, correlations between variables related to shamanism, and the benefits of shamanic hypnotic and placebo processes. This theory does not argue that anomalous experiences are invalid or that they do not correspond with reality. Arguments regarding the validity of anomalous experience are beyond the realm of this theory. Evaluations of the ritual healing theory would contribute to practical applications for the treatment of psychosomatic and psychological disorders. Hypotheses can be tested

through folklore research, anthropological observation, community surveys, and clinical studies.

References

- Barber, T. X. (1984). Changing "unchangeable" bodily processes by (hypnotic) suggestions: A new look at hypnosis, cognitions, imagining and the mind-body problem. In A. A. Sheikh (Ed.), *Imagination and healing* (pp. 69-128). Farmingdale, NY: Baywood.
- Bernstein, E.M. & Putnam, F.W. (1986). Development, reliability, and validity of a dissociation scale. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 174, 727-735.
- Cardeña, E., Lynn, S. J. and Krippner, S. (Eds.). (2000). *Varieties of anomalous experience: Examining the scientific evidence*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Chapman, J. P. Chapman, L. J., & Kwapil, T. R. (1995). Scales for the measurement of schizotypy. In A. Raine, T. Lencz, & S. A. Mednick (Eds.), *Schizotypal personality* (pp 79-106). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Claridge, G. and Beech, T. (1995). Fully and quasi-dimensional constructions of schizotypy. In A. Raine, T. Lencz, & S. A. Mednick (Eds.), *Schizotypal personality* (pp. 192-216). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clarke, I. (Ed.)(2010). *Psychosis and spirituality: Consolidating the new paradigm* (2nd edition). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Heap, M. I., Brown, R. J., & Oakley, D. A. (Eds.). (2004). *The highly hypnotizable person: Theoretical, experimental, and clinical issues*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Hufford, D. (1982). *The Terror That Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Koenig, L. B., McGue, M., Kureger, R. F., Bouchard, T. J. (2005). Genetic and environmental influences on religiousness: Findings for retrospective and current religiousness rating, *Journal of Personality*, 73, 471-488.

- Lange, R., Thalbourne, M. A., Houran, J., & Storm, L. (2000). The revised Transliminality Scale: Reliability and validity data from a Rasch top-down purification procedure. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 9, 591-617.
- Lewis-Williams, J. D. (2002). *The mind in the cave: Consciousness and the origins of art*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- McClenon, J. (1984). *Deviant Science: The case of parapsychology*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- McClenon, J. (1993). Surveys of anomalous experience in Chinese, Japanese, and American samples. *Sociology of Religion*, 54: 295-302.
- McClenon, J. (1994). *Wondrous events: Foundations of religious belief*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- McClenon, J. (1997). Shamanic healing, human evolution, and the origin of religion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36, 345-354.
- McClenon, J. (2000). Content analysis of an anomalous memorate collection: Testing hypotheses regarding universal features. *Sociology of Religion*, 61: 155-69.
- McClenon, J. (2002). *Wondrous healing: Shamanism, human evolution, and the origin of religion*. Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press.
- McClenon, J. (2005). Rootlore as therapy: Evolutionary impacts of ritual suggestion, *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 19, 115-128.
- Mithen, S. (2005). *The singing Neanderthals: The origins of music, language, mind and Body*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Schulze, T. G. and McMahon, F. J. (2004). Defining the phenotype in human genetic studies: Forward genetics and reverse phenotyping. *Human Heredity*, 58, 131-138.
- Shushan, G. (2009). *Conceptions of the afterlife in early civilization: Universalism, constructivism and near-death experience*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Tellegen, A. & Atkinson, G. (1974). Openness to absorbing and self-altering experiences ("absorption"), a trait related to hypnotic susceptibility. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 83, 268-77.
- Waller, N. G., Kojetin, B. A., Bouchard, T. J., Lykken, D. T., & Tellegen, A. (1990). Genetic and environmental influences on religious interests, attitudes, and values: A study of twins reared apart and together. *Psychological Science*, 1: 138-42.
- Winkelman, M. (2010). *Shamanism: A biopsychosocial paradigm of consciousness and healing* (2nd edition), Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

Evidence Unseen: The Ethnographic and Personal Unknown

Paul D. Biscop



Among Spiritualists it is a commonplace saying that, “mediumship proves survival”. It is through the providing of rich personal details about the communicating spirit that the medium hopes to demonstrate to the sitter in a home circle or private reading, or to the recipient in a public demonstration, that the medium is indeed in touch with the deceased. Evidence of survival is accordingly predicated on the provision of such details as, the spirit’s name (difficult to receive, but not impossible); places, events; shared memories; recognized objects of memory; character traits and peculiarities of language, dress, manners or occupation. Such details and others might be said, to borrow Geertz’s term, to constitute a “thick description” of the communicating spirit. We might refer to this kind of description as **the primary level of evidence**, since it is, ideally at least, reasonably verifiable by the recipient.

Some researchers of the past or present have argued, however, that this kind of evidence might be obtained from the recipient or sitter through telepathy, such that the medium has simply obtained the evidence directly from the consciousness of the recipient. This argument presumes that telepathy exists. To disprove this argument, if it needs to be dismissed, it would be necessary to produce evidential information that was unknown to the recipient’s consciousness, evidence that would have to be verified later. Such a situation is, in fact, not uncommon in mediumistic communications, and may present strong evidence for survival.

For the researcher who might be concerned for the evidential quality of mediumistic communication, however, there is a greater problem here anyway, and it is an important methodological factor. How **do** you gather sufficient data to support the evidential quality of mediumship, especially from a scientific or social scientific perspective? A typical Spiritualist Sunday Service demonstration of mediumship, usually of clairvoyance, may see from three to five messages given, of varying evidential quality. Usually verification by the recipient follows, either throughout the delivering of the message or at the end. If there is matter that must be verified later,

matter that is unknown to the recipient, that verification may be unknown to the researcher. The researcher may be unable to follow up the later verification, which might be done privately. Considering that there are hundreds of Spiritualist Churches throughout the English speaking world, and possibly others elsewhere, which are running similar services and doing similar kinds of demonstrations on Sundays and other days, the data base for researchers is potentially vast, though practically limited by time, distance and the ubiquitous funding.

As a part-time Spiritualist medium for 43 years (as against a full time medium who earns her/his living through providing mediumistic services), I would estimate that I have given out something like 3000 plus messages in public demonstrations in Spiritualist churches and in some public large scale demonstrations in halls, as well as in private readings and even in class rooms. I am only one of many mediums around the world, and am not involved full time, nor have I ever made a living through mediumship. While I have no idea how many mediums there may actually be around the world, Sunday in and Sunday out, nor can I guess the number over the 150 or more years of Spiritualist demonstrations that have been given, the number of messages, potentially evidential, must be staggering. In fact that number, whatever it might be, must theoretically at least, be considered the parameters of the research data base. In other words, no researcher is ever likely to be able to fully evaluate the degree of evidentiality of Spiritualist mediumship demonstrations. Nonetheless, researchers of various sorts may still choose to create generalities based in fact on a tiny percentage of possibilities. On the other hand, we can actually come to a reasonable conclusion based on the concept of **a preponderance of evidence**, a term suggested to me by Mike Tymn, author of *The Articulate Dead* (Amazon Books.com). As a legal term, it simply means that there is a sufficient amount of evidence such that, while no one individual piece may be absolute proof in itself, the total makes it highly likely or even convincingly likely, that it is so. In ordinary language, we might say that, “if it looks like a duck,

walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, flies like a duck, eats like a duck, etc., it's pretty obvious that **it is** a duck". Of course, in this analogy, one needs to know what constitutes a duck before applying the above criteria.

Ducks notwithstanding, the researcher in the area of paranormal communication supposedly involved in Spiritualist mediumship demonstrations, has both **quantitative and qualitative difficulties**. There is a potential plethora of data, but we can't always access it. In addition, although clairvoyance and clairsentience seem to be the most common and easily available forms of mediumship, other forms may also be highly evidential, provided they are accessible. While richness of detail, or "thick description" of communication may be considered a primary level of communication evidentiality, information that is unknown to the recipient and which must be verified by turning to others such as family members or others may be considered a **secondary level** of evidentiality, and one which potentially may be greater than that of the primary level. In this case, telepathy or "cold reading" of the recipient are both eliminated from the etiology of the phenomenon, to borrow another term. However, the researcher, as suggested earlier, may not be in a position to document the verification of such material, since it is likely to occur later and in private.

Yet another level, **a third level**, may be the most evidential of all, but again may also be problematic in access. At this level, information is obtained about spirits and situations which are absolutely not consciously known to the recipient, and which may not be verified for a longer period of time. Explaining such information may lead the skeptic or even the researcher into esoteric kinds of models which might be forms of reification, or perhaps which reach in to the absurd or even silly, as has occurred in some past research. I have been the recipient of such information which took almost twenty years to verify under extremely unusual conditions.

In the early summer of 1969, I was the recipient of a wrong-hand mirror writing spirit message of puzzling information. In this particular case, the medium was a friend and developing medium whom I had met at the first Spiritualist church I had ever attended, in Montreal, Quebec. The medium's name is George H., and he wrote this form of automatic writing using the opposite hand to the one which was normally used for writing, and he wrote very quickly in reverse, so that the paper had to

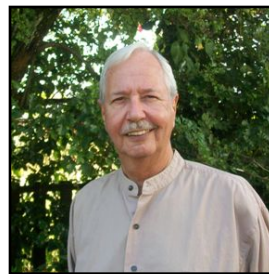
be held up to a mirror to read. He worked with a spirit collective, which called itself "Tonancas", and from whom the information was given. George claimed that the information was usually very evidential, though he did have at least some knowledge of me and my background at that time. The procedure is rather impressive to watch, especially considering the speed at which it is done. Nonetheless, the message at that time made no sense to me whatsoever. For example, since names are a thing of the earth plane, it is said that we often have other names on the Other Side; George asked Tonancas by what other names I was known on the spirit side. Several names were given, but then it said that I was also known by a name "which was held dear in my mother's heart", the name being Andrew. While I am fond of the name, I felt no special connection to it, but I later asked my mother if that made any sense to her. Her answer was a simple, "No." Other names of supposed relatives in spirit were also given, and meant nothing to me. So George was disappointed, and could not understand why the process seemed so out of sync that day. I tucked the sheets of paper away at least, and let the matter go. Seventeen years later, however, the old message began to take on new possibilities, and about two years later indeed was to prove quite accurate. That was because seventeen years after the message was given to me, my parents finally told me that I was not their natural child but that I had been adopted at five months of age. Needless to say, I was stunned by this profound shock of a totally unknown aspect of my personal identity. I was now facing the profound difficulty of identity reconstruction and the vast possibilities of that which was unknown. I began a search for my birth origins, armed at least with the name of my birth mother (on the adoption papers) and not much else. At that time, 1986, the province in which I was born would give out, as was common, only non-identifying information about my family of origins. To cut a long story short, as the saying goes, I did succeed in tracing my birth family, though my birth mother was deceased by the time I succeeded, and I discovered that my maternal grandfather, to whom I bore a resemblance, was Andrew. And the rest of the names on that document from 1969 were deceased family members not of my adoptive family, but **of my birth family**. Now, I would surmise that some might wish to say that the "Tonancas" collective was telepathically "reading my unconscious" mind and producing information that I unconsciously knew from before birth. (I can think of

at least one well-known debunker who would probably gravitate to such an explanation!) Or perhaps one might argue that I gained the information after birth, even though I was removed from my birth mother, according to the records, only ten days after birth. Others might fall back on some scheme of “universal consciousness” into which the medium tapped to provide such information. Ultimately the non-evidential hypothesis creates far more problems than the Spiritualist explanation creates, and we do know about Occam’s Razor.

An interesting footnote to the above situation, again from a personal view point, might be the case of my missing sister. At age 17, I was “urged” from within, for lack of better words, to do a portrait of a young woman, in pastel chalk and pencil, which is hanging currently in my study. The young woman would have been a few years older than I was at the time; I did not know who she was, nor why I had to do her portrait; I knew only that I had a strong connection to this image, and I called her, “Marianne”. After the girl in a song by Harry Belafonte popular at that time, who was “down by the sea side, sifting sand”.. and collecting shells. At that time I had a bit of art training, but mainly was self taught. Over the years, a number of mediums had told me that I had a sister in spirit, but I could not verify that. When I first began my search for my family of origins, I consulted a psychic who was recommended to me by a fellow medium whose judgment I trusted; in the course of the reading, he found that he was having difficulty understanding what he was receiving and asked if I were looking for something in particular. I replied that I was searching for my family of origin. He said that I had a natural sister in spirit, that she had only lived a few days or, perhaps, was born retarded or handicapped in such a way that she “had never fully touched the earth plane.” Of course I could not confirm that. Eventually, when I had located my birth family (with direct spiritual help as well as help from Parent Finders), I mentioned a sister. They had no knowledge of a sister. Yet the matter came back to me a number of times over the next several years, along with another detail in which I was told from my own spiritual contact that I would eventually contact the woman who has my birth mother’s papers and diaries. Following inner direction, I placed an ad in the newspaper of the major city near where my birth mother and her husband had lived, asking for any information anyone might have on my mother and her husband. I received a call from a constable of

the city police force, saying that his police partner had seen the ad and recognized the names as being people that he knew. Of course I had to explain to him who I was, which surprised him. He told me that I really needed to speak to his sister-in-law, who was coming around in a few minutes, since she had been the executor of my birth mother and husband’s estate. A few minutes later I was speaking with her in a very emotional conversation, for both of us, and she told me what my cousins did not know, that I would have had a sister, a few years older than me, but she only lived a few days, and her name was Marianne. I now have the papers and diaries that my birth mother kept over many, many years. From the photographs that I have from my cousins, I can see Marianne’s resemblance to my mother and her husband, as I see my own resemblance to my mother and her father, Andrew.

The question, though, still remains: how much qualitative material does it make to create a preponderance of evidence, and how is it to be gained? Though psychical research began in the 19th. Century and continues today to produce strong evidence for the survival hypothesis, we still face a powerful denial of any such possibilities from the faithful orthodox religious and the faithfully orthodox scientific materialists. In both cases, the religious and the scientific, it seems that the power and the authority of the paradigms and the paradigm holders is what is threatened. No matter what the explanation of mediumship, I find it quite bizarre that the possibility of life after death remains steadfastly avoided by those who seek the truth for the betterment of humanity. “Truth”, as Karl Popper supposedly said, “is a hard thing to come by.”



Paul D. Biscop, BCATR, Ph.D./Nanaimo, BC, Canada is a retired Cultural Anthropologist and post-secondary educator, as well as a Registered Art Therapist in private practice.

A Matter of Spirit: An Imaginal Perspective on the Paranormal

Angela Voss

At the recent conference 'Breaking Convention' at the University of Kent, there was much discussion about the therapeutic and consciousness-expanding properties of psychedelics and psychoactive plants. Scientific methods of quantitative data analysis and statistical research together with the physiology of non-ordinary states of consciousness are being employed to challenge negative and prohibitive attitudes and contribute to a general re-evaluation of legal constraints regarding the uses of such substances. However, despite the undoubted importance of such research, there is one dimension of ASCs which remains outside the epistemological framework of conventional science, namely the *ontological reality* or authenticity of the visionary experiences undergone by those under the effects of consciousness-enhancing agents. When research is bound to a materialist scientific paradigm, the numinous and revelatory content of non-rational states of consciousness is inevitably marginalised, as questions regarding their purpose, religious or spiritual import and 'truth' cannot be addressed within the limits of its discourse. The problem is partly due to the polarity between rational and metaphysical modes of understanding which has become intrinsic to post-enlightenment thinking, with the emerging dominance of the critical and analytical model for etic researchers in the modern academy.¹ Often, the only thing that can be said of the overwhelming experiences of the subjects is that they are personal, mystical, transcendent, or transformative. Individuals may speak of their visionary experience through vivid narrative, describing enhanced colours, strange beings and situations experienced via depths of perception that are impossible to articulate; but for those firmly anchored in the sense perceptible reality of this world, it is easier to focus on 'how' such visions are achieved in physiological, neurological or mechanical terms than 'what' is being revealed, and why – whether in a particular circumstance, or generally, to all who encounter the numinous liminality of other worlds.

Nor is this to deny the value of phenomenological approaches by writers and

researchers who are open to the possibilities of multiple levels of consciousness and the existence of spiritual entities,² but often their accounts are presented with a matter of factness which belies the ontological chasm between this world and the 'other place' they are describing. Unless it is acknowledged that our normal ways of knowing may be inadequate for shedding light on the true nature of these dimensions there is always the danger of the *reductio ad absurdum*—for example the identification of the other-than-human as the all too familiar alien or UFO from outer (physical) space. The attempt to explain other-worldly events in the terms of our own often makes them seem just plain ridiculous, and easily dismissed as either hoaxes or hallucinations by those firmly governed by their rational minds.

I would like to suggest a way of redeeming the authenticity of visionary experience from both the scepticism of a literalist, physicalist mentality and the reductionism—or concretisation—of 'new age' credulity. As scientific discourse reaches its limits, another mode of speaking is required to illuminate realms that lie beyond those limits and to do justice to the lived experience of encounters with other worlds; one which does not attempt to explain or subsume them to its own interpretations, but which engages with their ontological ground on its own terms. To illustrate such a mode, I will draw on the acute observations of the Sufi mystic Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240), who speaks from the tradition of Islamic mysticism, which is infused with neoplatonism. Neoplatonic epistemology arises out of a holistic metaphor which places human consciousness in a vast scale of cosmic intelligence, a variegated and hierarchical whole which is characterised by degrees of quality of *being*, all emanating from a primordial energy source termed the One. Most importantly, it differentiates between various subtle conditions of 'knowing' which link the human soul with corresponding realms or dimensions of existence, from the most material and earthy to the most rarefied and 'spiritual'. Each condition of being (or degree of consciousness) has a mode of perception appropriate to it, and indeed human beings are seen as the most material manifestations of a panoply of intelligences ranging from elemental

spirits to angels. The faculty which enables humans to apprehend the 'higher' planes of existence is termed by Plato himself the intellect, but this is not intellect as disembodied rational speculation. It is rather an intuitive *connection* of understanding, a resonance of the deepest stratum of the human soul with its original ground of being. As such, it exceeds the possibilities of rational thinking.³

For the later neoplatonists the imagination came to play a distinctive role as a mediating function between the sense perception and intellectual understanding. Such an imagination was not to be confused with mere 'fantasy' or impressions and images that were merely distortions of sense-impressions of 'this' world, but a faculty which produced mirror images of archetypal or spiritual realities.⁴ I suggest that the study of visionary and paranormal phenomena would greatly benefit from a metaphysical perspective that acknowledges the power of this 'higher' imagination to reveal a truth that is of another order entirely from sense-perception or reason alone. Such a perspective would provide an integrative model for both mystical and rational epistemologies, through reinstating the 'active' imagination as the mode of perception which mediates between the two, and facilitating insight into the truth of visions whose origin is non-sensible. Of course one could argue that this is also a function of the arts, which deliberately use symbolic images to open up depths inaccessible to the rational mind—and indeed it is precisely this power of the symbolic which needs to be reinstated in any methodology harnessed to the deeper understanding of 'paranormal' visionary experience. I hope the reasons for this will become clear.

Let us now approach the question of the ontology of 'altered states' with Ibn 'Arabi. In his *Meccan Illuminations (al-Futūhāt al-Makkīya)*, he describes and theorises about his own encounters with spirits or jinn:

One embodied himself to me in the earth,
another in the air:

One embodied himself wherever I was,
Another embodied himself in heaven.

They gave knowledge to me, and I to them,
Though we were not equal,

For I was unchanging in my entity,

But they were not able to keep still.

They assume the form of every shape,

Like water taking on the colour of the cup.⁵

These spiritual intelligences are mobile, changeable entities which may appear as embodied in both outer 'objective' reality and 'internal' visions, but whose autonomous existence is unquestioned. The cosmology within which Ibn 'Arabi locates this existence is essentially threefold, following the fundamental Platonic distinction between the material and spiritual worlds and placing a middle realm between the two, a realm corresponding to the visible cosmos which links heaven and earth. Here we are presented with a symbolic image that expresses through analogy a 'one world' cosmology in which the tripartite, harmonious structure is mirrored in the human soul as a microcosm, and can be known via the corresponding cognitive faculty. Thus the material world can only be known through sense perception, the intermediate world—the world where sense-perception and spiritual reality meet—can only be known through the imagination, and the spiritual world is 'unveiled' to the intuitive intellect. This is what leads Ibn 'Arabi to place such emphasis on the idea that the soul has two eyes: the eye of reason, which deals with 'human' affairs and empirical/rational knowledge, and the eye of revelation which sees into the divine world through its images, giving us access to it via visible forms.⁶ Post enlightenment epistemology has firmly separated these two forms of vision, exalting the former to the status of indisputable truth and the latter to mere 'subjectivity' or 'belief', but in neoplatonic thinking revelation precedes and informs both sense-perception and reason and is therefore primary, disclosing truthfulness and meaning for the individual through an image, which is then subjected to interpretation:

Revelation is a meaning. When God wants meaning to descend to sense-perception, it has to pass through the Presence of Imagination before it reaches sense-perception. The reality of imagination demands that it gives sensory form to everything that becomes actualised within it .. If the [revelation] arrives at the time of wakefulness, it is called 'imaginalisation' ... that is why revelation begins with imagination.⁷

The imagination then, is able to conceive immaterial, spiritual meaning through clothing it with an image: "the degree of imagination embraces that of sense perception and meaning. Hence it subtilises the sensory object and densifies meaning".⁸ Perhaps the nearest most people can come to appreciating this is through the kind of dream which is startling in its sense of heightened reality, where people and objects manifest as fully embodied and

tangible. Ibn 'Arabi suggests that such visions do indeed partake of two realities, as William Chittick explains:

[Imagination] *brings spiritual entities into relationship with corporeal entities ... By giving incorporeal realities the attributes of corporeal things ... imagination allows unseen realities to be described as possessing attributes that pertain to the visible world... Unseen things actually take on visible form in the imaginal realms.*⁹

And what are these 'unseen things'? They are discarnate intelligences, which may exist at many levels of non-material being. Whilst human beings with complex material bodies inhabit the earth, the spiritual world is inhabited by angels whose essence is simple and luminous, and the intermediate world by the spirits or jinn, which are paradoxically perceived to be both simple and compound simultaneously. In this medial place, spirits may appear as embodied and bodies may appear as spiritualised, as in dreams and apparitions. Ibn 'Arabi also uses the metaphor of a mirror-image to describe the ambiguity of the imaginal realm, for material things seen in a mirror are paradoxically both fully real yet fully unreal at the same time.¹⁰ The most important thing to remember however is that although spiritual presences may appear to humans as having somehow 'broken through' into sense-perceptible reality, in fact they partake of a fundamentally different ontological reality and are therefore immune to the laws which govern our material world.

Ibn 'Arabi explains that these imaginal beings can in fact be seen through two different 'eyes'; the eye of sense-perception which sees during a wakeful state, and the eye of the imagination which, in most people, sees during sleep and other altered states. However, it appears that certain individuals may also see with the imaginal eye during wakefulness and in this case the veil between the two worlds falls away: "the person who undergoes unveiling sees while he is awake what the dreamer sees while he is asleep."¹¹ Such refined souls will be able to distinguish between embodied spirits and human beings through recognising a 'mark' of identification, on which Ibn 'Arabi does not elaborate further. Presumably such a mark would be obvious to those able to discern it, but as William Chittick points out, "the Shaykh could live joyfully in the knowledge that he recognised the mark of every apparition. The rest of us, lacking in marks, had best be careful".¹²

The ability to distinguish 'higher' souls from those spirits still attached to the material world is of utmost importance, because often the 'lower' jinn will play tricks with the observer and convince him or her that they know more than they do:

*Because of what [the jinn] report to their human sitting companion, he has imaginings about the occurrence of events and what is happening in the cosmos, for they acquire that through listening to the Higher Plenum by stealth. Then their sitting companion supposes that God has honoured him!*¹³

How seriously are we to take this advice? It would seem relatively easy to deliberately create situations in which autonomous beings may be encountered, whether through psychedelics, mediumship, hypnosis or meditation techniques. But we have lost a sense of what medieval scholastics called *adaequatio*: that the intellect of the knower must be adequate to the thing known to perceive its truth.¹⁴ Through a sympathetic resonance, spirit phenomena will reveal themselves to the participant, whose desire, intention and faith are central to the process of attraction. The more earth-bound the consciousness, the more earth-bound the spirit, hence the importance of spiritual training and specific ritual contexts to cultivate a purity and refinement of soul that would attract the wisdom of higher beings. This was the central aim of neoplatonic theurgy, whose rites culminated in the 'divinisation' of the human soul as it fully realised its identity as an embodied deity.¹⁵

In *Imaginal Worlds* Chittick delineates four constituents of the spiritual vision: the consciousness of the observing subject, the reality-status of the object or person that is seen, the form it takes, and the location of its actualisation. Firstly, the observer may be either awake or in a trance or dream state. If he or she is awake, it is important to note that the eye of imagination may see an apparition which is not visible at all to anyone else whilst possessing full material form to the observer. But this does not mean that it is a hallucination in the reductive sense, rather, the neoplatonic understanding would be that the observer is seeing into a dimension whose ontological status as 'real' supercedes our notions of reality. This 'ontological inversion' as it has been called¹⁶ is impossible for the physicalist mentality to grasp as it requires a radical shift of orientation. It also means that any attempt to apply the methods of empirical scientific research to ascertain the 'reality' of such apparitions will be doomed to failure, despite their apparent concreteness and tangibility, because they

belong to a different modality of matter. It is of course possible to stretch the rational paradigm through talking of vibrational levels, energy fields and parallel universes, but such paradigms remain in the domain of abstract theorising. The point of imaginal visions is their connection with the emotional or affective states and intentions of those who see them, their liminality, and their numinosity. Without a three-world metaphysics, which provides a context for supra-rational knowing, it is difficult to see where direct encounter with a non-material being can be appropriately located in terms of its significance and transformative effect.

Ibn 'Arabi describes two kinds of altered states of awareness in which spiritual encounters take place: in dreams, or in a state of 'absence' of the soul (or 'annihilation' of the self/ego), when the soul is experienced as leaving the body and therefore moving out of the world of the senses. As for the reality-status of the object or person that undergoes 'imaginalisation', angels, jinn and humans may all manifest themselves imaginally, that is, in their subtle bodies.¹⁷ Humans who manifest in this way may be either alive or dead, for in Plotinian neoplatonism the highest part of the soul-energy of the embodied human will always be retained in the spiritual world, and will be rejoined after death. Thus it is possible to 'see' as real someone who may be hundreds of miles away, or who has died. As for the form of the imaginalised entity, this may be fully sense perceptible – but again one must emphasise that this does not mean it belongs in our world or is subject to its laws. Thus it may vanish in an instant, or it may appear as non-human, angelic, or even monstrous and alien. Similarly, the location of the apparition will depend on which 'eye' is seeing it:

The imaginal being perceived by the eye of sense-perception would be located 'out there' in the world of discontinuous imagination, while the being perceived by the eye of imagination would be 'in here' in the world of contiguous imagination.¹⁸

This suggests that it is not the spiritual beings themselves that change their locations, but rather it is a matter of *how* the human being sees them, which 'eye' is looking – and then it seems that they can either be understood as externally existing, or internally present. In fact it is impossible to apply temporal-spatial concepts to this ambiguous and paradoxical realm; Categories such as 'inner' and 'outer' have no meaning in non-spatial dimensions. In practice, the presence of the *daimon* or spiritual intelligence (particularly in channelling and

mediumship) confounds attempts to define it as either a psychological condition or an autonomous being. As the 15th century Platonist Marsilio Ficino reminds us, "remember our daemon and genius is not only, as is thought, our intellect, but [also] a numinous being (*numen*)."¹⁹

Now it is very easy to confuse the discontinuous imagination with the material world, if the eye of revelation is not active, but often the beings seen by this 'outward' imagination are not visible to others, or are not seen for what they truly are. Ibn 'Arabi relates an anecdote of the Prophet Muhammed seeing the Angel Gabriel in the form of a beautiful Arab youth, whereas his companions saw only the youth.²⁰ Some imaginal embodiments apparently have the power to leave a concrete impression or even object in our world, but this can only be achieved if the human medium is an enlightened sage. The common sorcerer may be able to conjure objects but they would not be seen as fully and concretely embodied, and they would soon disappear.²¹ One is reminded here of the apport and ectoplasmic materialisations in contemporary mediumship, which attain various degrees of objectivity and physicality.²² Successful spirit materialisation does seem to depend on the quality of psychic energy present, and not many spiritual circles are graced with the presence of gods or angels. Whether this is due to the medium falling short of the required spiritual purity and level of consciousness, is impossible to judge.²³

Chittick gives several instances of Ibn 'Arabi's own encounters with spirits, which fall into three categories: when he alone could see the apparition, when it could possibly be seen by others, and when it was definitely seen by others present. For example, in 1202 Ibn 'Arabi encountered the spirit of a holy man, Ahman al-Sabit, who had died 400 years previously. He appeared as a beautiful man, who seemed to pass through the bodies of other walkers, as he was circumambulating the Kabbah:

*My mind was turned toward him and my eyes were upon him, lest he slip away ... when he had completed his seven turns and wanted to leave, I seized hold of him and greeted him. He returned the greeting and smiled at me. All this time I did not take my gaze off him, fearing that he would slip away from me. For I had no doubt that he was an embodied spirit, and I knew that eyesight kept him fixed.*²⁴

The idea of 'fixing' the spirit through the quality and direction of perception is an interesting one, implying that it is the gaze of the human eyesight which allows

the spirit being to take on a form, like a covering – although Ibn ‘Arabi emphasises that there is no disjunction between the form itself and the spiritual essence of the apparition “even if it is found in a thousand places, or in all places, and is diverse in shape”.²⁵ Once the gaze is released and the spirit moves, it may disappear in an instant.

The ‘imaginalisations’ which appear in our world are therefore anomalous, ambiguous and paradoxical. As Ibn ‘Arabi points out, they are “neither entirely existent or non-existent, neither entirely known or unknowable, neither entirely affirmed or denied.”²⁶ Yet they inhabit a very real dimension, and paradoxically reveal themselves as concrete beings. “It is to something like this reality that each human being goes in their sleep and after their death” says Ibn ‘Arabi, and he notes that the observer “sees [moral and spiritual] qualities and characteristics as self-subsistent forms that speak to him and with which he converses, as being [human] bodies without any doubt.”²⁷ One must emphasise again that this does not mean that such forms are merely subjective hallucinations. The realm they inhabit was designated by the Islamic scholar Henry Corbin as the *mundus imaginalis*, “a precise order of reality, corresponding to a precise mode of perception ... a perfectly *real* world, more evident and more coherent than the ‘real’ empirical world perceived by the senses”.²⁸ We have seen that this world’s cognitive faculty is the active imagination, which, Corbin warns, must not be confused with “the imagination that modern man identifies with ‘fantasy’, and that, according to him, produces only the ‘imaginary’”.²⁹

What are the implications then for researching this imaginal territory today? Firstly, one must understand the limits of rational discourse and analysis. We are unfamiliar with the fundamental neoplatonic premise that visibility of spiritual phenomena is entirely dependent on the *quality of perception* of the observer, from which we can conclude that not everyone will have opened their eye of revelation. This raises the problematic question of empirical evidence and its assessment, for since the advent of photography it is possible to obtain a permanent, apparently ‘objective’ record of spirit activity. I would suggest however that technological ‘proof’ of spirit beings (whether via photographs, film or EVP) is highly problematic because it makes visible or audible to everyone phenomena that may not be understood for what they are (that is, even when the possibility of fraud is eliminated). If the

truth of the image can only be discerned by the imaginal and intuitive faculties, then those viewing through the ‘eye of reason’ alone will insist on a rational explanation or fall prey to Kant’s ‘surreptitious concept’ whereby numinous revelations are subjected to the same ‘positive thought’ as tables or chairs.³⁰ Unless sense perception and reason are understood to be in service to a deeper mode of knowing, the truth of apparitions will remain speculative, opaque and distorted, their manifestation baffling or simply impossible and therefore ignored or explained away. Objective proof belongs in the realm of empiricism and is therefore an impossible goal for the assessment of invisible qualities from the realm of spirit.

To sum up, I would suggest that it is vitally important that research methodology acknowledges the interdependence of the researcher’s mode of perception with what he or she sees and how it is evaluated, and that a framework for paradigms of knowledge beyond the rational is established. This means psychical research becoming open to metaphysics, spiritual hermeneutics (to quote a term of Henry Corbin) and the power of symbolic narrative to convey a truth beyond the social context or scientific analysis. Ambiguity and paradox accompany manifestations of the ‘imaginal’ in this world, and the right approach may be not an ‘either or’ one but a ‘both and’ – sensory, rational and imaginal perspectives mutually informing each other as phenomena are subject to a multi-levelled investigation. Rational explanations do not cancel out or explain away the transformatory power of the miraculous vision, they simply co-exist as different kinds of discourse. I will give the last word to the neoplatonist Proclus, who explains that whenever a particular faculty of knowledge is used to judge something inappropriate to it, it will simply render itself powerless. This is why the subjection of spiritual reality to the hegemony of material science will always fail to do it justice, and why researchers need to question their own intellectual criteria as they approach the study of the uncanny and paranormal:

*Every knowledge applied to an object which has nothing to do with it destroys its own power: for if we speak of sensation as applying to the object of rational knowledge it will do away with itself, and the same is true of rational knowledge (episteme) if applied to the intelligible: so that if there could be a logos of the ineffable, it never stops turning itself upside down and fights against itself.*³¹

Notes

¹ For a neurological perspective on the problematic relationship between these two fundamentally different orientations to the world, see Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2009). McGilchrist reaches a remarkably similar conclusion to the neoplatonists, that the 'left brain' function of processing information derives from, and is reliant on, 'right brain' creativity and insight. He points to the dangers arising from the current dominance of the left brain and its drive for total autonomy.

² To cite a few examples, David Fontana, *Life beyond Death* (2009); Graham Hancock (*Supernatural*, 2006), Patrick Harpur (*Daimonic Reality*, 1995, 2003), Colin Wilson (*Poltergeist*, 2009; *Supernatural*, 2011).

³ Plato explains his categories of knowledge in the 'divided line' image (*Republic* VI, 509d-513d), and provides a powerful narrative for the initiatory journey through these different modes of knowing in his allegory of the cave (*Republic* VII, 514a-520a)

⁴ On the neoplatonic understanding of imagination, see Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.4, 13; also J. Dillon, 'Plotinus and the Transcendental Imagination' in *Religious Imagination* ed. J. Mackey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986), ch.2.

⁵ Ibn 'Arabi, *al-Futūhāt al-makkiya* I.755.7, W. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn 'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (New York: SUNY, 1994), p.83.

⁶ Another metaphor which suggests a parallel with left and right brain hemisphere polarities.

⁷ *al-Futūhāt*, II.375.32, Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, p. 75.

⁸ *al-Futūhāt*, III.451.2, Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn 'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (New York: SUNY, 1989) p.115.

⁹ Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, p.73.

¹⁰ *al-Futūhāt*, I.63, trans J. Morris, 'Spiritual Imagination and the Liminal World: Ibn 'Arabi on the Barzakh', POSTDATA, (Madrid, 1995), vol.15, no.2, pp.42-49.

¹¹ *al-Futūhāt*, I.305, Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, p.84.

¹² Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, p.95

¹³ *al-Futūhāt*, I.273. 35, Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, p.88.

¹⁴ T. Aquinas, *veritas est adaequatio intellectus et rei (the truth is the adequation of the intellect and the thing; Summa theologiae I.q.21)*.

¹⁵ Two excellent sources on theurgy are G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (Pennsylvania State Press, 1995); A. Uzdavynys,

Philosophy and Theurgy in Late Antiquity (San Rafael: Sophia Perennis, 2010).

¹⁶ See J. Milne, 'Providence, Time and Destiny' (unpublished lecture) at <http://www.astrodivination.com/provid.pdf>, p.5.

¹⁷ In neoplatonic pneumatology, the imagination is associated with the subtle or astral body, which is why it is via the imagination that this non-material body may be perceived. See L. George, 'Iamblichus on the Esoteric Perception of Nature' in *Esotericism, Religion and Nature* (Michigan: Association for the Study of Esotericism, 2010); G. Shaw, 'The Role of Aesthesis in Theurgy' (unpublished paper, 2010).

¹⁸ Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, p.89.

¹⁹ M. Ficino, *Opera omnia* p.515. See R. Klimo, *Channelling: Investigations on receiving information from paranormal sources* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1998), pp.30-33 on the difficulty in distinguishing between a 'supraconscious' element of the psyche and a separate personality in channelled communication.

²⁰ Quoted in H. Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) p.219.

²¹ See Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, p.89.

²² The 'psychic' explanation given for apport materialisation is that spirit energy can make changes in the vibration of matter so it can pass through other matter, and then re-solidify. See L. Barnes Jeffs, 'The Production of Apports', *A Treatise on Physical Mediumship* at www.psychicsoul.org

²³ One is reminded here of the visit of Plotinus to a séance at the Iseum. Guardian spirits or *daimones* were being invoked by an Egyptian priest, but when it was Plotinus' turn, his tutelary spirit was seen to be a god of the highest order (Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*, 10).

²⁴ *al-Futūhāt*, IV.12.1, Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, p. 94.

²⁵ *al-Futūhāt*, I.133, Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, p. 94.

²⁶ *al-Futūhāt*, I.63, Morris, p.4.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Corbin, *Mundus imaginalis, or the imaginal and the imaginary in Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam* trans L. Fox (Pennsylvania: Swedenborg Foundation, 1999).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ For a discussion of Kant's epistemological stance with relation to the paranormal, see G. Cornelius, 'Field of Omens: A study of inductive divination' (unpublished thesis, University of Kent, 2009), chapter one, 'Kant, Spirit and Divination'.

³¹ Proclus, *Platonic Theology* 2.10, trans L. Siorvanes, *Proclus: Neoplatonic Philosophy and Science* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996).

The Ka in Ancient Egypt

Callum E. Cooper

Whether or not people ‘believe’ in ghosts or claim to have experienced them, virtually everyone you ask in nearly all societies is aware of the term ‘ghost’ and will often define this as a spirit of the dead. When we dig deep into human societies and the documentation of ghosts and apparitions they can be traced back to many ancient societies, especially that of ancient Egypt. This brings together a perfect combination of psychology and anthropology to approach issues regarding paranormal experiences, as anthropologist Dr. Hans Winkler who studied possession in ancient Egypt viewed it as ‘psychological anthropology’ (Hopkins, 2009). However, in his own studies, Winkler personally tried to avoid psychology as an approach to anomalous experiences. Yet now we often find psychology, sociology and anthropology united in these explorations of exceptional human experiences.

The ancient Egyptians are well known for their beliefs in the afterlife and the extreme care, dedication and respect they showed in funerary proceedings. Death could be argued to be the most important part of their lives as total extinction of the mind or soul was not something to contemplate, death had to be avoided at all costs (Zandee, 1960). Therefore, magical incantations were placed in and around the burial chamber and also placed on the sarcophagus of the upper class and those who could afford such burials, in the hope that the soul would continue to live beyond death. The book of the dead (arguably the oldest religious text) would outline the path to the afterlife, magical spells to vanquish evils and dangers along this path to hopefully succeed in being confirmed as having lead a life true of voice (Taylor, 2010a,b). This would then allow the dead to live an eternity of happiness alongside Osiris (God of the dead).

With such an interesting, complex and creative view of the afterlife, it’s important to consider aside from beliefs, what anomalous events, if any, did the

ancient Egyptians experience and report suggestive of survival? One fairly well documented and discussed anomalous event which parapsychology could find suggestive of survival in ancient Egyptian society is apparitions of the dead, though certain societies may not associate apparitions with that of the deceased person they represent.

It is noted in ancient Egyptian religion that the human body is made up of several parts, physical and spiritual. These parts include the ba (the spirit of man, or soul), which leaves the body to travel into the afterlife, the khu (a spiritual body which lives within each man), and the ka (a double). The ka was said to be a perfect representation of a living man and was effectively his own ghost but independent of mind and perception (Petrie, 1906). It would haunt the tomb in which the physical body rested in a place often known as ‘house of the ka’ and it was well known for the living to bring food offerings to the ka. Without food offerings taken to the ka, which would essentially be guarding or haunting the physical body, it was believed that the ka would eat whatever filth was found in and around the tomb, which many found to be disrespectful of the dead and the ka (Wright, 1987). In many archaeological digs masses of pots are often found around burial sites, which highlights the importance of these food offerings to the dead and specifically the ka within society. As Budge (1971) points out a ‘priest of the ka’ was assigned to perform religious rights for the tomb, physical body and ensure that the ka was not neglected with offerings of incense taken at certain intervals of the year to please ‘the double’.

There are certain documentations of ancient Egyptians encountering the ka, or what we would know as a ghost or apparition. Renouf (1880) discusses a letter from one of the papyri of the Museum of Leyden (at the time of 1879), which outlined the case of a man complaining about his wife persistently haunting him. The man declared

that the evil his wife's ka was requiting 'is not to be endured'. His wife had died and been laid to rest in a tomb three years prior to the apparitional experiences. To rid him of his wife's ka visiting him, he wrote his complaints about the situation on papyrus and travelled to his wife's tomb to read it out loud. He then tied the papyrus to a statue of his wife believing that as the ka and the khu lived in the tomb they would read his complaint about his deceased wife's visitations. Unfortunately, as Budge (1971) has also stated, it is unclear if the papyrus that the husband produced had any effect on the situation. Nevertheless, it is an early account suggestive of apparitions of the dead interacting with relatives.

Horne (1917) discusses an ancient ghost story which involves a high priest of Amon named Khonsumhabi (Khonsu-em-heb) and three men who find themselves talking and interacting with the ghost of an ancient Egyptian after disturbing his tomb and place of the mummified body's rest. The men and especially Khonsumhabi engage in conversation with the apparition who relayed information about his former life. This event is translated from fragments of ancient texts. The information provided from Horne's work describes that the event took place while Khonsumhabi employed the three men to assist in finding a suitable site for his own tomb. The apparition apparently employed very good language, the experience was highly emotional and brought Khonsumhabi to tears and placed him into a depressive state as the texts suggest. Though the language of the apparition was clear, the messages studied by Horne are apparently obscure, stating in reference to the ghost that "his remarks are brusquely broken off in the middle of phrases" (pp.152). The apparition complained of some accident taking place in his tomb and wished to have his family or someone he loved dwell with him where his physical body was laid to rest. The ka in this case is referred to in the ancient texts as 'Nuitbusokhnu' during its conversations with the priest Khonsumhabi. Horne (1917) pointed out that the name of 'Nuitbusokhnu' which is used in this case, means "the dwelling does not contain it". So this term may not have been a name for the dead person the ka was representing but a possible general term used in ancient Egypt to signify ghost or apparition.

These are fascinating early fragments of apparitional experiences, which are several thousands of years old (assumed to be around the Fourteenth Dynasty), and therefore by no means are apparitions and ghosts a modern construction of society. Even

modern Egypt still holds strong beliefs about apparitional encounters. In Islamic theory the ka is also known as 'jinn', again this figure is often a double and not the true personality of the deceased person they represent, but it is released once the body dies and can sometimes be said to appear in animal form at night (Padwick, 1924). Jinn are also known to allegedly be responsible for possessions and will enter a living person through the mouth to take control of their body. In other circumstances, it is believed in modern Egypt that if a person loses their life violently, then a spirit (called an 'afrit') comes out of the blood and haunts the local area. Winkler (2009) outlines some cases of Egyptians experiencing an 'afrit' around archaeological dig sites where at one time people had been killed and buried. One such account of an Egyptian witnessing an 'afrit' at an archaeological site is as follows:

"Once he was passing through the ruins at midnight. He saw an 'afrit' standing on a high ruin. It resembled a white cloth, about knee-high. It grew steadily higher and higher, higher than the ruins which equalled the height of two men... when an 'afrit' grows too tall it bends completely over the man and squeezes him to death, at least if he is someone born under an unlucky star. As an 'afrit' grows it makes the sound totototo. It was not possible to recognize a face or some other identifying mark; only something tall and white was visible and this sound was audible. So Sanusi (the percipient) uttered the basmala, "In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate," and kept walking. Then the 'afrit' diminished and disappeared into the earth."

It appears that experiences of the ka or an 'afrit' are fairly common like other apparitional experiences linked to a particular site, which we would describe as a 'haunting'. The topic of apparitions in ancient societies and their occurrence through to modern times has not been given a great deal of attention and is worthy of further research as Padwick (1924) suggested. Anthropology and psychology are perfect partners in understanding the ontology of such experiences, with accounts that can be collected and categorised from ancient Egypt to other societies over time. And modern psychology and parapsychology can shed light on possible explanations for the individual experiences, which may have developed into a belief of society. For example, the ancient Egyptians were known to have taken opium and Blue Egyptian water lily, both well-known psychedelics that could have promoted anomalous experiences, with opium often restricted to magicians, warriors

and priests (Schiff, 2002). Therefore, as we discussed with the ka and the designated priest to care for the ka it is possible that psychedelics may have created or promoted an apparitional experience for the priests involved. This may even be the case with Khonsumhaba while searching for his own tomb. However, in these early stages we can only speculate as to the causes of these anomalous experiences if we attempt to apply paranthropology and parapsychology to Egyptology.

In conclusion apparitional experiences seem to be a natural part of human experiences, which might lead to constructed beliefs and the integration of theories about apparitions into religions. In the case of the ka of ancient Egypt it certainly demonstrates that anomalous experiences surpass media influences being their cause for occurrence and have passed down the centuries relatively unchanged. They seem to consistently demonstrate a relation between a dead person and the site of the death or the physical body's resting place and in many of the Egyptian experiences seem to be spontaneous. Therefore the traditional method of collecting these anecdotes for analysis, categorisation and surveying the variety of phenomena is highly important in this case (Van de Castle, 1976). Even by briefly exploring the ka of ancient Egypt and comparing this to modern apparitional experiences, we can see that this form of experience may have more natural roots to human life than many would like to argue. Time does not appear to have greatly altered anomalous human experiences like many human traits which have remained more or less the same. Further investigation could lead to the construction of a hypothesis to account for apparitional experiences by using psychology and anthropology to explore the earliest documentation of such events. This hypothesis might not be constructed any time soon, but investigating the ancient roots of anomalous experiences may be a suitable start. This would allow us to understanding the experiences, societies' beliefs and compare similarities and categories of anomalous experiences across societies throughout documented history against modern day occurrences.

References

- Budge, E.A.W. (1971). *Egyptian Magic* (Republication edition). New York: Dover.
- Hopkins, N. S. (2009). Introduction. In H.A. Winkler (ed.) *Ghost Riders of Upper Egypt: A Study of Spirit Possession* (pp. 1-11). New York: The American University of Cairo Press. (Translated by Nicholas S. Hopkins).
- Horne, C.F. (1917). *Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East: Egypt* (vol.2). London: Parke.
- Padwick, C.E. (1924). Notes on the jinn and the ghou in the peasant mind of lower Egypt. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 3, 421-446.
- Petrie, W.M.F. (1906). *The Religion of Ancient Egypt*. London: Archibald Constable & Co.
- Renouf, P.L.P. (1880). *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion, as Illustrated by the Religion of Ancient Egypt*. London: Williams and Norgate.
- Schiff, P.L. (2002). Opium and its alkaloids. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 66, 186-194.
- Taylor, J.H. (2010a). *Spells for Eternity: The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*. London: The British Museum Press.
- Taylor, J.H. (2010b). *Journey Through the Afterlife: Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Van de Castle, R.L. (1976). Some possible anthropological contributions to the study of parapsychology. In G.R. Schmeidler (ed.) *Parapsychology: Its Relation to Physics, Biology, Psychology and Psychiatry* (pp. 151-161). Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press.
- Winkler, H.A. (2009). *Ghost Riders of Upper Egypt: A Study of Spirit Possession*. New York: The American University of Cairo Press. (Translated by Nicholas S. Hopkins).
- Wright, G.R.H. (1987). African demons and dead Egyptians. *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa*, 22(1), 77-82.
- Zandee, J. (1960). *Death as an Enemy: According to Ancient Egyptian Conceptions*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Hopkins, N. S. (2009). Introduction. In H.A. Winkler (ed.) *Ghost Riders of Upper Egypt: A Study of Spirit Possession* (pp. 1-11). New York: The American University of Cairo Press. (Translated by Nicholas S. Hopkins).

Diary of a PK Experiment



I'm a graduate student trying to come to terms with living with anomalous experiences. That hasn't been easy for me to do as a potential member of the mainstream scientific community. I still feel a sense of shame and embarrassment because I can't just be a typical member of my cohort. I can understand if some readers of Paranthropology might be offended by my attitude. It isn't logical or something I'm proud of. It's just something I live with.

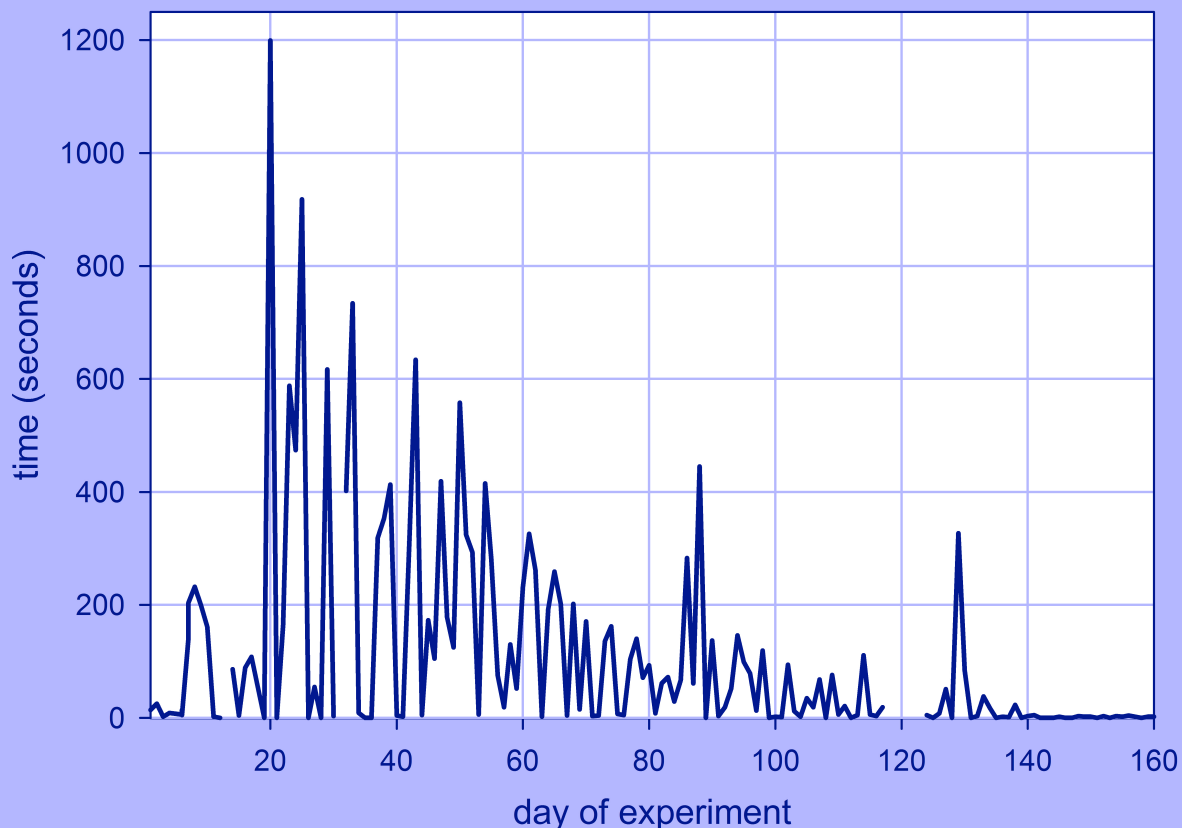
My anomalous experiences include such things as mediumship and seeing auras. I've had both a childhood and an adult NDE. However, it was occurrences of RSPK that caused me to start paying greater attention to my experiences. A stressful situation at home combined with the additional stress of graduate school resulted in episodes of RSPK

both at home as well as in my lab at the university where I was attempting to complete my doctorate.

Rather than getting into the experiences themselves, I would like to discuss what has probably been the best coping mechanism I've come up with so far to normalize what I'm going through. I've been turning my experiences into data. Since January 2011, I've been conducting a daily experiment using a simple pinwheel and a webcam.

The pinwheel is a piece of paper folded into a pyramid shape and balanced on the point of a needle that has the dull end pushed into an eraser which serves as the base. Each run consists of an attempt to get the wheel to spin without using any conventional means to initiate movement. The experimental runs are recorded on video, and the timings logged on a spreadsheet. An additional step of filling out a

Time Required to Initiate Complete Rotation of Pinwheel



PANAS mood scale before each run was added to the experiment at the suggestion of a researcher who has been kind enough to encourage my efforts. It's a simple experiment that takes maybe 30 minutes of my time each day.

For the first few weeks I looked at my experiment as more of a distraction from my experiences rather than as something useful or possibly "scientific". It gave me a sense of feeling more in control of my situation. It was almost as if I were putting the PK into a specimen jar and only taking it out now and then for analysis. Truthfully, I didn't expect to learn anything interesting. Deep down I was hoping that by studying the PK I would inhibit the phenomenon, perhaps even getting it to decline completely. I thought I could perhaps cure myself of the PK by ruthlessly examining it.

Given how simple and repetitive the experimental design was, I thought the biggest drawback would be boredom. Actually, I think it was boredom I was counting on to "fix" the PK. I knew that it wasn't uncommon in psi experiments to show a decline in results as the participant becomes progressively less enthusiastic. It didn't occur to me that I had started off the experiment with very little enthusiasm to begin with so I had nowhere left to go in terms of a negative attitude. I was pretty much just going through the motions. But by day 3 of the experiment, I was already starting to report interesting observations such as "collateral PK".

In the early runs of my experiment, I noticed that attempts to move the wheel were often accompanied by unusual noises such as bangs from the walls and ceiling. It also wasn't uncommon for other noises not heard while recording the experiment to turn up during playback of the videos. Occasionally lights in the room went out and small objects not in view of the webcam would move. "Collateral PK" was the term I came up with to describe such occurrences. I didn't realize it at first, but now I see that might have been what messed up my whole plan to turn PK into a boring experience destined to diminish into obscurity. My experiment was more interesting than I had anticipated.

It has since been pointed out to me that my initial mistake was in thinking I would get a decline in results when I was giving myself immediate feedback each time the wheel moved. Instead of setting myself up for a decrease in ability, I inadvertently set up a situation in which I could learn to improve.

By day 6 I was trying to talk myself out of continuing the experiment. It was more than just a

matter of giving up; I felt a strong desire to delete every video and every piece of data. I tried to convince myself it was all a waste of time. Based on my deepest desire to quash the PK, it probably was a waste of time. I wasn't suppressing the PK in the least. As it turned out, I was getting better at it. But the experiment did make me feel more in control of my situation, and that - along with some encouragement from a few trusted individuals - was enough to keep me going. Even now, I still have days when deleting all of the data seems somehow necessary to preserve my sense of security. I deal with the issue by sending backup copies of the data to a trusted researcher whenever I feel the need to.

On day 16, I got curious and calculated the correlations between the words used in the PANAS mood scores and how quickly I was able to move the pinwheel. Higher values placed on the words attentive, delighted, inspired, fearless, calm, bold, joyful, excited, proud, lively, confident and energetic correlated to longer times in initiating movement of the wheel. Higher values for downhearted, distressed, loathing, dissatisfied with self, irritable, disgusted with self, alone, upset, and guilty correlated to shorter durations needed to initiate a complete rotation of the wheel. I was taken aback by those results. Early indications seemed to suggest that being in a bad mood facilitated PK.

On day 65, I plotted my first graph of the timings data. The graph showed an initial period of quick start times for getting the wheel to spin, almost as if there had been an element of beginner's luck for the first few weeks. This was followed by a rather abrupt increase in the amount of time needed to spin the wheel and a subsequent gradual improvement in my ability to move the wheel quickly. Instead of the decline in ability I had been secretly hoping for when I started this experiment, I was starting to see a gradual increase in ability demonstrated in the results. I was upset by those findings. That was when it finally hit home how much I wanted the PK to wither away under scrutiny. I came close to quitting the experiment on day 65.

On day 79, I noticed something else was changing as my ability to move the wheel improved. At the beginning of the experiment, it was common to hear many odd noises while I was attempting to get the wheel moving. The noises would often get louder if I had been particularly frustrated by an inability to move the wheel on cue. As I became more proficient at getting the wheel to move, there were subsequently fewer noises occurring in my

surroundings. It was as if I had learned to focus the energy on the wheel better rather than just sending out energy in all directions and causing collateral PK to occur.

By day 87 it had occurred to me that the change in collateral PK noise levels might be an indication that I was learning control. That scared the hell out of me at the time, and still does. While I might not be at the mercy of unknown forces anymore, it occurred to me that perhaps I was some kind of monster. Maybe that isn't a rational reaction, but sometimes it isn't possible to stop from feeling a certain way. I felt like a monster. I did have the flu at the time, which didn't help me feel any better about myself. It was this departure from the trend that occurred when I was sick that helped me figure things out. When I couldn't move the wheel easily during my illness, the noisy collateral PK returned. As I got better and the runs got back on trend, the noise levels decreased again.

Over the next few weeks, the time it took me to initiate complete rotations of the wheel continued to decrease. Interestingly enough, the one departure from that trend, which can be seen on days 85-90, occurred when I was sick at home with the flu. Once I recovered, things picked up where they had left off. I also took a break from the experiment for a week while travelling. Interestingly enough, when I returned home and resumed the experiment, I repeated on a smaller scale what had occurred at the start of my experiment. I had a few days of very quick starts, followed by a sudden difficulty in initiating movement of the wheel and then a subsequent improvement in ability until I reached the levels seen prior to my trip.

On day 97, after my usual run of the experiment, I put a jar over top of the wheel before attempting to move it. This was something I had been trying out after many of my better experimental runs. But up until this point, nothing of interest had been caught on video. This time was different, I was not only able to get the wheel to move just a little bit but I also caught that movement on video. Since then, the frequency of getting "canned PK" on video has improved to the point where it has become a reliable occurrence. In fact, on day 146 of my experiment, I added in a second run with the pinwheel (in this case, an aluminum foil wheel to control for electrostatic effects) inside a sealed jar.

This new phase of my experiment is bringing up many of the same emotional issues I've been dealing with all along. I go through phases of denial, thinking

that I must be experiencing some kind of delusional behavior that makes me think the wheel is moving for reasons not easily explained by things such as electrostatic forces and convection currents. The better the controls I'm able to put on the experiment, the more upset I become in terms of not having an "out" or conventional explanation that I can be comfortable with. I still have days when I want to just make the data go away so life can go back to normal, even though I wasn't experiencing a "normal" life before I started the experiment.

The good news is that I am having more days when I'm OK with my experiences now. That was the whole point of starting this experiment. Not just to understand the PK, but to understand my reactions to it. In the beginning, my results were strongly affected by my mood and environment as if I was at the mercy of outside forces and had very little control over what occurred. I did feel out of control and like the victim of circumstances back then. Things were just happening to me. That situation appears to be changing. I'm feeling more in control these days.

As a final note, I want to emphasize the role played by a large number of parapsychological researchers in encouraging these efforts to come to terms with my experiences through this kind of experimentation. I would also like to acknowledge the influence of Alex Tanous and Arthur Ellison, both of whose work in the field of parapsychology has particularly inspired me. I would especially like to thank Jim Carpenter who has made some very helpful suggestions, such as using the PANAS mood score, and who has kindly looked after my data for me whenever I've felt compelled to make it all go away.

Psychedelics, Spirits and the Sacred Feminine: Communion as Cultural Critique

Cameron Adams

Any perusal of trip reports found online (for example on erowid.org), as well as in ethnographic reports of shamanism, shows that communication with entities plays a key part in these experiences. Though the entities may take a variety of forms, the psychedelic itself is commonly personified as female; a manifestation of the Jungian Sacred Feminine. Though ethnographic materials do confirm a cross-cultural association of psychedelics as female, these do not support an archetypal interpretation of the feminine. Instead, I assert that these tools draw out not only the individual's shadow but also the cultural shadow of the society and thus acts as an effective cultural critique.

In my own research on cosmopolitan psychedelic culture in general and on psychedelic healing in particular, the use of these substances invokes a sense of nurturing, love, and an approach to balance associated with femininity. For example, psychotherapeutic effects include alleviating emotional imbalances, doing personality work, dealing with end of life fear, inner exploration, working with interpersonal relations and spiritual development. These experiences lead to a heightened sense of well being through a sense of unconditional love and acceptance where one's experience can be assessed as it is without judgment. This is commonly associated with a connection with earth and cosmos, a focus on nature and an acknowledgement of the beauty of all things.

To my research participants, these are seen to be feminine qualities. This is further reinforced by the use of the personal pronoun 'she' when referring to psychedelic substances, in particular plant based psychedelics such as ayahuasca and *Salvia divinorum*, with fungi and laboratory chemicals being less feminised. Yet, in ethnographic contexts, where the psychedelic substance is also considered to be feminine the typical motifs include, but are not limited to becoming the ancestors who set up reality and culture as it now is, supernatural warfare (including healing related to witchcraft), divining criminal and/or antisocial acts, entering the spirit world to negotiate with spirits on behalf of the living

and the shamanic journey of death and rebirth (Dobkin de Rios 1993; Eliade 1964). The contrast between these two experiences of a feminine spirit begs us to evaluate what it means to be feminine, and why these divergent motifs are applied to ostensibly the same entity or phenomenon.

It is Sherry Ortner's (1974) assertion that in all societies women are subjugated. It is further argued that this is due to a universal attribution of male endeavour to 'culture' and of female existence to 'nature'. The argument is that due to the biological facts of reproduction, women are limited in their action, while men, freed of these biological constraints, can apply themselves to the elaboration of the arts, technology and religion; in short cultural activities.

Though, on the surface, this argument seems to imply a certain universality to masculine and feminine roles, the truth is in no way so simple. Goody and Buckley (Goody 1969; Goody and Buckley 1973), in reviewing sexual division of labour cross-culturally, find that, with the exception of the biological fact of reproductive roles, there is no hard and fast universal as to what men or women do. Likewise, Moore (1994) notes that the cultural fluidity of women's roles, "make it impossible to assert a communality based on shared membership in a universal category 'woman'" (9), leading Loftsdóttir (2002) to remark that "the sign 'woman' [is] characterised by diversity rather than singularity" (306). The same, as an obvious corollary, can be said of 'man' (Gutmann 1997). In fact, in the review of the anthropology of masculinity, Gutmann makes clear the fact that the only universal aspect of femininity and masculinity is that they create each other; they are 'boxes' constituted by biological facts of male and female into which diverse collections of cultural material can be flung.

Yet, Gilmore (1990), in an ironic echo of Ortner, argues that men in many cultures believe that women simply are born women while men need to create and re-create themselves in the model of an ideal masculine type. This is seen to be focused on the accumulation of power at each others' expense and

amounts to a narrow honing of male identity. In other words, the masculine role becomes rather well defined while the feminine is allowed to remain relatively vague.

If the masculine is developed within narrow tolerance while masculine and feminine are co-created through each other, we are left with a definition of the feminine as encompassing the unpredictable, unconstrained, possibly undervalued, potentially dangerous, but more than anything, the unmasculine. Of course, as we have seen, this can encompass a wide variety of specifics as exemplified by the Hindu feminine as idealised in Kali who “conveys death, destruction, and the consuming aspects of reality. As such, she is also a ‘forbidden thing’” (Kinsley 1997). The idea of the unpredictable and unmasculine feminine is brilliantly expressed by Jack Nicholson’s character, Melvin Udall, in the film, *As Good as it Gets*, when he replies to a fan’s question about how he writes women so well with “I think of a man, and I take away reason and accountability”; reason and accountability being definitive of masculinity in this case.

The rise of masculinist focused definitions of culture appear to begin with the transition from foraging to horticultural societies. Band level organisation is characterised by (relative) social equality and generalised resource sharing. Men hunt while women forage, yet all is shared widely. In this context, division of labour is an integrative force. However, as population size increases beyond the ability to maintain dense face to face networks, more land becomes managed to provide for vegetable matter, which consequently reduces the availability of game (Fittkau and Klinge 1973). Vegetable forage and horticulture (i.e. women’s economy) remain plentiful and predictable and can be shared easily, in the rare occasion that plant food must be shared. Yet, hunting becomes more unpredictable making generalised sharing of meat impossible, thus heightening its economic and alliance value. Accounting of sharing becomes standard and thus network development and maintenance through economic means arises. Men’s work takes on a different social meaning and valuation than does women’s work. In this context, we find the rise of male power, and thus, masculine definitions of society.

One aspect of the masculinist bias of cultural ideals is found, of course, in religion. Geertz (1966) argues that religion promotes moods and motivations appropriate to the culture in question. These moods

and motivations act as cultural ideals, and that which is not encompassed by these is repressed. As Harris (1997) notes, these spiritual, and ultimately cultural, ideals are held to be within the realm of men; women are often excluded or not held to the same ideals or standards. The aspects of everyone’s personality, as we all exhibit the full range of human emotions, moods and motivations, that fall short of these ideals and are thus repressed can be referred to as the Jungian concept of the Shadow (Goldsmith 2010; Shulgin 2002). Likewise, the aspects that fall outside of these ideals, but are still available to women, as they are not held to the same standards of social discourse, comprise a form of socio-cultural shadow. However, as these aspects of the shadow must be dealt with on a regular basis, they form the shallows of the enshadowed profundity of human experience.

However, in acknowledging that the feminine is, perhaps, best defined as not masculine, let’s not become too enchanted by Ortner’s assertion that the feminine is in all cases a subjugated and powerless class. For example, it is common for women to be excluded from men’s ritual activities, not because they are unworthy, but in some cases, because it is feared that if the women have access to the ritual paraphernalia they will take social ascendancy (Gregor 1985; Hays 1988; Murphy and Murphy 1985). Further, postmenopausal women are able to achieve the status of ‘honorary men’ in many cultures (Cheater 1986; Sullivan 2001) that allows them the full spectrum of masculine and feminine action for that community. In fact, this trans-gendered boundary crossing seems to be the source of power as exemplified by the common practice of transvestism among the world’s shamanic practitioners (Eliade 1964).

The power of the feminine in western mythology is exemplified by the episode of Odysseus and the sirens. The allure of the feminine is represented in the irresistible song of the sirens and its power is only dwarfed by the inevitable death awaiting whomever hears the song and is irresistibly drawn to the singers. Yet, Odysseus displays the idealised classical cultural traits of craft and industry to mediate the danger of the titillating feminine. By plugging the crew’s ears and having himself tied to the mast, Odysseus is able to dip into the dangerous feminine without suffering the consequences. I interpret this as a mythological reification of the power of Geertz’s moods and motivations over the discounted emotions. Likewise, shamanic ‘techniques of ecstasy’ (Eliade 1964) -- in the case under discussion, psychedelics -- provide the

means to enter the shadowy shallows without drowning in the dark depths. It matters not what the specifics of 'masculine' or 'feminine' may be.

What I am really doing here is destabilising our idea of what the feminine is. When we hear or read people describing psychedelics as feminine spirits, we naturally envisage our own model of femininity. The concept of the feminine may be universal, but it is structural; a vessel in which we drop culturally specific ideas. The feminine is unpredictable, dangerous and erotic not because of any innate quality but because it is the manifestation of what we culturally downplay. It titillates and threatens destruction, but what it titillates and destroys is merely the masculine definition of idealised culture.

That said, what we experience as entities in the psychedelic experience, or by extension other altered states of consciousness, and to which we ascribe Jungian archetypes, may not be what they appear. As the similarities and differences between aliens, fairies, elves and angels attests (Brown 2008), it is clear that anomalous experience, particularly that of numinous quality, is cloaked in the cultural trappings of the observer. This is not to argue the ontological status of such entities, but rather to make clear that as we enter a state of loosened associations, which makes such experiences increasingly likely, we are nevertheless obligated to process these experiences or encounters through our cognitive and cultural filters.

In this context, the 'feminine' acts as a critique of society. As we dip into the cultural shadow that manifests as feminine, it shows us what we value as a society through the stark relief of presenting what we dismiss. The psychedelic feminine is the gateway into the shadow from which the arbitrary boundaries of culture can be perceived and normality and rationality redefined. This may very well be the healing, teaching and reworking that the entities we encounter in the psychedelic experience perform upon us.

References

As Good as it Gets [Motion Picture] 1997 United States: TriStar Pictures and Gracie Films.

Brown, R.A. 2008. Angels and elves, archetypes and aliens: Anomalous encounter experiences viewed through a depth psychological lens. Ph.D. Thesis, Pacifica Graduate Institute, Santa Barbara, CA.

Cheater, A.P. 1986. The role and position of women in pre-colonial Zimbabwe. *Zambezia* 13(2), 65-79.

Dobkin de Rios, M. 1993. Twenty-five years of hallucinogenic studies in cross-cultural perspective. *Anthropology of Consciousness* 4(1), 1-8.

Eliade, M. 1964. Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Fittkau, E.J. and H. Klinge. 1973. On biomass and trophic structure of the Central Amazon rain forest ecosystem. *Biotropica* 5, 1-14.

Geertz, C. 1966. Religion as a cultural system. In *Anthropological approaches to the study of religion* (ed.) M. Banton, 1-46. New York: Praeger.

Gilmore, D.D. 1990. Manhood in the making: Cultural concepts of masculinity. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Goldsmith, N.M. 2010. Psychedelic healing: The promise of entheogens for psychotherapy and spiritual development. Rochester, VT: Healing Arts Press.

Goody, J. 1969. Inheritance, property and marriage in Africa and Eurasia, *Sociology* 3, 55-76.

Goody, J. And J. Buckley. 1973. Inheritance and women's labour in Africa. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 4(2), 108-121.

Gregor, T. 1985. Anxious pleasure: The sexual lives of Amazonian peoples. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gutmann, M.C. 1997. Trafficking in men: The anthropology of masculinity. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26, 385-409.

Harris, M. 1997. Culture people nature: An introduction to general anthropology, seventh edition. New York: Longman.

Hays, T.E. 1988. 'Myths of matriarchy' and the sacred flute complex of the Papua New Guinea highlands. In *Myths of matriarchy reconsidered* (ed.) D. Gewertz, 98-120. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Kinsley, D. 1997. Tantric visions of the divine feminine: The ten mahavidyas. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Loftsdóttir, K. 2002. Never forgetting? Gender and racial-ethnic identity during fieldwork. *Social Anthropology* 10(3), 303–317.

Moore, H.L. 1994. A passion for difference. *Essays in anthropology and gender*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Murphy, Y. and R.F. Murphy. 1985. *Women of the forest*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ortner, S.B. 1974. Is female to male as nature is to culture? *In* *Woman, culture and society* (eds.) M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, 67–87. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Shulgin, A. 2002. Psychedelic therapy and the shadow. Presented at the Mind States Conference, Negril, Jamaica, 1–6 October 2002. Audio podcast available for free download at: <http://www.matrixmasters.net/blogs/?p=163>

Sullivan, L.P. 2001. Those men in the mounds: Gender, politics, and mortuary practices in late prehistoric eastern Tennessee. *In* *Archaeological studies of gender in the southeastern United States* (eds.) J.M. Eastman and C.B. Rodning, 101–126. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

C a m e r o n
Adams, Ph.D.,
is a medical,
cognitive and
ecological
anthropologist
currently
interested in
psychedelic
culture,
psychedelic
medicine and
ecological
consciousness.



He currently holds a temporary lectureship at the University of Kent while conducting web based research on virtual communities. He also co-organised Breaking Convention: A Multidisciplinary Conference on Psychedelic consciousness.

Paul Devereux Live at the Rhine: Naturalizing Psi as the Anthropology of Consciousness

Ryan Hurd

The weekend of May 20, 2011, writer and lecturer Paul Devereux gave a weekend workshop at the Rhine Institute in Durham, NC. This is a quick review of his presentation, which reflects Devereux's lifetime of work as well as his recent publications *Spirit Roads* and *Sacred Geography*. Devereux also is a contributing editor of the peer reviewed journal *Time and Mind: Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture*.

Paul Devereux has spent his life researching subjects on the edge of academia: the precipitous realm where consciousness, landscape, and culture meet. On May 20th, when Devereux took the podium in Durham, NC, he looked tired from his transcontinental flight from his home in England. He quickly became animated and excited as soon as he began his introductory lecture that neatly frames his life work. On Saturday, Devereux presented an all-day lecture that fleshed out the topics he outlined the night before. In this review, I'll blend the content from both days together as they present a cogent whole of Devereux's view and his experiences in the field as a consciousness researcher and a cognitive archaeologist.

What is psi?

In Devereux's view, psi is a natural phenomena that eludes our understanding mostly because we live in a culture afraid of messy mysteries. It's a refreshing view that requires an open epistemological framework but does not throw out skepticism. Indeed, much of Devereux's work has been about revealing the natural causes of phenomena that are all too quickly tossed into a supernatural bag. Devereux does not seem interested in proselytizing a specific belief, but rather in mapping how people throughout time have left evidence of their beliefs in

the landscape. Finally, he convincingly shows how modern humans have the same capabilities for accessing non-rational states of consciousness, especially when guided by natural areas that promote and incite these states of mind.

Archaeology of Consciousness

First and foremost, Devereux can be considered an archaeologist of consciousness. "Ever since human beings realized they had a nervous system," he grins, "they played around with it." From the shamanic rock art of the Paleolithic to the Henbane cults of the Neolithic, our ancestors have utilized the landscape—and the fruits of said landscape—to entrain the brain beyond the known. Often, myths from centuries past have been revealed to be startlingly accurate once the modern field of neuropharmacology is applied.

Devereux retells the myth of the Oracle at Delphi, a post held by an entranced woman (or perhaps a series of women) who gave counsel to many Greeks in the first century BCE. Ancient sources describe a gas that filled the room, a view that was completely discounted. But it was recently discovered that a fault line lay directly below the temple.¹ Researchers now suggest that the historically recorded "pneuma" that rose as a mist around the Oracle was in fact a mixture of natural gases venting from the fault containing methane, ethane and ethylene. These gases contain hydrocarbons, known to affect bizarre sensations and visions amongst users. Devereux sums it up, "She was a glue sniffer, basically."

Devereux's own contributions to archaeology include original research in Stonehenge and other Neolithic sites. He is an expert in acoustic archaeology: the study of how soundscapes were intentionally created in order to affect consciousness

¹ Spiller HA, Hale JR, De Boer JZ. (2002). The Delphic oracle: a multidisciplinary defense of the gaseous vent theory. *Journal of Toxicology*, 40(2), pp.189-96.
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12126193>

and enhance social rituals.² Devereux argues that the interior stones of Stonehenge were transported from the distant source of the Welsh Preseli hills specifically for their unique acoustic properties. Known as blue stones, the rocks ring like a bell when struck by another stone. Current fieldwork conducted with the Landscape-Perception Project includes acoustically mapping the blues stones at Stonehenge as well as forensic audiovisual re-examination of Preseli, Avebury “in an attempt to return to the primary sensory status of prehistoric man.”³

Devereux also suggests that the burial chamber of Newgrange in Ireland was built specifically with acoustics in mind, although he admits the hypothesis is still tentative. The central chamber creates a strong resonance—an echo effect—at 110 Hz.⁴ This sound is at the lower range of the human voice, but in the right setting it's more than just a sexy baritone. Recent neurological studies conducted by Ian Cook at UCLA indicate that at 110 Hz, the brain's activity dramatically shifts, with a sudden dampening in the left side of prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain involved with language. Right dominance remains active, and because it's associated with emotional processing, the effect creates a strongly emotional receptivity that could be flexed a number of ways by cultural entrainment.⁵ This is the ground floor of the neuroscience of religion, adding to a complex of religious and spiritual effects for which we are biologically primed.

Sacred Landscapes

This brings me to one of Devereux's central theses: the world has been seen, and in some cases, sculpted, as a sacred landscape for as long as we have been

human. Spirituality, the dreamworld, and the mysteries of death have long been mapped onto the topography of our homes and communities. Certain places are recognized as special nodes of power, due to their geological, geographical, visual or acoustic properties. These places are not only appreciated emotionally as “beautiful and scenic” (as we have tended to wax poetically from the Romantic periods onward), but as places where one can have uncanny experiences, such as meeting spirits, local gods, and having visions of other worlds. Springs invite contact with fairies. Caves: animal spirits. The landscape is the portal and the container simultaneously.

One fascinating avenue of research, so to speak, is Devereux's work with spirit lines and fairy roads in the United Kingdom. From a combination of folklore research, topographical fieldwork, and interviews with landowners, he's exposed an intact subcultural belief system in which fairies and spirits are believed to follow straight lines across geographical regions. Haunted places and homes are not seen as isolated pockets (as in EuroAmerican conceptions of paranormal activity where something horrible has occurred), but a part of this sacred landscape. Bad luck, illness and ruin are thought to occur in places where the fairy roads are blocked by human activity.

Relatedly, the tradition of corpse roads is alive and well in many regions of the UK countryside. Sightings of ghosts by local residents occur on these paths that once were the walking paths of many a funeral progression. Local mystics also use these paths as places to conduct divination regarding future deaths in the community, although you won't find them advertising their services on Facebook. Devereux argues that these beliefs connect

² Devereux, P. et al. Acoustical properties of ancient ceremonial sites. *Journal of scientific exploration*, 9:438, 1995.

³ The Landscape Perception Project: <http://www.landscape-perception.com/>

⁴ Devereux, P. (2001). *Stone age soundtracks: the acoustic archaeology of ancient sites*. London: Vega, p. 88.

⁵ Cook, Ian, Pjot, Sarah, Leuchter, Andrew. Ancient architectural acoustic resonance patterns and regional brain activity. *Time and mind*, 1(1), March 2008, p. 95-104.

landowners to some of the historic shamanic practices in the UK, remnants of times before persecution of the old ways.

Anthropology of Consciousness

But weird sightings didn't happen only to our ancestors and isolated farmers and sheep herders. Westerners who have strange experiences that strain credulity are Devereux's bread and butter, showcasing the everyday relevance for this work of expanding our view of what is natural. He recounted several extraordinary reports of anthropologists who found their paradigm of reality seriously tested in the course of routine fieldwork. I've always enjoyed these published accounts from anthropologists, who are all rigorously trained to be observers not only of people, but of their own participation, and how their participation changes them from the inside out.⁶ Given the extreme pressure to not publish these anomalies, the accounts have a greater gravitas than your average ghost haunting.⁷

Devereux cites anthropologist Kenneth Kensinger, one of the original anthropologists who participated in Amazonian ayahuasca rituals in the 1970s.⁸ Kensinger described much later how, in an early session with the Cashinahua people of Peru, participants reported they went on a soul flight, and told him afterwards that his grandfather had died. Far from modern communication, or anyone who could have known this information, Kensinger discovered two days later that his grandfather indeed had passed away.

"This is happening," Devereux says, even though we don't have a scientific framework for how telepathy, clairvoyance, or remote viewing works. It's an everyday reality that is inevitably shifting the narrative of Western culture, as slow as the shift may be. Devereux sees his work as a small part of this shift, and encourages us to share our own anomalous experiences so it continues to percolate up through the grass-roots too.

For his part, Devereux's current research includes co-directing the Black Swan Project. Affiliated with the Beckley Foundation⁹, the Project is currently testing the effects of mild magnetic stimulation and auditory entrainment on human brain activity. This work extends Michael Persinger's studies with the God Helmet¹⁰, a device that causes the perception of a "sensed presence" in human participants through magnetic stimulation of the brain.

Bringing this all home, the workshop concluded with an activity to showcase how we all can develop the ability to sense something we can't smell, see, touch, taste or hear. In this case: sensing distortions in our own bodies' magnetic fields. Devereux and his wife Charlene presented us with a challenge to divine the locations of two ordinary earth magnets hidden amongst 25 dixie cups. I'm not too humble to admit that I was the only participant to correctly guess the locations of both magnets hidden, leading me to wonder if I missed my calling as a professional dowser.

Is there a sixth sense? The question seems somehow dated for the 21st century, but it's still a worthwhile pursuit. Now we talk about neurognostic

⁶ Check out Young and Goulet's *Being changed by cross-cultural encounters* (1998: Broadview Press) for more accounts of this variety.

⁷ On the other hand, medical folklorist David Hufford reminds that the typical ghost haunting remains important when Westerners have experiences we are not culturally primed for (such as bereavement visits and sleep paralysis encounters) but which have a strongly consistent cross-cultural phenomenology. <http://www.metanexus.net/magazine/tabid/68/id/10610/Default.aspx>

⁸ Kensinger's classic work (1975) is *The Cashinahua of Eastern Peru*, with co-editors Phyllis Rabineau, Helen Tanner, Susan G. Ferguson, and Alice Dawson

⁹ <http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/>

¹⁰ Persinger, Michael A; Healey, Faye (2002). "Experimental facilitation of the sensed presence: possible intercalation between the hemispheres induced by complex magnetic fields". *The Journal of nervous and mental disease* **190** (8): 533–41.

capabilities, not ectoplasm. But Devereux's work reminds me that all information—from whatever source—must come through our bodies, and be interpreted by our brains. What is considered supernatural today is actually natural, just not understood.

Since the lecture, and reading up on Michael Persinger's work¹¹, I've also begun to seriously consider how much our ability to sense subtle geomagnetic effects—amongst other phenomena—may be washed out by the Western lifestyle in which we are pelted with a tremendous range of radiation from cell phones, wifi networks, and the copper-enriched electrical grid. That's something to consider even for the few of us who are ready to listen; the landscape holds the line open, but there's noise in the system.

On this point, Devereux interviewed an Irish storyteller and asked him pointblank why most of us don't see fairies today, to which the man replied, "We move too fast." That's the useful take-away from Devereux's whirlwind tour: we can slow down, and start paying attention to what's happening in our own communities. "Be here now," he said. He then spent nearly a half hour giving us practical tips for making our homes more aligned to the landscape.¹²

A week after the lecture, I sat by the creek that runs through my neighborhood on the west side of Philadelphia. I then noticed for the first time that a small spring or seep joins the creek at the shoals. I followed the wet slick of grass and mud up the slope until it disappeared near my neighbor's garden. That night, I dreamed that two fairies came into my room. When I tried to talk, one of the fairies crawled into my mouth. I delicately removed her, trying not to harm her thin clear wings, and she laughed and flew off. My take on the dream: it's time to start sharing our anomalous experiences even when—especially when—they get stuck in our mouths.



Ryan Hurd is a writer and consciousness researcher living in Philadelphia. He is the editor of DreamStudies.org and author of *Sleep Paralysis: A guide to hypnagogic visions and visitors of the night*.

¹¹ Michael Persinger's video "No more secrets" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9l6VPpDublg>

¹² If you're interested in grounding your home, I wrote an article summing up his tactics here: <http://dreamstudies.org/2011/05/26/3-ways-to-find-your-ground-and-make-your-home-more-sacred/>

Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

Abstracts from the Afterlife Research Centre 1 Day Workshop on

“Ethnographic Approaches to Mediumship”

Audio recordings of the presentations can be accessed at www.afterliferesearch.co.uk

Serena Bindi - Université de Nice Sophia Antipolis

“Rituals of possession and agency in North India. Investigating the success of traditional mediums in Garhwal Himalays”.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in a number of rural communities in the north Indian state of Uttarakhand, this paper discusses three forms of ritual possession performances, namely those involving village and house/lineage deities, as well as those taking place within practices of divination and involving personal gods and goddesses. In a scenario in which coexisting practices and systems of cure shape the lives of individuals and institutions, the paper investigates the reasons for the continuing success of traditional mediums. In order to do so, we will pay particular attention to the fact that these rituals allow for different degrees of reflection on events, problems and illnesses which trouble people's everyday lives. Moreover, mediums and their rituals entail a certain degree of agency, negotiations, debates and the expression of power relations between people and between people and deities. Finally, engaging with ongoing anthropological debates on the nature and social role of phenomena of possession, the paper argues that instances of possession are at once the product of specific socio-cultural relations and understanding, whilst, at the same time, participate in the production – as contexts of reflection, interpretation, action – of “social reality”.

Fiona Bowie - Department of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Bristol

“Afterlife Geographies and the Nature of Evidence”.

This paper will consider descriptions of the nature of afterlife existence with a particular emphasis on geography or topographies. I ask what might constitute the nature of evidence when considering the status and veridicality of such reports. Consistencies across time and cultures may be considered as evidence of the existence of such planes, if not scientific proof. One can, however, treat them ethnographically. The similarities and differences in descriptions of the afterlife geographies will be assessed in relation to claims concerning how these planes are created and sustained. Material will be drawn mainly from communications from discarnate entities communicated mediumistically, in particular the accounts given by Galen Stoller in *My Life after Life* and the discarnate interlocutors of medium Cynthia Sandys. I also touch on the therapeutic and social benefits related to acceptance of these messages and the challenges they can pose to the religious, consumerist and scientific status quo.

Jane Derges - Department of Anthropology, University College London

“Sensing the divine: illness and meaning making amongst members of an Anglican Spirituality Group”.

During research among members of an Anglican Spirituality Group in the UK, a surprising number identified themselves as ‘wounded healers’; individuals who had experienced significant physical, emotional or existential life crises before becoming healers. They described how a divine or cosmological presence was ‘sensed’ at these points of crisis, providing both comfort and a coherent explanation of causality that was often lacking elsewhere. These sensations were ‘felt’ not only in terms of a presence at the time of crisis, but also as explicit physical, tactile sensations in the body, or through visual phenomena. Although many had previously an internalized, existential sense of self through emphasis on a more intellectualized tradition of religious thought and meaning making, it was their personal experiences of emotional crisis or illness that had shifted this meaning making from an exclusively intellectual one, to a more embodied explanation of causality that posited divine intervention as a central and core experience. This ethnographically focused presentation will attempt to define the relationship between individual crisis, embodied agency and the development of a positive personal theology, through the connection of bodily sensations to religious experiences; namely a ‘sensing’ of the divine.

Hannah Gilbert - Exploring the Extraordinary Conference, York

“Spiritual Experience and Identity in Modern British Spirit Mediumship”.

Spirit mediumship was introduced into mainstream Western culture in the 1840s in North America. The catalyst for this introduction stemmed from an incident involving two teenage girls who would themselves go on to become practising mediums for many years. Spirit mediumship found its way to Great Britain in the early 1850s, and a number of British individuals would follow suit by providing their own mediumistic demonstrations to the public. While much of the literature suggests that mediumship simmered out following WWII, the 21st century nevertheless sees spirit mediumship as having a well recognised position within contemporary Western culture. A significant numbers of Westerners seek the services of spirit mediums, as well as consuming demonstrations or representations of spirit mediums through a variety of media. The personal and experiential side of mediumship has often been neglected by academic

Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

researchers. This has resulted in a lack of insight into and engagement with those who are actual practitioners of spirit mediumship. This paper will reflect on interviews conducted with spirit mediums for my doctoral research project, and will argue that their biographies contain a wealth of insight into a complex personal spirituality and public practise. It will seek to demonstrate that personal experience and identity are significant influences on both an individual's understanding of their mediumistic abilities, and how they go on to perform it to those unable to experience spiritual contact.

Jack Hunter - Department of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Bristol

“Mediumship, Trance and the Afterlife”

In most mediumship traditions altered states of consciousness (ASCs), commonly referred to as “trance”, play a central role. It is through ASCs that mediums claim communication with the invisible world of spirits and deities, and it is from these communications that notions of the nature of the spirit world are drawn. It is important, therefore, as anthropologists with a particular interest in afterlife beliefs that we understand the processes by which information about the afterlife is accessed. This short presentation will give a brief overview of the current state of our understanding of trance and its relation to afterlife beliefs, and will conclude by assessing the significance of this knowledge for our ethnographic approach to the study of mediumship.

Terence Palmer - School of Theology & Religious Studies, University of Bangor

“Spirit Possession and Telepathic Hypnosis”.

Spirit possession is a topic of supreme interest to anthropologists who study the phenomenology of spirit possession in shamanic practices in traditional religions around the world. The theories pertaining to spirit possession are generally centred in cultural belief systems and social consensus within the ethnic group or tribe. In modern Western societies the predominant theory is that spirit possession is an autogenic manifestation of a disturbed mind and treated accordingly. This theory is often transposed into the ethnographic cultural and societal context when the spirit possession is seen to be uninvited and destructive. However, there is scientific research that provides a conceptual framework that can accommodate spirit possession in all cultures and societies where the ontological status of possession entities is open to re-evaluation. This paper is an introduction to the experimental method and the discoveries of 19th century researcher F.W.H. Myers whose research revealed that telepathic hypnosis is a scientifically validated reality. This paper proposes that there is an explanation for spirit possession according to this concept. Examples of some of Myers experiments are presented.

Emily Pierini - Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Bristol

“Master Sun, Master Moon: complementary forms of mediumship among the Jaguares of the Vale do Amanhecer”.

This paper explores two forms of mediumship practised in the Brazilian religion of the Vale do Amanhecer (Valley of the Dawn): the conscious one of the medium of indoctrination and the semi-conscious one of the medium of incorporation who manifests spiritual beings. They work in pair in religious rituals aimed at the release of discarnate spirits from the physical plane and at the healing of patients, providing them with the awareness of spirit evolution through communications with spiritual beings embodied by trance mediums. Drawing on ethnographic material from my fieldwork I will present the Vale do Amanhecer's discourse, namely the ‘mediumistic science’, addressing conceptualizations of mediumship, possession, illness and healing. Approaches to spirit possession and mediumship shifted from those regarding these phenomena as pathologies to those considering their therapeutic aspects. This repositioning becomes possible when focusing on mediums' experiences. I will discuss how the process of mediumship development in particular, may have therapeutic effects in some cases of mental disorders, alcohol and drug addictions. The process of learning how to deal with mediumship is indeed defining a medium's lived experience and perception of the Self, as well as her mediumistic performance. A focus on embodiment, sensory and extrasensory experiences is essential since they play a crucial role in this process.

Carine Plancke - Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Sociale, Collège de France, Paris

“Restoring the relation to the spirit world: Violence and desire in Punu trance-dance performances”.

Although dancing often conditions or facilitates the occurrence of possession trances, it is generally addressed by scholars on mediumship in a rather limited way. In this presentation, concerning water spirit possession among the rural Punu of Congo-Brazzaville, the interdependence of the two phenomena will be explored as it conditions the restoration of the relation to the spirit world by way of a deep affective involvement of the possessed and the other performers. Possession trance is described by the Punu as an experience of being beaten by the spirit. During water spirit performances possessed people move out off the dance rhythm and perform uncontrolled, often repetitive movements without observable stylization. The words spoken by the possessed however are very stereotyped and typically express the anger and dissatisfaction of the spirit because of the disrespect of his or her wishes. In opposition to the violent character of the trance experience, the dancing in its continuous circular and

rhythmically marked progression connects the participants while taking them in an energetic wave. The songs that accompany the dancing glorify the fertility-bringing water spirit world in an associative chain of images and the ending formulas literally voice the joy and the desire for the presence of the spirits. The continuous, flowing motion of the singing and dancing as it is tied to the desire for this aquatic world and rhythmically resounds with it calls for the arrival of the spirits. Their intervention then leads to more intensified dancing in order to integrate the chaotic out-of-rhythm movements of the persons in trance. It is this necessary relation between dance and trance in its affective attuning that conditions the success of a spirit celebration. Hence, in the Punu case, mediumship and its capacity to join spirits and humans cannot be accounted for outside of its relation to the dance community that desires the water spirit world.

Bettina E. Schmidt - School of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

“The Discourse of being ‘possessed’ in Brazil: speaking about mediumship, trance and possession in Afro-Brazilian religions”.

The Brazilian discourse about ‘possession’ is centred on the nature of the spiritual or divine entity. While spiritual entities are regarded as individual and firmly bounded entities, divine beings such as the Orixás (African deities) are without a firm boundary. It is therefore impossible to ‘become possessed’ by them. Consequently, the extra-sensual experience connected to Orixás requires a specific terminology to acknowledge the complex relationship between human body and divine entity and the human consciousness. In my paper I will present data from my research among devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions in São Paulo (in 2010) that focussed on the understanding of the ways how people refer to the experience of ‘being possessed’ or ‘being a medium’.

Gregory Shushan - Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion, University of Oxford

“Shamanism, Near-Death Experience, and Afterlife Conceptions in Indigenous Societies: A Theoretically Eclectic Ethnohistorical Approach”.

My current research examines the relationship between afterlife conceptions and conceptually-related anomalous experiences in small-scale societies worldwide. The purpose is to determine the extent to which the conceptions are consistent (a) cross-culturally; (b) with culturally-embedded shamanic ‘other world’ experiences; and (c) with the spontaneous, evidently universal near-death experience (NDE). While this paper will emphasise methodological issues, it will also review the nature and progress of the research so far, and place it in the context of my earlier study (Conceptions of the Afterlife in Early Civilizations: Universalism, Constructivism, and Near-

Death Experience, Continuum 2009) which compared afterlife conceptions in selected early civilizations during periods of little or no cultural contact with the others (Old and Middle Kingdom Egypt, Mesopotamia through the Old Babylonian period, Vedic India, pre-Buddhist China, and pre-Columbian Mesoamerica). It was found that in addition to culture-specific elements, there are cross-culturally consistent thematic elements between the conceptions in all these civilizations; and that these correspond to the most frequently reported elements of the near-death experience. The present project focuses on the interface of ‘anomalous’ experiences and indigenous ‘religious’ beliefs in small-scale societies around the world, as found in the earliest ethnographic reports. Given the differences in social organization and scale between such societies and early civilizations – as well as the high degree of cultural independence between them – this work is essential in further testing the conclusion that (in spite of postmodernist paradigms) afterlife beliefs cross-culturally appear to be almost universally formed not only by a combination of culture-specific socio-cultural and environmental factors, and universal cognitive factors, but also universal anomalous experiential factors.

Daria Trentini - School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

“We will not abandon the tradition of spirits’: Spirit possession and Islam in an urban context”.

This paper is based on one year fieldwork I spent with Ancha, a spirit healer in the city of Nampula, in northern Mozambique. Two main kinds of spirits commonly manifest themselves in the city. The spirits from the mountains are considered to be Africans, *Makua*, and are inherited from the mother’s lineage, providing diviners and healers with their knowledge of herbs, plants and barks. Secondly, possession by Muslims spirits leads healers to reframe their identity in Islamic terms: they undertake certain Islamic behaviours, speak ‘Arabicsized’ languages and implement Islamic books as a way of sophisticating divinatory practices. By endorsing these ethnographic data, I examine the place and significance that spirits healers have in an urban setting where historically local matrilineal ideology has dialogued since the period of the slave trade with different types of Islam shaped by doctrinal (Swahili, Sufism and Waahabi) and racial factions (African and Indian). Throughout the paper I explore questions such as: is possession a ‘meta-cosmology’ which brings together acts and practices which are generally conceived in separate frames? Or, rather, does the language of possession retain and reproduce the boundaries between the local matrilineal ideology and Islam? I will respond to these questions by intertwining the story of Ancha with the exploration of the historical and social worlds in which possession occurs. The story of possession I am going to describe will unveil the multiple meanings through which Islam is locally experienced undermining therefore the straightforward explanations by which possession and Islam have often been examined.

Commentaries

Comments on "Candomblé, Umbanda, and Kardecismo Mediums in Recife, Brazil"

by S. Krippner in
Paranthropology, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 9-13.

The article by Dr. Krippner is a very interesting and elucidating description of three Spiritualist movements in Brazil: Umbanda, Candomblé and Kardecismo. However, the title seems to suggest a strong relation between these three types of 'psychic practices' (as if the similarities could be traced back to the practices) that I would like to comment on.

I agree that, from the anthropological point of view, Umbanda and Candomblé may have many points of interest, due to the presence of strong non-european cultural elements. However, Kardecismo bears no relation to the African-Brazilian practices such as Candomblé and Umbanda, in fact it has no relation at all with them: it has no rituals (which could lead to special practices such as use of drumming and dancing to stimulate 'trance' and, therefore, to parasympathetic excitations as described in the article), has no organized clergy and holds no belief in magical powers of any kind. Moreover, Kardecismo does not allow charged mediumship which is a common practice in African-Brazilian cults. Krippner establishes a scale from Candomblé to Kardecismo and maps distinct strata of the Brazilian society to the several levels of this scale. It is worth emphasizing that the only common elements among such belief systems are the phenomenological aspects of somewhat generalized mediumship.

For Kardecismo, there are no magical beings, only spirits which are the souls of the departed ones. Kardecismo also strongly supports the belief in reincarnation (another point of contrast to many afro-brazilian religions – except for Umbanda) which also vividly contrasts with Spiritualist principles, where the historic origin of Kardecismo may be found. Kardecismo met strong opposition from intellectuals at the beginning of the 20th century for being an antagonist of the dominant Catholic church, as Krippner has pointed out. Kardecismo, however, may be regarded as a philosophy of religious consequences (such as Buddhism) and

teaches a special interpretation of the Christian ethics (in opposition to the traditional Protestant and Catholic beliefs).

Historically, Umbanda was founded by the medium Zélio Fernandino de Moraes (1891-1975) in 1908 as a Spiritualist movement in which spirit entities of old slaves and natives would have the chance to manifest. With time, a multitude of authors (pais de santo) and sources contributed to the principles of Umbanda, adopting many precepts from Kardecismo, the Catholic Church and African religions such as Candomblé (Camargo, 1961). Umbanda and Candomblé, however, produced a phenomenon of incorporation of Catholic saints as representations of their gods, which is perhaps the reason for the importance Umbanda gives to the Christian heritage, as described by Krippner.

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank Tiago Paz e Albuquerque (UERJ, State University of Rio de Janeiro) for useful references and discussions.

Reference

Camargo C. P. (1961). *Kardecismo e Umbanda*. São Paulo: Pioneira.

Ademir Xavier, PhD.

Krippner's Response:

Ademir Xavier "is absolutely correct on each point that he makes. He clarifies many issues for which I did not provide adequate information, and I welcome his scholarly research because it will enhance readers' appreciation of spiritist traditions in Brazil."

Review:
Daimonic Imagination: Uncanny Intelligence
University of Kent, May 6th-7th 2011

The University of Kent has hosted two groundbreaking conferences in the space of just over a month - the first was an epic exploration of psychedelic consciousness, and the second an examination of the daimonic in all of its varied guises. There seems to be a newly burgeoning interdisciplinary renaissance in the desire to understand consciousness and these two conferences represent significant stepping stones in that endeavour. The second of the two conferences was truly interdisciplinary in nature featuring talks from numerous academic departments including art, literature, divination, cultural studies, philosophy, theology and religious studies, spirituality, anthropology, classics, history, psychology, film studies and sociology - a truly inspirational feat of organisational ability. As there were so many talks going on simultaneously in three separate rooms it was only possible to attend a select number, consequently this overview will only focus on those that I attended (I look forward to catching up on the ones I missed when the numerous recordings are published online).

The first panel of the day kicked off with Geoffrey Cornelius' talk "*One Mumbo Short of a Jumbo: Limits of Rational Discourse in the Realm of the Daimon*". In the talk Cornelius gave a valuable introduction to the increasingly rational scientific position on issues of metaphysics that has developed in the West since the Enlightenment, paying particular attention to the work of Immanuel Kant in the 18th century. In his essay "Dreams of a Spirit Seer" (1766) Kant, following Swedenborg's famous clairvoyant vision of a fire in Stockholm, conducted a philosophical exploration of Swedenborg's proto-spiritualist philosophy. He concluded that Swedenborg's writings referred to a different realm of being, one that is not amenable to rational discourse - forever in an area that does not consist of positive knowledge, so while Kant did not necessarily dismiss Swedenborg's philosophy he did conclude that it was irrational and so, in his own terms, "cancelled" any further discussion of it. Cornelius concluded his talk with the

notion that today belief is not enough, we need to submit experience to discrimination of thought. He suggested that we take a "second naive" position when considering the realm of the daimon - a position that is experiential but which takes heed of the progress that has been made by the rational enlightenment. The second presentation in this first panel was given by two developmental psychologists from Bar-Ilan University, Israel - Hannyah & Rivka Glaubman - entitled "*Imagination as a Primary Mental Function*". It was argued here that the imaginative capacity of human beings has played a central role in our evolutionary development, a position which is in opposition to the classical view of imagination as secondary to epistemic processes which allow us to engage with our environment. The Glaubman's suggested that our ability to imagine has been fundamental to our survival in allowing us to solve problems in difficult situations. Drawing on research in child development they suggested that there is no reason to assume that when a child is born they have a fully formed idea of the "real world", rather they use their imaginations to build up a picture of the world which is later tested using their epistemic faculties. They argued that the evidence from developmental psychology indicates that a fictional world-view may come first, or at least at the same time as the epistemic world-view.

Following the morning panel was Ronald Hutton's keynote lecture simply entitled "*Encounters With Faeries*" in which he gave a colourful and enlivening account of the similarities and differences between traditional folkloric accounts of the faerie folk and the much more homogenised Victorian fairy tale. Hutton highlighted the danger and tension between the world of the humans and the faeries in the traditional folklore motifs which was entirely lost in the Victorian fairy story. He also examined potential functional explanations for the traditional folklore, suggesting the possibility that such stories provided useful justifications for, for instance, mild forms of schizophrenia (e.g. he's away with the fairies), to stop people being stupid (e.g. don't go walking on the moors late at night), and to explain

Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

luck/misfortune without blame (e.g. it's the doing of the faeries). Hutton also gave a sort of anthropology of the faerie world, suggesting that fairy lore in Britain is zoned - in the South fairies are small and friendly, in the North, Southern Scotland and Wales fairies need to be constantly reckoned with and in the the Scottish Highlands and Ireland fairies are generally much larger, more dangerous and cause more problems. The faeries of traditional lore often have jet black skin (unlike any human skin), they are usually about 5 feet in height, have a preference for green and white clothes, enjoy circle dancing, live underground, come out only in the summer and autumn and have a single nameless Queen. To conclude his talk Ronald told us the story of his own tantalising encounter with the *Leanan Shidhe* while walking as a young man in Ireland.

After lunch the next panel opened with Terrence Palmer's examination of the work and theories of founding psychical researcher F.W.H. Myers in his talk "*The Scientific Approach of F.W.H. Myers to the Study of Mystical Experiences, and Its Value to Psychology*". The talk was a synthesis of some of Palmer's doctoral research at the University of Bangor. Palmer drew attention to the huge influence of Myers' psychological theories on the works of other, more well known, pioneers in the field of psychology. Myers' model of the human mind, consisting of the supraliminal (normal everyday consciousness) and the subliminal mind (beyond the threshold of normal everyday consciousness) was hugely influential in the development of, for example, Piere Janet's theories of dissociation, William James' notion of 'consciousness beyond the field', and Jung's collective unconscious. Unfortunately for Myers, his theory was swiftly superseded by Freud's psychodynamic model and Watson's behaviourism. Palmer also highlighted Myers' realisation that the realms of psychological disorders, inspiration and the paranormal were linked in a unified conceptual framework revolving around altered states of consciousness. To Myers these were not supernatural, but rather facts of nature. Terrence Palmer's talk was followed by a presentation from Maggie Hyde entitled "*Uncanny Intelligence and One World Cosmology in Depth Psychology*". In this presentation Hyde traced the vestiges of the pre-enlightenment notion of the *Unus Mundus*, or One world, in post-enlightenment divination practices and connected these with the practices of depth psychology and psychoanalysis. Hyde argued that the methods of psychoanalytic dream interpretation are similar in many ways to the traditional methods of

divination, only that in contemporary psychiatry the paranormal component is generally rationalised away through the use of terms such as "transference" and "counter transference". It was at the end of Maggie's presentation that I made my way over the Lecture Room 3 to see Helena Bassil-Morozow's presentation on "*Modern Myth and Modern Demons: Tim Burton's Batman Films*". Bassil-Morozow's talk took a neo-Jungian approach to the interpretation of Tim Burton's two Batman films (*Batman* (1989) and *Batman Returns* (1992)). In the talk Bassil-Morozow examined the expression of Tim Burton's distrust of large collective groups and his preoccupation with fragmented psyches (as expressed through many of his most memorable characters) through the lens of Jungian theories.

The first talk of the second day was given by myself and was entitled "*Numinous Conversations: Psychical and Anthropological Interpretations of Spirit Communicators*" in which I explored the parallel development of parapsychological and anthropological theories of spirit possession. This was followed by David Luke's talk "*So Long As You've Got Your Elf: Death, DMT and Discarnate Entities*" which took the audience on a high-speed tour through the strange and interconnected realms of faerie traditions, parapsychology, neurochemistry and the psychedelic experience. David Luke considers himself and ontologist, and through examining reports of strange entity encounters while under the influence of the highly psychoactive compound DMT considers that we have at our fingertips a highly repeatable method for studying these entities that is amenable to laboratory experimentation. Psychedelic experiences offer researchers unique access to innumerable invisible worlds and their inhabitants. The third talk of this morning panel, entitled "*Psychedelics, Spirits and the Sacred Feminine*", was given by Cameron Adams, an anthropologist based at the University of Kent. The talk focussed on the often reported feminine presence encountered while consuming psychedelic substances (a brief perusal of the *Salvia Divinorum* archives at www.erowid.org will give an insight into this). Cameron argued, however, that this particular interpretation of femininity is particularly Euro-centric, and that if we look to other cultures psychedelic experiences are interpreted in completely different ways. In many shamanic societies, for instance, psychedelic experiences open the experiencer to a world of supernatural warfare, of battles with witches and to a spirit world overtly

concerned with notions (and experiences) of death and rebirth.

The second keynote lecture was titled “*When Spirit Possession is Sexual Encounter: The Case for a Cult of Divine Birth in Ancient Greece*”, and was concerned with Dr. Marguerite Rigoglioso’s painstaking research into the possibility of temples in ancient Greece which revolved solely around the induction of immaculate pregnancies. Drawing on a wide range of ancient sources Rigoglioso argued that there was evidence to suggest the existence of a widespread belief in parthenogenesis (female only conception and birth) in the ancient world. She argued that remnants of this belief can be seen in many of the world’s religious and mythological systems including Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and certain Native American traditions. This talk was provocative and engaging and resulted in a lengthy and informative question and answer session.

After lunch we reconvened for further panels. First of all I attended Stephanie Spoto’s talk “*John Dee’s Conversations with Spirits and Problems in Elizabethan Practical Occultism*”, in which she gave a colourful insight into the world of Elizabethan magic focussing primarily on the relationship between Elizabeth I’s court astrologer John Dee and the mischievous psychic Edward Kelly. At the end of this talk I hurried over to Lecture Room 3 to catch Alex Rachel’s talk “*Daimonic Symbiosis: An Inquiry into the Psychic Coevolution of the Human and Subtle Species*” in which he synthesised his decade of meticulous research using altered states of consciousness to make contact with non-physical entities. Rachel analysed his experiences with ASCs through the framework of transpersonal psychology, and argued for the possibility that human psychic and cultural evolution has been driven by waves of contact with non-physical entities that long to be a part of our physical world of forms. He suggested that his concept of daimonic symbiosis could be put to use in psychology through the development of new models of the psyche (a poly-centric psyche of aggregated non-physical entities?), in interdisciplinary studies through overcoming academic fragmentation, and in eco-social issues though providing an experiential insight into current sustainability. The final presentation in this session was given by Toby Chown who drew on his work providing drama therapy classes in a medium-secure psychiatric ward. Chown argued in favour of the benefits of using drama therapy and the imagination to assist fragmented psyches to engage in

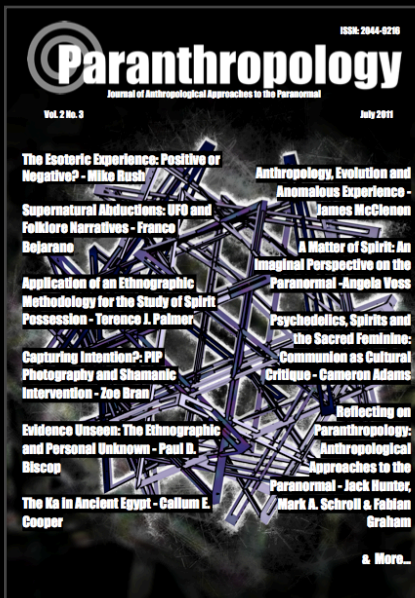
a dialogue with themselves to resolve internal problems through character acting.

Unfortunately, due to my having to catch a train, I was unable to attend the final keynote lecture of the conference, though I am sure that there will be other overviews that will pick up on aspects that I have been unable to outline. All in all the conference was a breath of fresh air - it was wonderful to see so many disciplines represented and to see how they all provide unique insights into the multifaceted daimonic reality. I see this conference as a major stepping stone and look forward to further developments - it is a very exciting time.

Jack Hunter

Pa

Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal



Download back-issues of Paranthropology for free from
www.paranthropology.co.uk