



# Paranthropology

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**Introduction**

Welcome to the first issue of "Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal". This journal is basically intended to provide a platform for the dissemination of new research and ideas pertaining to anthropological approaches to the study of paranormal beliefs, associated practices and phenomena. While the main emphasis of the journal is on anthropological approaches, it will also branch out into other disciplines - psychology, parapsychology, sociology, folklore, history - as a means to explore the way in which these theoretical methodologies interact and shed light on the paranormal. The theme for this first issue is "Methodologies and Approaches". In keeping with this theme, therefore, is an article by Eric Ouellet, PhD, on his attempt to integrate the concept of psi into sociology, an article from Dr. Fiona Bowie outlining her recently developed approach to the ethnographic study of the afterlife, and an outline of David Woollatt's PhD research methodology in his study of contemporary spiritualism and the media. Mark A. Schroll, PhD, has contributed the first of a two-part article on the history of the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness, Sarah Metcalfe discusses the emotional and ethical dynamics of psychic and mediumship consultations, being the subject of her current PhD research, David Taylor analyses the shamanic components of a haunted house case he investigated, and Dr. Yves Marton discusses the nomenclature of the paranormal in both anthropology and parapsychology. I sincerely hope that the reader will find the articles presented in this journal interesting, and that they will inspire discussion for the coming issues.

Jack Hunter

**Anthropology & the Paranormal: What's the Point?**

*Jack Hunter*

*"...such things as modern reports of wraiths, ghosts, 'fire-walking', 'corpse-candles', 'crystal gazing' and so on, are...within the province of anthropology." - Andrew Lang - Preface to 'Cock Lane & Common Sense' (1896)*

There are many reasons for taking an anthropological approach to the study of the paranormal. Not only does anthropology provide a promising methodology for our elucidation and understanding of the paranormal, but the paranormal also presents an opportunity for anthropology's theories and techniques to be tested and expanded. This short article will aim to give an insight into this mutually beneficial conjunction.

The idea that anthropological methods are well suited to the study of paranormal phenomena is by no means a new one. Writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Scottish academic Andrew Lang (1844-1912) was keen to emphasize the anthropological method to the members of the Society for Psychical Research. Lang was dismayed by the fact that the SPR was, for whatever reason, refusing to comment on the psychic experiences recorded in the anthropological literature and, similarly, that the anthropologists of the day were seemingly un-interested in the research that was being carried out by the SPR. Lang (1896) was of the opinion that both data sets (anthropological and psychical) would best be understood with reference to

each other, rather than being taken as separate and un-related phenomena.

Lang's call for an anthropological approach to the psychic essentially went unheard until the late 1970s when the discipline of transpersonal anthropology was born as a means to integrate the findings of transpersonal psychology with those of anthropology. This merging of perspectives arose from the experiences of certain anthropologists while in the field, most notably Joseph K. Long's peculiar encounter with an apparently self propelled coffin accompanied by a disembodied voice. It wasn't until 1989, however, that the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness was established as an official section of the American Anthropological Association. Today the research remit of the SAC includes: "States of Consciousness and Consciousness Studies, Shamanic, Religious, and Spiritual Traditions, Psychoactive Substances, Philosophical, Symbolic, and Linguistic Studies, Anomalous Experience": finally, at least in certain respects, taking up where Andrew Lang left off at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Mark Scroll's article in this issue for a more detailed history of the SAC).

Anthropological methods, in particular ethnographic participation, can lead to an improved understanding of the social, psychological and spiritual mechanisms underlying manifestations of the paranormal, factors that could add a deeper understanding of the type of phenomena studied by parapsychologists. Parapsychological research has tended to assume that paranormal effects can simply be replicated in the laboratory without

recourse to considering the way in which such effects have traditionally been produced. Indeed, Frederic Myers, one of the founders of the Society for Psychical Research, stated that the aim of psychical research would be to study ostensibly paranormal phenomena without an...

*“...analysis of tradition, and by no manipulation of metaphysics, but simply by experiment and observation - simply by the application of phenomena within us and around us of precisely the same methods of deliberate, dispassionate exact inquiry which have built up our actual knowledge of the world which we can only touch and see”* (as cited in Gauld, 1983, xi)

This highly rational, positivistic and empirical approach has become the bedrock of modern parapsychological inquiry, and might, possibly, explain the relatively unimpressive findings of the discipline when compared to the extravagant phenomena recorded in the ethnographic literature: it is simply approaching the issue from a perspective that ignores magical tradition. De Martino (1972), for instance, lists a number of ostensible paranormal phenomena (clairvoyance, precognition, out-of-body experiences, psychokinesis, fire-walking and so on) witnessed by ethnographers working in disparate parts of the world, and compares the way that the ethnographer records such occurrences (i.e. within a particular historical, social, cultural, mythological, and cosmological context), with the way in which parapsychology records its phenomena. He writes of parapsychology:

*“There is, of course an almost complete reduction of the historical stimulus that is at work in the purely spontaneous occurrence of such phenomena. So, in the laboratory, the drama of the dying man who appears... to a relative or friend, is reduced to an oft repeated experiment – one that tries to transmit to the mind of a subject the image of a playing card, chosen at random”* (1973, p. 46).

This is precisely the way that anthropology elucidates the paranormal – it tells us the conditions (physical, social and psychological) in which paranormal phenomena manifest, without a highly reduced set and setting. It is here that we begin to see the importance of ritual, drama and participation to understanding a little better the true function of ritual actions and the manifestation of paranormal phenomena.

Spirit mediumship is one particular manifestation of the so-called paranormal that most obviously expands anthropological theory. As a discipline that studies human beings anthropology relies heavily upon informants; that is individuals from a given society who provide the anthropologist with information. In many societies throughout the world, however, it can become exceedingly difficult to tell who precisely the informant is – especially when the information is reputedly coming from a discarnate spirit, demon or deity. How is an anthropologist to take this? Traditionally the establishment view-point has been to consider the beliefs of the “other” from a distanced perspective as if to suggest that their beliefs could not possibly possess any form of ontological validity. More recently, however, theorists have argued in favour of treating such beliefs as the native of a culture does. Edith Turner (1993, 1998, 2006) has been a keen advocate of this perspective, especially in terms of interpreting belief in the existence and agency of spirits in the field. Other anthropologists have also begun to treat spirits seriously, even if not as necessarily ontologically real: for example Nils Bubandt (2009) has explored the political agency of spirits communicating through possessed mediums in North Maluku – treating them as methodologically real. Here we see anthropology’s notion of conscious agency expanded to include other forms of personality,

The paranormal can enrich anthropology in many ways, and this is to be expected: the world of the supernatural has dominated human kind’s thoughts since time immemorial. Anthropologists, then, being concerned with understanding human beings,

should also desire to understand the supernatural. The supernatural runs at the very core of what we are, some might even argue that our ability to conceive of such an apparently abstract order of reality defines us as human beings. To take the paranormal component of a culture seriously, then, is to understand that culture as an inhabitant within in it would. This simple idea can equally be applied to anthropological investigations that are not concerned with the paranormal – the overall message is to take what your informants say seriously, treat them as multi-dimensional human beings and appreciate their social, psychological, historical and cultural contexts as an integrated whole.

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paranormal and contemporary mediumship.

## Parasociology: Integrating the Concept of Psi into Sociology

Eric Ouellet, PhD.

It is with pleasure that I accepted Jack's invitation to write a short text on parasociology for his newsletter. I think there is a serious need for a social science and humanities equivalent to the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* or the *Journal of Parapsychology*, and *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal* may be just it in the making! In any event, sociologists and anthropologists are close cousins and we can certainly fit under this "roof".

What is parasociology? It is a term I use to describe a sociological approach that I am developing to integrate psi phenomena within sociological analysis; something that very few sociologists are willing to do or even consider. They usually ignore the paranormal, and the few who pay attention tend to look at it only as a belief system. In other words, by integrating the concept of psi into sociology, I really intend to make parasociology to sociology what parapsychology is to psychology.

For the time being, I focussed mostly on the UFO phenomenon because I found it easier to study from a sociological perspective, but it is only a starting point. I have been working on a number of issues ranging from understanding the shortcomings of ufology to methodological issues related to interpreting symbolism to conceptualizing the notions of social psi and the social unconscious. These various ideas are discussed on my blog (<http://parasociology.blogspot.com>), and are slowly but surely forming the content of a book. It will be a collection of essays in parasociology; some conceptual, others more empirical in nature.

I am concentrating particularly on UFO waves and a few seminal cases, starting from the premise that the UFO phenomenon is a social psi effect. I recently looked at the 1952 UFO wave, and especially the events that occurred over Washington D.C. in July of the same year. To provide an analytical framework, I used the Model of Pragmatic Information (MPI) developed by the German parapsychologist Walter von Lucadou to study poltergeists (better known in parapsychology as

Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis – RSPK). The similarities between the 1952 UFO wave and RSPK events as described through the MPI are striking. However, I found one key difference: the principle agent linked to the phenomenon could not be an individual (called the focus person in RSPK research) and in fact points towards a particular social group in the American society. This is for me a significant indication that social dynamics and macro psi effects can be correlated.

I am now completing a more ambitious case study on the Canadian UFO wave of 1966-1967. This wave was much more diffused and fragmented than the previous ones, making the analysis that much more complicated. However, I found a number of concordances between specific social issues and the symbolic content of some key sightings. It is particularly interesting to note that the social tensions between the English and French-speaking communities of Canada could have been at the center of this "psychical storm".

There are other parasociological essays that I am envisioning for the near future: the Airship wave of 1896-97, the French UFO wave of 1954, the American UFO wave of 1973, and the issue of crop circles. But I also plan to expand beyond the field of UFOs. One project is to do a parasociology of ghosts and haunting, involving empirical and ethnographic work with a local ghosts and haunting club near where I live. Finally, I also hope to develop a network of people interested in investigating the possibility of social psi effects from a sociological perspective.

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### Methods for studying the paranormal (and who says what is normal anyway?)

Fiona Bowie

*"Round about the accredited and orderly facts of every science there ever floats a sort of dust-cloud of exceptional observations, of occurrences minute and irregular and seldom met with, which it always proves more easy to ignore than attend to"*

William James

Social scientists by definition look at and try to understand, describe, predict, account for, and generally interpret the role of human beings in society. This involves, depending on the discipline, looking at individuals and groups, their motivations, interactions, material and symbolic worlds and, which is what makes us quintessentially human, at the attempt to impose meaning on our experience. Disciplines and individual scholars could be placed on a grid according to the extent to which they adhere to a broadly scientific and experimental or humanistic and interpretive approach to their subject, and according to the extent to which they are able, or willing, to be reflexive (to deconstruct and contextualise) their own assumptions, mindset, positioning and interactions with their material. They also vary according to the extent to which they adhere to the materialist view of the world that dominates academic social science. This is to say, there is no single social scientific way of understanding and studying the world, although there is a largely hegemonic positivist and somewhat dismissive attitude towards anything that smacks of the 'supernatural', even when referring to conventional religious belief and practice, and even more so when we approach what might broadly be termed the 'paranormal'.

A few brief examples will suffice. Roy Rappaport, in his magisterial posthumously published work *Religion and Ritual in the Making of Humanity* (1999) concluded that religion confers an evolutionary advantage but is ultimately of human, material origin (a form of Durkheimian Marxism). For Matt Rossano, an evolutionary psychologist, religion as outlined in *Supernatural Selection: How religion evolved* (2010) also has adaptive advantage. Rossano describes how religion enables human beings to create socially bonding rituals, and the way in which it has acted as an early form of health-care (through shamanic practices). A reviewer of *Supernatural Selection* concluded that while some of Rossano's claims, such as the capacity of ritual to increase the brain's

working memory, are scientifically testable, much of it looks like ‘another evolutionary just-so-story’ (Gefter, 2010). The implication is that religion must be directly functional to evolve and survive, and that understanding these functions in evolutionary and biological terms is sufficient to ‘explain’ it. Similarly, cognitive archaeologist, David Lewis-Williams in *Conceiving God: The cognitive origin and evolution of religion* (Thames and Hudson, 2010), concludes that the natural functioning of the human brain gives rise to belief in a supernatural realm (my emphasis). One more example; social anthropologist Sidney Greenfield, in *Spirits with Scalpels* (2008), his rich and evocative description of spiritual healing in Brazil, concludes that the extraordinary abilities of untrained ‘doctors’ to diagnose and treat a variety of illnesses, and to perform invasive surgery without the use of anaesthesia or subsequent infection, is due to the patients being put into a light trance leading to the release of endorphins that activate the immune system (p.201). This ‘explanation’ might sound comfortingly scientific and render the impossible (from the perspective of a reductionist science) conceivable, but it fails to address the question as to how the healers correctly diagnose patients, and works on the assumption that emic (insider or ‘native’) explanations of supernatural guidance and intervention have no basis in reality. There are social scientists whose personal experience has convinced them of ‘the reality of spirits’, notably Edith Turner whose conversion came as a result of her actually ‘seeing’ an invasive spirit leaving a sick woman during an Ndembu healing ceremony in central Africa (1992). The historian Ronald Hutton also points out, as others have done, that there is no more evidence for a materialist than for a supernaturalist view of the world, and that the former necessitates ignoring, dismissing or reinterpreting indigenous explanations of the phenomena being described (2007). What constitutes the natural, normal or supernatural and paranormal is also a matter of perspective. There is no agreed understanding of the limits of what is natural, no cultural universals regarding the boundaries of nature or normality. Paradigms shift, and as our understanding of ourselves and the universe changes, so do these parameters.

Where then does this leave our study of the paranormal? I suggest a methodology

that is particularly suited to the ethnographic study of the afterlife and other paranormal phenomena, but which has a much wider and more general applicability. I have called this methodology ‘cognitive, empathetic engagement’. This is a dialogical method that does not presuppose any particular standpoint on the part of the observer/ethnographer. The cognitive element demands an effort of imagination – one is asked to see the world through the eyes of another (culture, informant, text) and follow the logic of a particular understanding of the phenomena described. The success of the cognitive element will depend not just on clarity, intelligence and imagination, but also on empathy with the person or perspective being investigated. One does not have to agree with or like a point of view in order to enter into dialogue with the person or persons proposing it, and to try to understand and describe it. The degree of understanding achieved will also depend on the degree of intellectual and physical engagement with the topic. Whether one is studying a ritual or a text, seeking to engage fully with it will potentially provide insights not available through an intentional distancing. A presupposition of this method is that the observer (one might prefer the more philosophical or theosophical terms ‘knower’, or ‘thinker’, or post-modern ‘actor’), approaches the people or topic studied in an open-minded and curious manner, without presuppositions, prepared to entertain the world-view and rationale presented and to experience, as far as possible and practical, a different way of thinking and interpreting events. This will not yield a single comprehensive view of the world, but a variety of perspectives each of which will reflect the tension between what Gadamer (1989) refers to as the ‘objective necessity’ of the natural world and the inner experience or ‘sovereignty of the will’. This is not a form of extreme relativism, but a recognition that the world ‘out there’, experienced as solid and real, is mediated through our physical senses, and our prior experience and sense of self, which includes our spiritual as well as our cognitive capacity, our mind as well as our brain.

One might be left with questions and no answers, or with a new and evolving understanding of the nature of reality. One might have one’s prior convictions and *Weltanschauung* confirmed, thereby either affirming, rejecting or reformulating the

views presented by those studied. What one does not do, when using the methodology of cognitive, empathetic engagement, is start with an *a priori* assumption as to the ‘reality’ of the situation. Secular forms of reasoning are recognised as part of a Western discourse, which has its place but which also needs to be understood within its own historical context. One does not make the mistake of believing that to explain something (healing, possession, religion) in terms of cognitive, social or functional mechanisms, is to understand it, let alone to account for its origins. To describe and understand the physical properties and functions of a radio receiver does not tell us anything about the source, content or reception of the words or music it transmits. To state that religion brings communities together, enlarges the capacity of the brain and enhances well-being is not the same as saying that religions come into being and survive simply because they perform these functions. The wealth of evidential material that pushes at the boundaries of materialist science as currently understood cannot simply be dismissed as ‘unscientific’ and therefore fraudulent or mistaken without constantly moving the goalposts. Using ridicule to disguise one’s unease, and seeking refuge in a limited form of materialism is hard work. It takes more energy to keep one’s fingers in the dyke, or in one’s ears, than to listen patiently to the messages of others and to test the water lapping over the levies. Our rational, logical minds and intelligence can be put at the (scientific) service of seeking to describe, understand, analyse and perhaps explain the world we create as human beings, and in which we find ourselves playing but a small part on a much larger stage.

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## Contemporary Spiritualism, it's Shifting Meanings and use as Spectacle

*David Woollatt*

First of all I would like to say a little about my research and the basis for my study. Over the last 10 years British society has become fascinated by a new form of Spiritualist entertainment, that of the paranormal and ghost hunting TV show. The likes of *Most Haunted*, *The Antiques Ghost Show*, and *Street Psychic* to name just a few. Yet what is the consumer of these programs looking for? Do consumers of these shows watch this para-tainment to gain a further awareness of spiritualism, it's traditions or theosophical perspectives, or is the media merely utilising Spiritualism for a promotion of the spectacle? The meanings generated through contemporary representations of Spiritualism often provide notions that spiritualism is about fear, heightened senses of loss, resentment and anger, whereas spiritualism itself provides us with a completely opposing set of values through the seven principles; highlighting the importance of Love. Fear and spectacle are often constructed within the para-tainment TV show through the inclusion of the notion of a 'vengeful spirit', a ghost that bears some kind of grudge, a concept often found within the Victorian ghost story.

The methodologies applied when drawing an analysis of contemporary media texts are based on the principles of

qualitative research. As you would expect in this area the majority of work is based around viewing and reading media texts that I have identified as significant to this study. Obviously a fundamental part is the choice of texts that are to form the basis of analysis and discussion within the enquiry. The texts should therefore be high quality examples, they should portray exactly what is meant by para-tainment, and can be clearly defined and categorised by their content.

My approach to reading the texts is mediated not through any expectation or particular research assumptions but through theoretical perspectives and previous critical work performed in this field by theorists from a number of different disciplines but predominantly, as you would expect, from those who are working within a social scientific setting. Such theorists from Baudrillard and his work on the media through to Furedi and his analysis of contemporary fear.

My research methodology also involves tracking the shifts in the meanings generated through the broadcast of spiritualism on contemporary media platforms such as, as I have discussed, TV, radio and the Internet, asking questions of the authenticity of the representation of spiritualism's theological and theosophical values and evaluating whether the consumers of spiritualism within 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain have a very different understanding of the practice in terms of signs, symbols and meanings than the audience who played a participatory or passive role when consuming spiritualism over one hundred years ago. The way that I am attempting to track any shifts in meaning is to draw out examples of contemporary understandings of the spiritualist belief system, as presented through contemporary media, and plot these against the traditional beliefs and the seven principles framework of spiritualist belief.

The course of this enquiry will, I hope provide a fair and well researched piece of evidence into the meaning of spiritualism and it's contemporary representation within 21<sup>st</sup> Century British media.

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## The Anthropology of Consciousness: Investigating the Frontiers of Unexplainable Personal and Cultural Phenomena (Part 1)

*Mark A. Schroll, PhD.*

### The Turbulent Early Years 1978-1990: A Brief History of the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness

If any of you would ever seriously consider becoming a real Fox Mulder investigating actual X-File, Twilight Zone and Outer Limits kinds of cases, you will want to become active in the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness (SAC). SAC holds annual spring meetings, as well as annually organizing sessions at the national American Anthropology Association. See <http://www.sacaaa.org>. One of the most complete histories of SAC is the paper "Boulders in the Stream: The Lineage and Founding of the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness" (Schwartz, 2001).

This article is a brief introduction to the founding of SAC and many of its areas of research. According to Geri-Ann Galanti, the Anthropology of Consciousness can trace its roots "to a symposium organized by Joe Long and Stephan Schwartz for the 1974 American Anthropology Association (AAA) meetings in Mexico City (Galanti, 2000, June 13, personal communication). Long collected and edited the presentations given at this symposium into a major work in this field, which he titled *Extrasensory Ecology: Parapsychology and Anthropology* in 1977. Long was someone that was interested in the serious scientific study of this material. It was also at these meetings that Long was persuaded to turn against Carlos Castaneda because of the evidence accumulating against Castaneda's research that would have negatively impacted the development of this fledgling discipline (Hrisko, 2003). (The continuing controversy of Castaneda's research will be explored in a future article).

John Baker adds that the next phase in shaping the future of consciousness studies in Anthropology took place during two symposiums "on anthropology and parapsychology organized by Long for the

1978 annual AAA meeting in Los Angeles” (Baker: 1, 2000, cited in Schwartz, 2001). At this time Galanti was a graduate student just beginning her dissertation work on psychic readers. Excited to see other anthropologists interested in a common set of issues she collected their addresses and compiled them into a mailing list. Galanti then began writing and distributing an occasional “Newsletter for the Anthropological Study of Paranormal and Anomalous Phenomena” (NASPAP). The first issue of the Newsletter appeared in May 1979, whose primary focus was an attempt to bring “together scholars that were interested in anthropology and parapsychology” (Hriskos, 2003). But, as we will learn in future articles, the research interests of anthropologists of consciousness has evolved into an incredibly diverse field. Galanti points out that these early sessions were characterized by intense debates about methodology, and what constitutes legitimate areas of investigation within anthropology. Following these debates after the sessions had adjourned, and thus “off the record,” there were many archeologists who Galanti spoke with that admitted they had indeed used what we might call “psychic individuals” to help them in their work.

Constantine Hriskos has condensed the turmoil of these early years of SAC into a brief historical synopsis that he was kind enough to share with me in an email on June 10, 2003. I have reworked some of this material, but primarily the following six paragraphs are Hriskos’ summary of these early years that he gleaned from his yet unpublished history of SAC (Hriskos, 2003).

In 1980 at the South-Western Anthropology Association (SWAA) meeting there was an all-day symposium titled: “Impersonal, Personal, and Transpersonal: Paradigm Shifting, Anthropology Coming of Age.” According to NASPAP, “This symposium was an exploration of the forefronts of the physical sciences for the studies of consciousness, and an inquiry into aspects of shamanism, healing traditions, and the interface between anthropology and the study of paranormal phenomena” (Galanti, 1980, quoted in Hriskos, 2003). Among the presenters at this symposium were Michael Winkelman and Dan Moonhawk Alford who have continued to make significant contributions to SAC. The evening program included two films by Schwartz, which were presided by Long.

As an outcome of this symposium, it was suggested that an Association for Transpersonal Anthropology (ATA) be formed. The birth of this organization occurred a month later on May 25, 1980. The following year the ATA held its first annual meeting in conjunction with the SWAA meetings in Santa Barbara, March 18-21, 1981. With the ATA’s formation the newsletter changed its name to the Newsletter of the Association for Transpersonal Anthropology (NATA). The following quote is taken from the August 1981 issue of NATA:

“As some of you may be aware, the Association for Transpersonal Anthropology has been experiencing some internal difficulties. The major conflict has been over the direction that ATA should take. Some felt it was important to maintain academic standards and try to obtain affiliation with the [American Anthropology Association] AAA. Others were more interested in exploring experiential and personal approaches, and less concerned with the ‘legitimization’ of the transpersonal.

At a recent ATA meeting at [the] Asilomar [Conference Center, Pacific Grove, California] on August 8, [1981], the attending members agreed that it was possible and important to maintain a balance between the two directions. Therefore, it was voted that candidates for offices of ATA should be committed to this stance. We certainly hope that ATA will emerge from the turmoil stronger and healthier. At present, the members of *Phoenix’s* editorial board and the editor of NATA are guiding ATA. Joseph K. Long, President, and Philip Staniford, Vice-President, have both resigned” (quoted in Hriskos, 2003).

Some time after this the name of the association was changed to the Association for Transpersonal Anthropology International (ATAI). ATAI’s annual meetings were again held in conjunction with the SWAA in San Diego. It was during these meetings that Philip Staniford died and Matthew Bronson became involved with the association. A year later in 1984 the association held its first separate conference at Vallombrosa Center in Menlo Park, California. Priscilla Lee organized the conference with the help of Kay Rawlings.

In the summer of 1984 ATAI experienced yet another schism within its

perennial identity crisis, whether to be more academic or more experiential. This schism continues to haunt the organization and surfaces with an incredible regularity every few years, leading to splits and reorganizations, and even the birth of new organizations and sections of the AAA among others. According to Galanti, this particular split was a personality conflict between Shirley Lee and Ron Campbell versus everyone else. As a result of this split several members met at Galanti’s home that summer and formed the Association for the Anthropological Study of Consciousness (AASC). The founding Board of Directors were Dennis Dutton, Geri-Ann Galanti, Keith Harary, Patricia Hunt-Perry, Priscilla Lee, Joseph Long, Jeffery MacDonald, Kay Rawlings, Stephan Schwartz, and Margaret Wilson. Joseph Long was elected President.

The first conference of the newly reformed AASC was held in April of 1985 in Vallombrosa. Discussions soon arose within the ranks of those attending concerning affiliating with the American Anthropological Association (AAA), but this affiliation did not actually occur until November 1990. President of AASC at this time was Galanti, and the association went through another incarnation and emerged with its present name The Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness (SAC). In 1992 Constantine Hriskos joined the organization and took up his duties as editor of the SAC newsletter column in *Anthropology News*. The culmination of these turbulent early years eventually rewarded Galanti for her 12 years of tireless effort to maintain this focus (and/or sometimes “unfocused”) group, when SAC became an official division of the AAA in 1990 and its present era began.

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## The Therapeutic, Ethical and Relational Dynamics of Mediumship and Psychic Consultations

Sarah Metcalfe

Sociological studies into mediumship practices focus upon dealing with death and bereavement, and the provision of social support, within the spiritualist context (Cornwall, 1994; Nelson, 1969; Skultans 1974; Walter, 2008; 2006). Mediums are seen to provide reassurance to predominately female relatives that loved ones are now safe in the spirit world (Hazelgrove, 2000; Nelson, 1969; Skultans 1974). However, mediumship and psychic practices have become more visible and diverse in nature, with the assistance of advanced communicative technologies. Mediums and psychics increasingly promote eclectic mixes of new age and parapsychological phenomena throughout the secular domain (Campbell, 2008; Heelas, 2008). This work involves using extra-sensory cognitive abilities acquired naturally, through innate sensitivity or learning or rather developing this skill (Edward, 1998). These practitioners then relay this information to individuals which requires relational skill (Gauld, 1983; Edge, 1993; Wooffitt, 2006). Hence, they have developed effective ways of eliciting extra sensory knowledge but of also being able to socially interact with individuals to gain the desired effect.

Rather than being historically outcast these practitioners are now the driving forces behind lucrative commercial sectors (Hazelgrove, 2000; Romans, 2009). Consuming mediumistic knowledge and advice is not restrictive to those in esoteric or spiritualist cultures but is becoming a widespread occurrence across the globe (Heelas, 2008; Wooffitt, 2006). Individuals seeking advice can purchase one to one sittings with practitioners in person and via 24 hour, telephone and online, services.

Stage demonstrations also attract masses of attendees and those ringing psychic premium rate lines, from the comfort of their homes, far outweigh attendance figures at weekly spiritualist services (SNU, 2010).

It is clear that these practitioners are offering a form of lay counselling, where focus is upon life and relationship complexities, self esteem and health issues, which in many ways reflects mainstream provision (Lester, 1982; Wooffitt, 2006). Consumers confirm that they do use these services in a life directive and counselling manner seeking mainly advice, 'with that extra something', over love life and monetary uncertainties rather than seeking to reminisce with deceased loved ones (Metcalfe, 2010: 36).

Multi- disciplinary research that has explored such extra-sensory phenomena has included focus upon either the authenticity of abilities (Fontana, 2005; Gauld, 1983; Keen et al, 1999), the implications for human functioning such as notions of consciousness or personality types and deficiency (Beischel and Schwartz, 2007; Semetsky's, 2006; Shepherd, 2009) or the cultural and social reasons for involvement within such practices or groupings (Haraldson and Houtkooper, 1991; Nelson, 1975; Skultans, 1974) There is, however, a distinctive sociological line of inquiry emerging into the widespread social dynamics of these practices. Wooffitt (2006) examines the discourse of psychic practitioners. This agonistic approach disengages from the stigmatisation of participating individuals and moves towards assessing the interactional qualities of these exchanges that are collectively produced linguistically. His work illustrates that these consultations are managed through notions of authenticity but that extra-sensory communication alone does not determine the outcome of these consultations.

There are two issues here. Firstly, there is a distinct lack of research that has examined the social implications of this commercialization of extra-sensory knowledge transfer (Wooffitt and Gilbert, 2008). Secondly, collective (including client) responses to these interactions have yet to be fully developed (Metcalfe, 2009). Jorgensen and Jorgensen (1982) view practitioners as being extremely supportive to their clients. However, when workers were questioned they claimed to experience emotional and physical difficulties because of the

negativities that were frequently presented to them such as having to be authentic and supportive but simultaneously frustrated. Clients also present themselves in specific ways such as managing their informational displays according to perceived authenticity and trust whilst often developing reliance upon this instant form of advice (Lassez and Sardar, 2006; Lynne, 2003; Shepherd, 2009; Way, 2004). These factors raise issues that extend the analysis of discourse (Wooffitt, 2006), and move towards the need for the assessment of the emotional underpinnings of interaction.

Like Wooffitt (2006) I also seek to disengage from politicized research direction by introducing three key themes that guide my current doctoral research. I acknowledge that these practices are primarily emotional and managed social interactions which are geared towards counselling. I ask; what impact the social and managed elements of these interactions have upon the transfer of extra sensory knowledge? Secondly, I recognize the potential contradictory outcomes of these services. For instance, these consultations have therapeutic intent (Lester, 1982) but simultaneously are not governed by universal ethical codes of conduct and thus are ethically tentative to all those involved (Mayer, 2008; Way, 2004).

To illustrate, extracted from a pilot study, which examined 18 internationally diverse client responses to consultations, participant 4 provides a good example of how immediately therapeutic these consultations can be.

*"It was very emotional but I think that was to do with my present state of mind like at the time erm but before I went to see him I was feeling extremely depressed and feeling down. Within the space of an hour that I sat with him and he gave me this reading my fears and entire view on life and my situation had changed so I felt psychically and spiritually better. It was a very positive and uplifting experience. He was absolutely brilliant he blew my mind proving to me without a shadow of a doubt that some people do have the gift"* (Metcalfe, 2009: 79)

Other participants though reported many instances of controversial advice or specific warnings such as predicting the death of a child, a relative having paedophilic tendencies, pregnancy problems and car accidents (Ibid). This study concludes that

these consultations have positive and negative impacts upon users. While they are support driven and uplifting in nature they prompt addictive tendencies and artificial life trajectories and impinge upon clients' identities. Findings here contradict earlier claims that these consultations are used to provide primarily bereavement focused therapeutic effect.

Reflecting upon these accounts I argue that 'the paramount sociological issue is not whether or not beliefs and practices (religious, scientific, or occult) are verifiable scientifically but what it is that members hold to be real and what the social consequences of these convictions and resulting actions are' (Jorgensen & Jorgensen, 1982: 382). Therefore, rather than looking at reasons for involvement, I ask; what are the social consequences of these interactions? Also, what are the effects upon parties managing their emotional displays? Development of such research questions and analysis is currently underway. I intend to draw upon social theories of emotional labour (such as, Hochschild, 1983; Bolton, 2005 and Mann, 2004) to conceptually assist in the development of appropriate ethnographic methods (such as diary analysis, in depth interviewing and observation) which should contribute in the understanding of the social consequences of these consultations. I welcome any suggestions.

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## Measuring the Circle: Contemporary Anomalistic Experiences and Shamanic Narrative

David Taylor

Perhaps the suburbs of Birmingham are not the first place most of us would think of when it comes to contemporary shamanistic experiences. Even more unlikely if that those experiences centred around a teenage girl.

For over 25 years I have been investigating anomalous experiences. From reports of apparitions and poltergeists to alien abductions and photographs of fairies. Far from providing me with the answers I long for, I have been faced with more and more puzzling questions. One thing that experience has taught me however, is to always expect the unexpected.

Sometime in the 1990's I was involved in an ethnographic investigation of a classic 'haunted house' on the outskirts of Birmingham. The family - mother, father and teenage daughter - believed that their house was haunted by the spirit of their son/brother, who had recently been killed in a car crash.

In instances such as this, it is not the duty of 'paranormal investigators' (a term I deplore) to denounce this belief or the experiences associated with it, but to allow the family to use this as a transformative experience. The range of phenomena reported in the house was, in itself, nothing unusual for your 'average' haunted house - bumps, bangs, cold spots, objects moved, unusual (pleasant) smells etc. At the request of the family I organised that members of my psychical research group would spend a few hours in the house with the family to monitor and hopefully record any anomalous experiences. Suffice to say that the evening passed without event. But as we packed up our belongings, a casual remark from the teenage daughter made me stop in my tracks and ultimately re-evaluate how I thought about anomalous experiences.

She told me that since her brother had died, she had been having a series of strange dreams. What was even more unusual about these, is that they appeared to be place centred, only occurring when she was at home, never when she stayed with friends.

In these dreams she was asleep in bed. In the dream, her sleep was disturbed by a knock at the front door. When she opened it her 'dead' brother was standing there. He explained that after the accident he was taken (by who or what?) to the top of a tall tree where he was 'put back together again'. He also explained to her that he had no internal skeletal structure. He said that he had come back to give her a message. At this point he opened his eyes to reveal inky blackness. His sister screamed and woke herself up!

With such a traumatic experience in the families history it is no wonder that the sister was having dreams about her brother. However, it is the transpersonal elements that are of interest.

The similarities between this dream and shamanistic experiences is of course obvious. In the majority of shamanistic cultures the shaman undergoes a 'death', is taken to the spirit realm where he 'dies' and is made whole, 'reborn' and then returned to the community now a fully initiated shaman. In some instances there are changes to the physiology of the shaman - his internal organs can be removed and replaced with crystal or a similar natural or supernatural element (as in the Birmingham case above). In this case there are strong elements of Northern European shamanistic experience, where Yggdrasil, the world tree, plays a central role in the shamanic mysteries. The world tree is a motif present in several religions and mythologies, particularly Indo-European religions. It is represented as a colossal tree which supports the heavens, thereby connecting the realm of the gods, the earth, and, through its roots, the underworld. It may also be strongly connected to the motif of the tree of life. Specific world trees include the one in Hungarian mythology (Világfa/Életfa), Yggdrasil (or Irminsul) in Norse mythology, the Oak in Slavic and Finnish mythology, and in Hinduism the Ashvastha.

But what can this one case tell us about similar experiences? It is tempting to speculate about such experiences, and draw parallels with shamanic traditions. At the very least we should (re)consider anomalous experiences in contemporary Western culture as having a pedigree and an historical context. To many contemporary investigators of anomalous phenomena there is no interconnection within the subject. Ghosts are ghosts. UFOs are UFOs. Never

the twain shall meet. Author and researcher Paul Devereux makes an interesting observation when he says:

*"In his book, The Archaic Revival, Terence McKenna reports his meetings with many traditional, tribal shamans around the world. He notes that shamans speak of 'spirit' the way a quantum physicist might speak of 'charm'; it is a technical gloss for a very complicated concept. It might therefore be best for us to not totally disbelieve in the reality of spirits and yet not automatically assume that they are simply the ghosts of the dead or beings from the Otherworld either. They may be part of a reality for which our culture does not yet have working concepts"*.

I think what we can take away from these experiences is that they show us that mysteries are not to be explained away, but entered into, a form of initiation, a way of seeing the world differently. We should not be surprised that there are bitter arguments over the reality of witnesses' experiences.

The impasse seems formidable until we abandon those extreme either/or positions. Most paranormal phenomena are ambiguous, and I think it is significant that they are often dream-like events. Perhaps they are special forms of reality which bridge the internal and external worlds. Because of their paradoxical nature, I sometimes liken the paranormal to the Taoists' 'Un-carved Block'. They are like fragments of a primal reality. Pregnant with a myriad of possible manifestations, before they are whittled and polished into intelligible shape by the way we process our perceptions and expectations. If this sounds mystical, so be it.

What experiences like this tell us is that anomalous experiences are merely the tip of a very large and very interesting iceberg that may have a lot to tell us about why these experiences happen, what they mean, what we can learn from them and more importantly, what we can learn about ourselves.

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In 1986 he founded Parasearch, an ASSAP-affiliated regional paranormal research group. He is also an Accredited Investigator for the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena and until recently served as a Groups Officer as well as being a director on its national executive committee. He is also a member of the Society for Psychical Research, Scientific & Medical Network, the Alister Hardy Society, the Ghost Club and the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies and is a committee member of the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies.

### **A Rose by any name is still a Rose: The nomenclature of the paranormal**

Yves Marton

In the long journey and distance between anthropology and parapsychology there is, in addition to a different approach to research, a distinct way of naming phenomena. The way that one names or even leaves nameless certain aspects of human experience, in the case of anthropology and parapsychology, is the subject I am very briefly addressing here. Furthermore, in exploring various domains parallel to these sciences, or which are investigated by them I have run into the manner in which different nomenclatures determine distinct groupings or a distinct sense of belonging.

Within anthropology, culture, diversity, authenticity or the deconstruction of identity are key concepts. Within parapsychology, the paranormal, psi, testing, validity, are central. Each science has criteria by which it assigns value. In anthropology the importance of vivid description and intellectual sophistication brought a sense of mastery to the writing of Clifford Geertz and many subsequent scholars. Within parapsychology, the

combination of detail, precision, dedication to and proof of veracity combined with a sense or rather an element of wonder (or of “paranormality”), made the writing of Dr. Ian Stevenson a paramount example of writing which inspired many outside the parapsychological community [1].

The use of distinct terms to refer to similar phenomena may be based in part on our point of view and the use we plan to make of the concepts that we are addressing. At another level however, they may become a type of proprietary device used to demarcate what is considered as belonging to our domain of study so as to keep elements, ideas and people outside our own territory and territorial claims.

Thus while anthropology prefers the term “shaman”, parapsychologists are quite comfortable with the term “medium” or “spirit-medium” [2]. While anthropologists in the present may refer to ancient knowledge, rituals with a significant amount of respect, parapsychologists will speak of efficacy, paranormal claims and procedures.

The fundamental term which places parapsychology outside of conventional science is evidently its preoccupation with the concept of and the use of the expression “paranormal.” Earlier on the current term was psychical. Anthropologists, folklorists and other social scientists have usually skirted around the issue, sometimes dipping their toe in the cold water of scientific and professional disapproval by borrowing awkwardly from parapsychology to create a variety of unusual pastiches.

Thus one finds an almost endless list of terms that were used at one time or another to refer to the paranormal, or more simply the “para” part of “parapsychology” and the “normal” or “natural” part of “paranormal.” “Psychic” and “Psychical” have been terms, beyond the pale, which have not for the most part been used by anthropologists as analytical tools, as opposed as emic concepts. The term “paranormal” has been in use for many years and was already utilized by researchers in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In one rare paranthropological publishing event, in 1946, Barnouw used the term “paranormal” in an early and original foray into parapsychology or psychical research by an anthropologist, in his article on “Paranormal Phenomena and Culture” (Barnouw 1946).

The modifying of the term may be an index of discomfort with the associations of being part of a “deviant science” (McClenon 1984) or it may indicate that one has a distinct approach to the concept which requires a modification in terminology, or both. “Paranormal” was taken up and changed to “supernormal” and also “supranormal” in the following instances. The venerable anthropologist, one of the “founding fathers” of the science, as it were, Robert Lowie referred to “the supernormal experiences of American Indians” (Lowie 1955). Eileen Garrett, the medium, research subject, writer and founder of a parapsychological institute, utilized the same term in 1949 in her biography “Adventures in the Supernormal” (Garrett 1949) [3]. The folklorist Ward referred to accounts of paranormal experience as “encounters with the Supranormal” (Ward 1977) and once again in 1987 as “Supranormal Encounters” (Ward 1987). Folklorist and others felt at ease with the non-threatening term, “supernatural”, referring as it often does to an emic category of what is officially perceived by social scientists to be a fiction about anything existing outside the scientific materialist view of the “natural.” The maverick folklorist Hufford used the term when he referred to “supernatural assault traditions” (1982) in his groundbreaking study of accounts of incubus experiences or night terrors. The folklorist Walker used the term in an anthology entitled Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural (Walker 1995). The anthropologist I.M. Lewis used the term to refer to the realm of the paranormal in his audacious, for its time, exploration of “The Anthropologist's Encounter With The Supernatural” (Lewis 1989 [1974]).

There are many other uses of an almost unlimited number of terms which have demonstrated the open-ended approach to this topic and to a certain extent the sense of bafflement and possibly awkwardness at naming what is both unnamable and at times disdained and marginalized. What is called the paranormal may be contiguous with what anthropologists and other social scientists have referred to as: supernormal, supranormal, supernatural, memorates, experiential, magical, a separate reality, shamanistic, anomalous,

terpsichoretrancetherapy, cultural practices (Argyriadis 1999), [4] experiencing ritual, Spirit presence (Turner) and other terms used by anthropologists. Other disciplines have also utilized other terms, psychologists having preferred the term “anomalous.”

It seems that we in the U.S.A. and possibly much of Europe have moved towards the cultural or I should say the non-Western pole of paranormal experience, in society as whole. That is, presently much of society accepts what used to be called paranormal, in the guise of apprenticeship to cultural arts, ancient traditional spiritual rituals, and healing forms from outside the Western allopathic and materialistic perspective.

The touchy relationship between anthropologists and parapsychologists did not only come from the anthropological side of the equation however. In the early 1990's I spoke to one anthropologist who had attempted to submit one or several articles for publication in parapsychological journals and who was rebuffed. The anthropologist stated to me that though he had made the effort to make a bridge between anthropology and the much maligned (from mainstream science) science of parapsychology, his work had been harshly criticized by parapsychologists who apparently had not appreciated his effort and who had treated his work (and the discipline he came from) as not “scientific” enough. He had felt that such an attitude did not warrant his persisting in trying to enter the closed world of parapsychological scientists, as he was quite at home with anthropology.

This points to the aspect of anthropology which can contribute much to psychical research, namely its open-ended, humanistic methodology and its serious attempt at going beyond cultural boundedness as well as ethnocentric and specifically Eurocentric notions of reality. As such anthropology in terms of its case studies, ethnographies and narrative and dialogical approach comes close to a complimentary fit with the descriptions of paranormal experiences contained in the writings of the early psychical researchers, and later the undervalued compilation of experiences, conducted by Louis Rhine, wife of the experimentalist J.B. Rhine. This is not to say that attempts to faithfully and objectively document paranormal phenomena (as opposed to simply reporting experiences) is not a worthwhile pursuit, but merely that there is already a large body of work and an established methodology for reporting

experiences that is well developed in both disciplines [5]. There have been few attempts within anthropology to actually document paranormal occurrences from an observational stance, seeking to approach scientific objectivity. There is in fact a certain degree of hostility towards such attempts, both from some humanistic anthropologists and also from mainstream scientists. A rare instance occurred in the work of Evan Vogt who tried to document the rate of success of folk “water witching” in his 1959 study [6] (Vogt and Hyman 1979 (1959)).

It is also true that the openness and humanism of certain elements in anthropology can sometimes veer into the currently popular ethical and philosophical relativism which is in fact antithetical to part of the scientific and paranormal scientific method. For if everything is entirely relative, there is no reason to pursue the truthfulness and validity of certain paranormal claims, for then all claims are equally true and false [7]. Short of this postmodern anarchistic reaction to the abuses of Eurocentric and “patriarchal” science, there is still plenty of room for maneuvering and benefitting from the common interests and subjects which parapsychology and anthropology share with each other [8].

Parapsychology and psychical research provides an almost unlimited wealth of recorded material that can be explored (once much of the undeserved stigma and condemnation is removed) and compared to ethnographic material to great benefit of both sciences. Conversely anthropology conveys, in some of its writing, salutary explanations about understanding and coming to terms with different ways of perceiving the world from the Western and/or Western educated model that contextualizes some of psychical research's foundational background.

#### Notes:

[1] Dr. Ian Stevenson however seemed to express reservation concerning being considered a parapsychologist. He wrote an article questioning the use of the term parapsychology as being wise for the evolution (and popularity among scientists and academicians) of such studies (SOURCE?). Nevertheless his work fits quite well into the methodology utilized by most parapsychologists in a general sense. The topic of his research “children who remember previous lives” and “xenoglossy” (the spontaneous speaking of unlearned foreign languages) make his work be firmly within the tradition of psychical research.

Interestingly one of his publications outside the realm of the paranormal, involved the methodology for doing case studies, within the medical paradigm (Stevenson 1971). As such his work exemplifies the connection between the scientific method and the approach and fundamental philosophy behind paranormal research as used by many parapsychologists as well as the early psychical researchers.

[2] The term “medium” has been used by some anthropologists who investigated Afro-Brazilian religions, as well as by some British anthropologists, possibly because of the greater continuity of the spiritualist and psychical tradition in the United Kingdom.

[3] She was also, I believe, the founder of the Parapsychological Foundation which published the previously mentioned article by Lowie in the journal Tomorrow.

[4] The anthropologist would not immediately think of cultural practices in this context, but the types of practices referred to, within Afro-Cuban religion and Cuban spiritism are replete with a concern with and a connection to the paranormal and to having access to paranormal faculties (premonitions, mediumship, trance, and the ability to change or perceive events at a distance in time and space).

[5] Within parapsychology and psychical research, such an approach was developed early on and to some extent abandoned, after the reframing of the discipline carried out by J.B. Rhine and others, yet the abundant literature and methods used are still with us.

[6] In one chapter of my dissertation in anthropology I included photographs of surgeries carried out by two paranormal or spiritualist surgeons, so as to document through observation as well as scientific or objective description phenomena and occurrences which seemed to go beyond the ordinary materialistic understanding of physiology and biology. Such an endeavour elicited the term “outrageous” from a social science / humanist scholar and a request in 2001 to remove the entire chapter from an anthropological member of my committee. Attempts to verify and test psychic intuitions were also carried out by the archeologist Stephen Schwartz

[7] We can avoid, hopefully the other extreme, the disdain for any belief based on personal experience, intuition, by those who state that only beliefs based on scientific or formal parapsychological proofs are worth “their salt.” Along this latter line of reasoning Ian Stevenson once stated that he would look askance at anyone who became convinced of the reality of reincarnation, solely based on the research presented in his book, as if personal belief always required rational proof, and that in a very large and explicit quantity.

[8] I wanted to thank the kindness of the staff of the Parapsychological Foundation in giving me in 1995 a copy of the work they published on Parapsychology and Anthropology.

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Yves Marton was born in France and emigrated as a child to the United States. He wrote his M.A. on the spiritual content of Dances of African Diaspora Religions, in 1986. He conducted research in cultural anthropology and a form of apprenticeship in Los Angeles, with Cuban and Brazilian immigrants, and in 1990 in Rio de Janeiro with spiritist mediums, and followers of Umbanda and of Candomble. He wrote his dissertation on anomalous experiences and phenomena among Brazilian spirit mediums, based on this research and journey. He has also written about the impact of Carlos Castaneda on anthropology (1994) as well as a brief article on America Leyva, an Afro-Cuban Santera who was helpful in his own journey. His interest in parapsychology and psychical research was stimulated by the thoughts of a renaissance thinker and artist, Mayuto, from Brazil with whom he studied in 1980's, as well as from ensuing study and visits to parapsychologists and parapsychological media producers in New York and in Rio de Janeiro. His present research involves mediumship, mysticism and comparative religion.

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## NEWS

Jack Hunter and Dr. David Luke are currently working towards editing an interdisciplinary volume on the subject of mediumship. Contributors include:

Assoc. Prof. Patric Giesler, Prof. Stanley Krippner, Prof. Charles F. Emmons, Prof. Deirdre Meintel, Dr. Diana Espirito Santo, Dr. Fiona Bowie, Dr. Bettina Schmidt, Dr. Hannah Gilbert, Dr. Elizabeth Roxburgh, Dr. David Luke, Jack Hunter, Fabian Graham, Emily Pierini, Tamlyn Ryan.

To find out more about the book, which will hopefully be completed by the winter of 2010, visit:

[www.talkingwiththespirits.weebly.com](http://www.talkingwiththespirits.weebly.com)

## EVENTS

**22<sup>nd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> July – 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Convention of the Parapsychological Association**, Enclos Rey, Paris, France. For more information visit:

[www.parapsych.org/convention](http://www.parapsych.org/convention)

**21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> August – Weird Paranormal and UFO Conference 2010**, Athenaeum Theatre, Warminster, Wiltshire. For more information visit:

[www.weirdevents.co.uk](http://www.weirdevents.co.uk)

**2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> September - International Conference on Myth, Literature and the Unconscious**, University of Essex, Colchester, UK. For more information visit:

[www.essex.ac.uk/lifts/events/Mythic.aspx](http://www.essex.ac.uk/lifts/events/Mythic.aspx)

**10<sup>th</sup> September - 34<sup>th</sup> International Annual Conference of the Society for Psychological Research**, University of Sheffield. For more information visit

[www.spr.ac.uk](http://www.spr.ac.uk)

**17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> September – 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Transpersonal Psychology Section of British Psychological Society**, Cober Hill, Cloughton, near Scarborough. For more information visit:

[www.transpersonalpsychology.org.uk](http://www.transpersonalpsychology.org.uk)

**24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> September - 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Exploring the Extraordinary Conference**, University of York, Department of Sociology. For more information visit:

[www.etenetwork.blogspot.com](http://www.etenetwork.blogspot.com)

**23<sup>rd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> October – The Fortean Times UnConvention**. More details to be announced, for further updates visit:

[www.forteanimes.com](http://www.forteanimes.com)

# Exploring the Extraordinary

Friday 24<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 25<sup>th</sup>  
September 2010  
University of York

2<sup>nd</sup> Conference

Keynote speaker:

**Dr David Clarke**  
investigative journalist, author and broadcaster  
on extraordinary phenomena.

Exploring the Extraordinary began in 2007 as a supportive network for those actively researching or interested in extraordinary experiences.

By extraordinary experiences we mean experiences that have been termed paranormal, supernatural, religious, spiritual, or transcendent. This includes, but is not limited to, psychic phenomena, out of body experiences (OBEs), near death experiences (NDEs), sleep paralysis, lucid dreaming, apparitions, contact with the dead and mystical experiences.

This interest also extends to the practices, beliefs and/or rituals that can be associated with these experiences. The network is firmly and positively multi-disciplinary and increasingly international and provides a supportive forum for new or early researchers.

exploring the  
extraordinary

Conference papers cover topics such as

- making sense of extraordinary experiences
- exploring spirituality outside traditional religious institutions
- bereavement, spirituality and transformation
- the ethics and consumption of mediumship
- the experiential – through mediumship, in research and spirit art
- making explicit interdisciplinary links e.g. between anthropology and parapsychology

Cost: 1 day £30 (£20 concessions), 2 days £60 (£40 concessions) Includes refreshments and lunch

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: 9<sup>th</sup> August, 2010

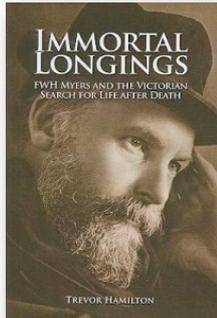
For further information and to register  
[ete.network@gmail.com](mailto:ete.network@gmail.com)

Go to [www.etenetwork.blogspot.com](http://www.etenetwork.blogspot.com)

 Find Exploring the Extraordinary on Facebook

# Reviews

**“Immortal Longings: F.W.H Myers and the Victorian Search for Life after Death” by Trevor Hamilton. ISBN: 978-1-84540-123-8. Price: £19.95**



The latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was a time of despair and hopelessness for many. “We were all in the first flush of triumphant Darwinism, when terrene evolution had explained so much that men hardly cared to look beyond,” wrote Frederic W. H. Myers, a Cambridge classical scholar and poet before becoming a pioneering psychical researcher.

As with so many other educated people, Myers, the son of a minister, had lost his faith, and life had become a march toward an abyss into nothingness. He recognized that there were many who were “willing to let earthly activities and pleasures gradually dissipate and obscure the larger hope” during life’s death march, but, perhaps because he was a deep thinker, Myers was unable to effectively use the defence mechanism called repression to overcome his death anxiety and the concomitant fear of extinction.

Subtitled “FWH Myers and the Victorian Search for Life after Death,” this book details the efforts of Myers and several of his colleagues to make sense out of various paranormal phenomena which seemed to suggest that the world is not totally mechanistic and that consciousness does survive physical death.

Although Professor William Barrett, a physicist, is recognized as the prime mover in setting up the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in 1882, he relinquished the leadership roles to Myers and his two Cambridge friends, Edmund Gurney, and Professor Henry Sidgwick. Their objective was to scientifically study the phenomena,

including hypnotism, telepathy, multiple personalities, and mediumship, to see if they offered any evidence that mind was not totally dependent on brain and that there is something beyond the five sense. But they had to do it discreetly, cautiously, and indirectly. “To admit the literal reality of the ghost was to move back to the dark ages,” author Trevor Hamilton explains their dilemma. There were simply too many “newly enlightened” people in the upper echelons of society who could not make a distinction between matters of the spirit and the superstitions of the church they had left behind and now scoffed at.

“It is too simple to represent Victorian England as a pious, fundamentalist land shaken by the advances of a materialistic and iconoclastic science,” Hamilton states, pointing out that the census of 1851 revealed that well over five million people did not attend church on Sunday, March 30, 1851. However, it was clear, Hamilton adds, that the educated middle classes and upper-middle classes were emancipating themselves from their evangelical roots as a result of the scientific and scholarly advances. Darwinism might have been the crowning blow, but this emancipation had begun well before Darwin, during the “Age of Reason.”

Drawing from Myers’ diary, short autobiography written only for his friends, and other references, Hamilton explores Myers’ early life and the influences which shaped his beliefs and disbeliefs. He acquaints us with his days at Cambridge, when he was called, “Myers the superb,” and then discusses his conflicting love interests as well as other trials and tribulations. He tells how Myers hooked up with Gurney and Sidgwick and how the three intellectuals complemented each other in various ways – Myers often brash and assertive, Sidgwick reserved and cautious, Gurney meticulous and somewhere in between Myers and Sidgwick in his enthusiasm for their mission.

The SPR exposed many fraudulent mediums, although there is controversy over

some of the exposures, including that of Madame Blavatsky. The mediumship of Eusapia Palladino was also very controversial, some members of the SPR convinced that she was a charlatan and other that she was a genuine medium, whereas the truth seems to be that she was a “mixed” medium – producing genuine phenomena at times and faking some at those times when her powers failed her. Theosophists, in the case of Blavatsky, and Spiritualists, in the case of various other mediums, argued that the researchers simply didn’t understand the phenomena and were applying terrestrial science to celestial matters which they didn’t understand.

As Hamilton sees it, Myers was caught in a Victorian dilemma. “One set of desires, the yearning for the immortal, spiritual universe, was opposed by another set, which was the wish for privacy and the hiding of any evidence that breached the unimpeachable façade of familial and moral behaviour,” he writes. “His need to prove and even preach survival was counterbalanced by his reticence over intimate evidence.”

That “intimate evidence” involved a number of evidential messages coming to him through different mediums from Annie Marshall, his great love of the early 1870s (although apparently a platonic affair because of her marriage to Myers’ cousin). When Annie killed herself because of her many frustrations, Myers grieved deeply. When he later married the beautiful and wealthy Eveleen Tennant, their marriage was troubled somewhat because of Annie’s communications with Myers from beyond the veil – communications which Myers kept private and were destroyed by his wife after his death in 1901.

Although not educated as a psychologist, Myers has been credited with developing a systematic conception of the subliminal self as well as a theory holding that telepathy is one of the basic laws of life. In fact, it was Myers who coined the word “telepathy,” previously called “thought transference.” As Hamilton points out,

Myers seems to have been ahead of Freud in exploring the subconscious (which Myers preferred to call the subliminal), although their theories bore little resemblance to each other. When Freud joined the SPR in 1911, he wrote an article making it clear that Myers' "subliminal" was not the same as his "unconscious." Hamilton quotes Aldous Huxley as saying that Myers' "unconscious" was superior to Freud's in that it was more comprehensive and truer to the data of experience. How much Myers influenced Freud is not clear, but there is little doubt that Myers' ideas significantly influenced pioneering psychiatrist William James. And yet, because Myers dared see a soul hidden in the physical shell, he is hardly remembered in psychology circles today as the prevailing paradigm remains the Wundtian approach, which holds that the only things that make sense are those which can be scientifically measured and quantified.

Myers died in 1901, a victim of Bright's disease. William James wrote that "his serenity, in fact, his eagerness to go, and his extraordinary intellectual vitality up to the very time the death agony began, and even in the midst of it, were a superb spectacle and deeply impressed the doctors, as well as ourselves."

After Myers' death in 1901, various mediums began receiving messages purportedly coming from him. Some of these messages were very fragmented and made no sense until they were collected and pieced together to make complete ideas. "The whole process seemed at times like a giant Victorian word game (anagrams, cryptic puzzles, strange puns and rhymes), of which, in fact, Myers and his colleagues...were inordinately fond," Hamilton explains. These so-called "cross-correspondences" were interpreted by other researchers as attempts by Myers, as well as by Gurney and Sidgwick, both of whom preceded him in death, to overcome some of the objections to mediumship, including fraud and telepathy. "[They suggested] a high level of collective design and purpose, implying character, intention and personality," Hamilton states.

One message for Sidgwick's widow, Eleanor, who had been very active in the SPR, read, "Now, dear Mrs. Sidgwick, in future have no doubt or fear of so called death, as there is none."

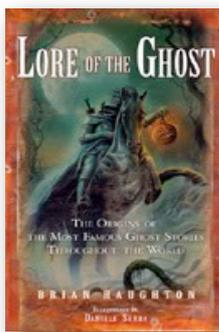
Hamilton concludes the book by asking if Myers' quest had been successful. "In personal terms it was," he opines. "'He became convinced, on the basis of the intimate sittings he had with both Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Thompson, that he had communicated with human beings (however different their nature and post-mortem existence) who had survived bodily death. This belief was underpinned by his wide ranging reading and research in paranormal and abnormal activity across Europe and in the United States. It led to him bearing the onset of death with a kind of joyous resilience, almost even insouciance...'"

On the other hand, Myers obviously failed in his wider hope of establishing immortality for the spiritually-challenged masses. While the search for immortality continues today, more than a hundred years later, the foundation established by Myers and his colleagues seems to be slowly but increasingly appreciated.

Hamilton offers us a very interesting, intriguing, informative, in-depth, and even inspirational look at one of history's most overlooked and unappreciated contributors.

Michael E. Tymn

**"Lore of the Ghost" by Brian Haughton. ISBN: 978-1-60163-024-7. Price: £11.99**



This new book from Brian Haughton traces the origins of some of the most famous ghost motifs from around the world. It is an original and thought-provoking book, which gives a long overdue and in-depth analysis of many famous ghost lore motifs. Brian does a fantastic job of tracing the folkloric and historical roots of many well known types of ghost – from the Wild Hunt and Women in White to Screaming Skulls and Phantom Hitchhikers.

Brian convincingly shows that modern reports of phantom horsemen have their roots in the Wild Hunt, from the Herlathing in England to the Cwn Annwn in Wales. Along with phantom horseman, the

spectral Lady in White is certainly one of the most enduring ghost motifs from around the world. She is often sighted alone in remote places, sometimes near stretches of water. Here Brian points out the similarities she shares with the Welsh Ladi Wen, or White Lady who is also often seen near pools and wells. It is this association that lends strong support to the notion that modern reports of White Ladies have much in common with pre-Christian chthonic deities.

There is a strong historical element running through this book, an element that, thanks to Brian's excellent research, strongly suggests that many of the reports of apparitional experiences we know so well today, have their origins in a pre-Christian past. This is a past that includes phantom black dogs as chthonic psychopomps and headless horsemen who have more in common with Sir Gawain and the Green Knight than many modern researchers are aware of, or would like to acknowledge.

Brian is expertly placed to write this book as he is a qualified archaeologist and member of the Folklore Society with a strong interest in the paranormal. Brian adds a feeling of someone who is extremely well read in the subject, and is able to guide the reader through a huge amount of historical literature with ease. This is not simply yet another book on the folklore of ghosts and apparitions. What Brian has done is to show that folklorists and cultural anthropologists are perhaps best placed to investigate the paranormal. Folklorists and cultural anthropologists have for decades been grappling with a phenomenology fairly similar in complexity to that displayed by most paranormal subjects. The central phenomena of almost any folk tradition may have characteristics which are seemingly of this world and others which are more ephemeral, dreamlike, mythical, paranormal or even supernatural. To emphasise one aspect over the other, or to argue from an isolated position condemning the others, is an exercise in futility. Narrative folklore accounts are judged to be the product of many forces; physical, social, political, economic, geographical, historical, cultural, psychological, mythical and religious (to name the most obvious), not the least among these being the sheer creativity of the human imagination. This is something that only a few researchers are beginning to understand and acknowledge. If anything, this new book only reinforces just how complex a

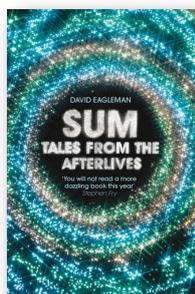
phenomena ghosts are, and how important it is that we move away from a purely equipment led approach to the subject.

This is a scholarly book written in an easy to read style which will have you not only eagerly turning the page, but seeing ghosts in a completely new light. As Proust said "The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.

David Taylor

**"Sum: Tales from the Afterlives" by David Eagleman. ISBN: 978-1-84767-428-9. Price: £7.99**

This short book has already received a huge amount of publicity and has been extremely well received in a number of quarters: with movie production rights, stage performances and celebrity endorsements



all swiftly following its publication. This is particularly interesting because the book's subject is by no means conventional. David Eagleman, a neuroscientist at Baylor College of Medicine, has written a collection of forty brief sections of prose detailing potential afterlife scenarios, each one being completely different to those that precede and follow it. Eagleman has stated that the book is the manifesto for possibilianism, a theoretical position designed to shed new light on the stagnant theist vs. atheist debate. Rather than adhering to a false dichotomy (either there is a God or there isn't), Eagleman prefers to hold numerous theoretical potentialities in mind at any one time, for instance maybe God is a "married couple" or "a species of small, dim-witted, obtuse creatures", or perhaps "we are a part of God's biology" and so on: the possibilities are endless. It is precisely this sort of creativity that makes "Sum" such an interesting and engaging read. Instead of numbing the senses this book induces awe at the infinite possible realities that surround and await us. This is a highly recommended read for its creativity and the intellectual refreshment that comes with it.

Jack Hunter

Reviews for future issues should be sent to [discarnates@googlemail.com](mailto:discarnates@googlemail.com)

## USEFUL RESOURCES

### Websites

Academy of Spirituality and Paranormal Studies

([www.aspsi.org/index.php](http://www.aspsi.org/index.php))

Afterlife Research Centre

([www.afterliferesearch.ingo](http://www.afterliferesearch.ingo))

Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Unit

(<http://www.lamp.ac.uk/aht/Home/home.html>)

The Anomalist

([www.anomalist.com](http://www.anomalist.com))

Anomalous Experience Research Unit

([www.york.ac.uk/depts/soci/research/aeru.htm](http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/soci/research/aeru.htm))

Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena

([www.assap.org](http://www.assap.org))

Australian Institute of Psychical Research

([www.aiprinc.org](http://www.aiprinc.org))

Erowid

([www.erowid.org](http://www.erowid.org))

The Esoteric Experience

([www.esoteric-experience.org.uk](http://www.esoteric-experience.org.uk))

Exceptional Human Experience Network

([www.ehe.org](http://www.ehe.org))

Exploring the Extraordinary Network

([www.etenetwork.blogspot.com](http://www.etenetwork.blogspot.com))

Koestler Parapsychology Unit

([www.koestler-parapsychology.psy.ed.ac.uk](http://www.koestler-parapsychology.psy.ed.ac.uk))

Paranormalia

(<http://monkeywah.typepad.com/paranormalia>)

Parapsychology Articles and Blog

([www.mind-energy.net](http://www.mind-energy.net))

Parapsychological Association

([www.parapsych.org](http://www.parapsych.org))

Parasearch

([www.parasearch.org.uk](http://www.parasearch.org.uk))

Psychic Science

([www.psychicscience.org](http://www.psychicscience.org))

Public Parapsychology

([www.publicparapsychology.blogspot.com](http://www.publicparapsychology.blogspot.com))

Rhine Research Centre

([www.rhine.org](http://www.rhine.org))

Scientific and Medical Network

([www.scimednet.org](http://www.scimednet.org))

Skeptico

([www.skeptiko.com](http://www.skeptiko.com))

Society for the Academic Study of Magic

([www.sasm.co.uk](http://www.sasm.co.uk))

Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness

([www.sacaaa.org](http://www.sacaaa.org))

Society for Psychical Research

([www.spr.ac.uk](http://www.spr.ac.uk))

Society for Scientific Exploration

([www.scientificexploration.org](http://www.scientificexploration.org))

Survival after Death

([www.survivalafterdeath.org.uk](http://www.survivalafterdeath.org.uk))

Transpersonal Anthropology

([www.paranthropology.weebly.com](http://www.paranthropology.weebly.com))

Transpersonal Psychology Section

([www.transpersonalpsychology.org.uk](http://www.transpersonalpsychology.org.uk))

### Free On-line Journals

**Edgescience** – magazine of the Society for Scientific Exploration – available from:

<http://www.scientificexploration.org/edgescience>

**Esoterica** - is a free electronic journal devoted to the study of Esotericism – available from:

<http://www.esoteric.msu.edu>

**Foundation for Shamanic Studies E-Newsletter** – newsletter for the FSS dedicated to the preservation, study, and teaching of shamanic knowledge for the welfare of the planet and its inhabitants - available from:

<http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs045/1101293452407/archive/1102003530108.html>

**MAPS Bulletin: Multi-disciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies** - focused primarily on assisting scientists to conduct human studies to generate essential information about the risks and psychotherapeutic benefits of MDMA, other psychedelics, and marijuana – available from:

<http://www.maps.org/news-letters>

**Psypioneer Journal** - contains articles on the personalities and organisations of Spiritualism in bygone days – available from:

<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/Decalogues%20and%20Principles.pdf>

**Rhine-Online: Psi News Magazine** – newsletter of the Rhine Research Centre – available from:

<http://www.rhine.org/newsletter.htm>

**Taste: The Archive of Scientists' Transcendent Experiences** - is an online journal devoted to transcendent experiences that scientists have reported. It lets scientists express these experiences in a psychologically (and professionally) safe space – available from:

[www.issc-taste.org](http://www.issc-taste.org)

**Wessex Research Group Newsletter** - exists to promote the work of individuals and groups interested in the study of consciousness. It contains a listing of the events for the month ahead and can accommodate short articles, book reviews and descriptions of courses – available from:

<http://www.wessexresearchgroup.org/newsletters.html>

## Other Journals of Interest

**Anomaly: Journal of Research into the Paranormal** - is ASSAP's bi-annual journal of record. It features in-depth articles of ASSAP research and investigations as well as other items of interest. While not peer-reviewed, articles aim to be of scientific standard but written in a more accessible style than most formal scientific papers.

(<http://www.assap.org/newsite/htmlfiles/Anomaly.html>)

**Anthropology of Consciousness** – publishes articles from multidisciplinary perspectives that focus on the study of consciousness and/or its practical application to contemporary issues. The journal supports rigorous and empirically-based inquiries into consciousness that utilize diverse methodologies, including ethnographic, scientific, experiential, historical, and alternative ways of knowing.

(<http://www.wiley.com/bw/journal.asp?ref=1053-4202>)

**European Journal of Parapsychology** - is a peer-reviewed scientific journal for research – particularly theoretical and theory-driven empirical work – relating to the field of parapsychology. The EJP's aim is to stimulate and enhance activity in parapsychology, particularly in Europe, by publishing Articles, Research Notes, Reviews and Comments that offer insight into or criticisms of parapsychological research. The EJP also publishes peer-reviewed Student Research Briefs.

(<http://ejp.org.uk>)

**Journal of the Society for Psychical Research** - has been published continuously since 1884, promoting the Society's aim of examining "without prejudice or prepossession and in a scientific spirit those faculties of man, real or supposed, which appear to be inexplicable on any generally recognised hypothesis." The *Journal's* contents reflect the wide range of our contributors' specialisms and interests and include reports of current laboratory and fieldwork research, as well as theoretical, methodological and historical papers with a bearing on the field of parapsychology.

(<http://www.spr.ac.uk/main/page/spr-publications-parapsychology>)

**Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural** - an interdisciplinary forum for the study of the preternatural as seen in magics, witchcraft, spiritualism, occultism, prophecy, monstrophy, demonology, and folklore. The journal embraces a broad and dynamic definition of the preternatural, since the very categories of magic, religion, and science are open and active registers that the journal strives to explore, contextualize, and challenge.

([www.preternature.org](http://www.preternature.org))

**Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture** - presents new perspectives on landscape, monuments, people and culture. The journal features scholarly work addressing cognitive aspects of cross-related disciplines such as archaeology, anthropology and psychology that can shape our understanding of archaeological sites, landscapes and pre-modern worldviews. It also explores how modern minds create images of the past, and addresses how new findings about prehistory can inspire current research on the brain and consciousness.

(<http://www.bergpublishers.com/BergJournals/TimeMind/tabid/3253/Default.aspx>)

## Next Issue

The next issue will be available in October 2010. Its theme will be “Paranormal Encounters in the Field”. If you would be interested in contributing a short article, roughly between 500-1,000 words (longer articles are also accepted), or an account of your own personal encounters with the paranormal while engaged in fieldwork, please get in touch via [discarnates@googlemail.com](mailto:discarnates@googlemail.com).

It would be good to get a discussions section started up in the next issue, so if you have any comments, criticisms or suggestions that you would like to be made public please e-mail them to the above address.

## Contact

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

## Acknowledgements

A special thank-you to everyone who contributed to this first issue – it would not be possible without the time and effort they have put into writing their articles. A big thank-you also to those who have read the journal – you make it all worthwhile.