# Paranthropology

The Spectrum of Specters: Making Sense of Ghostly Encounters

Ritual as Therapy: Steps Towards an Ethnography of the Invisible

# Paranthropology

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# Introduction

Welcome to Vol. 5 No. 4 of Paranthropology. In this issue Michael Hirsch, Jammie Price and colleagues take a sociological perspective on ghostly encounters, Matt Coward charts the changing contexts of witchcraft beliefs and practices, S. Alexander Hardison tackles the 'Complexities of Evaluating Evidence for "Psychic" Effects,' and Peter Mark Adams takes 'Steps Towards an Ethnography of the Invisible' through an emphasis on ritual and healing. Then we have a commentary on 'Progressivism, Materialism, Anthropology, Politics and the Paranormal' from Fortean Historian T. Peter Park. Park's commentary takes its impetus from Prof. Darryl Caterine's presentation at the 6th Exploring the Extraordinary conference, held in Gettysburg earlier in the year. Finally, William Rowlandson reviews Jack Hunter and David Luke's recently published survey of contemporary Spirit Possession practices, 'Talking With the Spirits: Ethnographies from Between the Worlds.'

The next issue (Vol. 5 No. 4), will be guest edited by our close associate Mark A. Schroll, and looks set to be an exciting and wide-ranging addition to Paranthropology's repertoire, which currently consists of over 135 articles.

As it is now over two years since the last Paranthropology anthology was published (which itself was published to celebrate the journal's second anniversary), plans are now afoot to prepare a second anthology that collects some of the very best articles from the last two years. More details will be announced within the next few months. We hope you enjoy this issue.

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# The Spectrum of Specters:
# Making Sense of Ghostly Encounters
Michael Hirsch, Jammie Price, Meghan McDonald & Mahogany Berry

## Abstract

Tabloid news outlets and television programs often sensationalize paranormal phenomenon. In contrast, we see the paranormal as a social fact, necessitating scientific explanation. We examine how 39 interviewees who claim ghost encounters make sense of their experiences. Most often, participants carefully sought explanations from family and friends to understand their ghost encounter. Others looked to religion and science. After disclosing a ghost encounter, many participants faced skepticism from family and friends and found their claims discounted. We compare the results of this research with earlier social scientific work on paranormal phenomenon and suggest more social science study of paranormal claims.

## Introduction

This paper explores the nature of ghostly encounters, how people make sense of these encounters, and how others receive this news. Goffman's work on stigma and presentation of self (1959, 1963) helps us to understand paranormal experiences. Goffman notes how impression management is complicated by the existence of damaging information about one's self. For Goffman, stigma is a mark or a blemish that reduces an individual from "a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman, 1963 p. 3). Individuals can be stigmatized by physical deformities, by group membership (race, religion, or tribe), or by blemishes on their individual character. An individual is socially discredited if his or her stigma is known. A person is discreditable if her or his stigma is unknown (held backstage by the stigmatized person) but remains discoverable. As a stigma is often a person's master status in the eyes of others, the management of stigma is of particular importance for individuals as they navigate through life.

In line with Goffman's work on presentation of self, after a paranormal encounter, people must decide how to manage their experience with family, friends, coworkers and strangers. The may fear people will view their experiences as a character flaw. They must decide if and with whom they will disclose this information. They risk stigma in a world that emphasizes rationality and science. Family, friends, coworkers and strangers may label them as mentally imbalanced if they disclose their beliefs. A person's paranormal claims may question their validity in all other aspects of their lives.

## Methods

We began this project after the lead author heard several ghost stories from a waitress in a restaurant that he regularly visited. The lead author found the waitress' stories so compelling that he asked to interview her in detail about her ghost experiences and, subsequently, he interviewed many others.

The lead author coined the term "ghost quieter" to describe the waitress. A ghost quieter sees the presence of a ghost as tied to unfinished earthly business. The ghost quieter helps the ghost complete this work and find peace, which releases the ghost's spirit and ends the haunting. Quieting differs from exorcism in that the latter seeks to expel rather than release an unwanted presence from a space (e.g., body, building).

Recruitment for our study began with the ghost quieter. Upon completion of this initial interview, she recommended others to speak with us. These interviewees recommended still others. This

technique, known as snowball sampling, yielded a significant proportion of our sample. As we discussed the study in conversations with friends, family and colleagues, additional people volunteered for our project.

Following the recommendations of Breno Martins (2013), we used interviews to learn about participants ghost encounters. After introductory questions, we asked participants to recount their ghost encounters. We then asked participants to describe how others responded to disclosure of their experiences, what resulted from the experiences, and how they made sense of their experiences. Along the way, we collected general demographic information.

The lead author conducted all but two interviews. Given the intimate experiences discussed, we did not audio or videotape the interviews. Instead, the interviewer took detailed notes. Most of the interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, with two exceptions. Two interviews with multiple encounters lasted two hours. On two occasions we followed up with an interviewee by phone or email for clarification. Three interviewees contacted us by phone, email or postal mail after the interview to provide additional data.

We completed 39 interviews with individuals who believe they encountered ghosts between years 2003 and 2013. The sample includes 30 women (77%) and nine men. At the time of the interviews, our participants ranged in age from 18 – 75 years. Twenty-six (67%) of the participants are White, seven (18%) Black, five (13%) were Hispanic, and one (3%) Samoan. Our sample includes fourteen students (36%), eight managers (21%), six professors (15%), a professional psychic, a retired teacher, a group home attendant, a maintenance worker, an administrative assistant, a waitress, a Wiccan priestess, an artist, an educational specialist, a person awaiting induction into the military, and an unemployed person. The participants' educational attainment ranged from high school diplomas to Ph.D.s.

# Findings

Eighty-two percent of our participants (n=32) reported multiple encounters with ghosts while 18% reported a single encounter (n=7). For some multiple encounters meant as few as two encounters, while for others multiple encounters transpired in the dozens (such as the ghost quieter and the psychic). For some, the multiple encounters sometimes linked to a discrete period of time or a specific location, while for others the encounters stretched over lifetimes and geographic terrains.

Participants experienced visual, aural, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile sensations. Many witnessed object movement (51%), apparitions (48%) or both (72%). Two participants' encounters involved proprioception-the sense of embodiment. Just over half of our participants told stories of numerous household objects moving of their own accord, such as doors, curtains, pictures and light switches. Participants also told of hearing voices and music from nowhere.

Almost half of our participants described observing a ghost. Participants often felt drops in room temperature and smelled perfume along with apparitions. Some participants characterize apparitions as dream-like; like a figure in a dream, between awake and asleep. Only two of our participants (5%) felt full proprioception; i.e., when a ghost inhabits your mind and body. Several participants discussed connecting mentally with a ghost whereby the ghost communicated instantaneously large amounts of information without words. However, full proprioception includes this and physical embodiment.

Regardless of ghost experience – object movement, apparition or proprioception - nearly all of our participants identified either a positive or non-threatening encounter with a ghost. As Nicki, an 18 year-old African-American student stated, "I think they're here for a reason and won't hurt me." (We changed the names of the participants to maintain confidentiality.) Some even perceived their ghosts as angels in their lives, which we will discuss later in the paper. However, three of our participants (8%) suffered a demon ghost who terrorized them. While several participants recounted fear from observing a ghost, terror from a demon ghost fails to compare.

Because we collectively tend to discount the aberrant claims of others when reported during altered states (e.g., intoxication, duress), we contextualize the ghost experiences of our participants. While sixty-four percent of our participants' encounters manifested during mundane or normal times in their lives, 18% of our participants' encounters presented during moments of crisis (e.g., the death of loved one, the end of an important relationship). Another 18% of our participants encountered ghosts sometimes during mundane moments of their lives as well as during periods of crisis.

# Ghost Identity

Most of our participants (59%) did not know the identity of their ghost. Some of these participants speculated that the ghost originated from the community around the house in which they encountered the ghost, or lived in the house previously. A smaller percentage (26%) of our participants recognized their ghost personally; a post-mortem apparition (Gauld, 1982; Rogo, 1974) of a grandfather, brother, mother, cousin or close friend. These encounters often occurred shortly after the death of their loved ones.

Many of our participants (62%) observed ghosts along with a friend, coworker, or family member. Tyrrell (1953) referred to this as "collective percipience" in his research relating ESP to ghostly encounters. However, we prefer the more sociological term co-presence. The co-presence often provided what scientists call inter-subjective verification. In other words, another person provided a check or a second reading on the participant's observation. Similarly, often (39%) a friend, family member or coworker, entered a space after the encounter and then also experienced the ghost. We call this serial verification. Here is how Veronica, a 42 year-old White student, described serial verification: "Every once in awhile we see a shape kind of thing that's not distinctive. My husband often sees it in the shop. I've seen it a couple of times in the house."

# How People Understand Ghost Experiences

We asked participants how they made sense of their ghost encounter. Sixty-three percent attributed the experience to them being "sensitive" to the energy of ghosts. The term "sensitive" is used in the paranormal community (e.g., Evans, 2002). It refers to a person that is open mentally, physically and spiritually to paranormal energy. Sensitive people tend to be more aware of stimuli around them and hence may see or sense paranormal activity that others cannot. Some of our participants explained paranormal activity as released human energy upon death. They suggest this energy gets stuck and sometimes the deceased can call upon this energy to communicate to the living.

Almost a quarter (23%) of our participants drew on a religious explanation for their ghost experience. Often this stemmed from a religious childhood.

Many of these participants detailed links to the spirit world from their religion (various Christian denominations) that made it easier to believe in ghosts.

Eighteen percent of our sample explained their ghost experience with an empiricist perspective. They would not have believed it had they not seen it themselves. And they cannot deny what they saw with their own eyes. Thirteen percent do not try to explain what happened. They just accept it. They do not think about it, or try not to. It just is. Or was.

# Life Impact of Ghost Experience

Because action is guided by the meaning we assign to objects, situations, and experiences, we tried to discuss any life changes that resulted from the ghost encounters with our participants. For half of our participants (51%, n=20), the ghost encounter seemed to leave no long-term impact on their lives. After numerous prompts, no discussion of this subject resulted with these participants. The other half of participants endured substantial impacts.

Fifteen percent of our participants sought help, such as with individual counseling with a mental health provider or a psychic or with quieting for the house where the ghost visited. Another fifteen percent engaged in behavioral modification to manage the ghost(s) in their lives. They avoided doors, rooms and houses; moved; or changed their sleep schedules. For most of these participants, these changes are ongoing.

Another 15% of our participants identified the ghost as a beneficial experience in their lives. For these participants, the ghost saved them from harm, comforted them, and "blessed" their lives permanently. Lucille, a White 50 year-old professor, explained: "It was important to me to have that experience because I was able to let go a lot of anger, and fear that was no longer necessary." Finally, 10% of our participants developed careers in paranormal energy related fields as a result of their ghost experiences such as a ghost quieter, natural clairvoyant, Wicca leader, and Reiki healer.

A majority of our participants (69%, n=27) reported stigmatization concerning their ghost experiences. Twenty-six percent of our participants (n=10) reported no stigmatization. In contrast, the sharing of numerous paranormal encounters became a mas-

ter status for two of our participants in the form of careers as a clairvoyant and a ghost quieter. Among those stigmatized, we heard numerous accounts of medical labeling as some version of "crazy" in response to our participants' ghost experiences, such as Sheila, a 20 year-old White student: "The ghost thing made me question whether I'm right in the head. I've been told that folks who've had such experiences had a sickness or disease."

Several participants feared the label of "crazy" so they simply did not share their story. As Rhonda, a 62 year-old White professor, revealed, "People in my family think I'm weird." Likewise, Lynn, a 40 year-old White professor, shared, "My husband doesn't know. He'd think I was nuts." This participant and another never told anyone other than our lead author. When initial disclosure of their experiences (discreditable information) led to expressions of skepticism by others, many of our participants learned to manage their fear of rejection by determining others' beliefs in ghosts before sharing their stories with them. We call this guarding. These stigmatized participants learned to "guard" themselves and their experiences in order to minimize further marginalization. They choose to share their story only with people who indicated reception to paranormal activities or who indicated their own paranormal experience. These stigmatized participants conducted their own mini-vetting process before telling, as Katy, a White unemployed 50 year-old, demonstrated: "I have told others but they have been hand-picked – it's not something you tell everyone." Charles, a 29 year-old African-American graduate student, echoed: "I've never really -- This story never really comes up with people who don't believe in ghosts. It comes up when other people are sharing their ghost stories."

Among those who report not experiencing stigma (26%), participants drew strength from self-confidence and validation from family and friends who either discovered the ghost along with them or had their own unique encounters. Of the ten participants who report not experiencing stigma, nine also report either co-presence or serial ghost experiences or family and friends experiencing ghosts at another location. This validation helps develop confidence in these participants.

Some of these participants believed they were not stigmatized because family and friends know and accept that strange events befall them frequently. While this label as strange might be perceived as stigma in itself, the participants did not seem to adopt it as

such. For example, Suzanne, a 49 year-old White professional, claimed, "I was talking to everyone about it but they all believed it would happen to me since strange things always happen to me." And Nicki, introduced earlier, proudly remembered, "My dad always told me I was different."

Others want to affect people's beliefs about the paranormal by sharing their story, as indicated by Lucille: "I know that maybe the telling of the story reminds people of their other world's connection. There is purpose and we are reminded." Similarly, Amy, a 21 year-old White waitress, expressed: "I figure the more people I tell the more they are likely to change their minds."

Finally, two of our participants moved beyond the stigma they initially withstood and built careers in the paranormal, one as a ghost quieter (this was not a paid career) and one as a clairvoyant. For these participants, their ghost experiences became a master status in a manner described by Goffman (1963 p. 110) as "minstralization." Our ghost quieter became her community's ghost confidant; the person you would seek for help with hauntings and the person you invited to speak publicly as an expert on ghosts. Police departments seek the clairvoyant's help in solving murders and family members and friends request his help in finding lost people. He also makes the rounds speaking to university classes and civic groups.

# Discussion

It is clear that interactions with ghosts are memorable experiences for our respondents. For most, the experiences were exceptional, whether they were singular in nature or part of a life-long series of encounters. At the time of our interviews all but one of our participants believed their experiences to be real and true (one participant later dismissed his experience as a childhood delusion or hallucination). Our findings are not surprising given that 90% of Americans believe in paranormal phenomenon (Markovsky and Thye 2001; Rice 2003). McCready and Greeley (1976) estimate that 18% of Americans experience paranormal activity.

To understand their experiences, participants turned to religious training, taken-for-granted understandings of the world, beliefs about psychic phenomenon, and family and cultural heritage. Much of the social science literature on paranormal activity draws on deprivation theory to make sense of paranormal experiences (Rice 2003). However, there is

not much empirical support for this theory, except for more women holding paranormal beliefs and more women experiencing paranormal activity (Greeley 1975; Fox 1992). Our participants' demographics do not provide support for deprivation theory, other than, similar to other studies, women represent 77% of our sample. Our sample is diverse on age, education, occupation, and disproportionately white; all of which refute deprivation theory.

In most cases, our participants reached for explanations for their experiences from family, friends and their community, which supports social impact theory as described by Markovsky and Thye (2001). This theory posits that people believe what those around them believe. People with influence strongly shape beliefs, especially if they are close by and if more than one person "believes." Many of our participants talked about how their religious beliefs from their childhood or from their current practices helped them make sense of their ghost encounters. Many participants noted that ghosts and other psychic energies were always around when they were growing up and were just accepted by their family members. This shaped their "definition of the situation" and their worldview. A subsequent ghost encounter is not defined problematically.

Participants who did not draw from interpersonal connections to explain their ghost encounters usually developed a quasi Humean explanation (Pinch 1979). They acknowledged that their paranormal experience fell out of line with conventional science. While they acknowledged a high value and belief in science, they also believed in their own observations, which they knew countered scientific explanations on ghosts. Like many of those studied by Goode (2000) they believe science and the paranormal can be reconciled.

From our study we learned that after a ghost encounter, people often face the skepticism of family and friends and run the risk of being discounted for their claims. While dramatic responses such as exorcisms are rare (but sustained by our ghost quieter), they believe most people share a larger cultural uneasiness with those who claim paranormal experiences. Most of our participants reported being guarded about sharing their stories with others. They carefully vetted with whom they disclosed their experience and then closely managed the information exchange and reaction. Some told to us that we were among the very few to hear their stories. The common fear of rejection among participants suggests that they believe they hold discrediting information

about themselves, information that should not be shared lightly with others. For two of our participants (the ghost quieter and the clairvoyant), the experiences became imbedded in a master status. Their paranormal experiences became their primary identity in their community.

# Directions for Future Research

We hope to see a revival of interest in the paranormal among social scientists. Back in the 1970's and 1980s there was a flurry of research on paranormal phenomenon among social scientists (Pinch and Collins 1984). Often though it was to estimate the frequency of occurrence, document beliefs, and identify causes -- as if to somehow access truth. That is, do ghost encounters really occur? If we know all the variables, can we make the event occur? And, thus, are respondents and participants in paranormal studies telling the truth?

We think future work should focus instead on the social construction of beliefs and experiences (Pinch and Bijker 1984). As Thomas (1923) pointed out, it matters little whether the assigned meaning is empirically accurate, for if "men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." For all but one of our participants these encounters were defined as real and had lasting effects on them. For some it changed their life paths. For others it changed their views on transcendence. Some have been stigmatized by sharing their encounters. Others actively guard against stigma by concealing a potentially stigmatizing past.

These aspects of these experiences are clearly within the realm of social science: How we make sense of the world; how we negotiate experiences that challenge our understandings of self and the world; how we carry discrediting information into our lives. All of these are worthy of study. We invite others to share in our exploration of this topic.

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# The Witch from "His-Story" to "Her-Stories": Changing Contexts

## Matt Coward

*Abstract*

The modern Witch roots their 'his-story' firmly in the practices of who they believe are their predecessors; the argued 'witches' of the burning times. Modern Witchcraft is much more than that these 'her-stories' seek to assert gender identity and socio-spiritual empowerment of their practitioners. The modern Witch understands their past, but more importantly, looks to their future.

## Introductory Remarks

The idea for this project was spawned from a general fascination with paganism[1] and the idea of what constitutes a Witch[2]. This paper aims to consider the way in which the conditions for adherents to articulate their beliefs and practices has changed; how it is that the understanding of and the conditions relevant to the Witch has changed. The layout of the following paper is two fold that leads into a concluding section; after the consideration of etymology and a *'his-story'* of witchcraft we turn to the present, to the *'her-stories'*. This will happen through the analysis of the research conducted for this paper.

## Mastering a Methodology

When studying a community within a specific context, the only appropriate methodology to adopt is an anthropological approach. Watson (2003:20) remarks that most of anthropology's contribution to academia comes from ethnographic fieldwork, which in turn leads to a deeper understanding of the community in question. Consequently this study will be formed around the responses from various sources. The main element that will form the basis of this study comes in the form of results and responses from a semi-formal qualitative questionnaire, which has been published through the Internet[3] for the purposes of this paper. From the very outset of this project it was the intention that participant response would form the basis of the study, due to the varying approaches to the religious practices in question.

The very nature of a self-completion questionnaire allows for the collection of data relatively quickly and effectively (Wallinson, 2006:87-8) whilst at the same time being cheap, convenient for the participant and reducing researcher influence, bar the phrasing of the ques-

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[1] The use of both the phrase paganism and Paganism is used within this paper. The term *paganism* refers to the fluid collectives of people who describe themselves as 'pagan'; whereas the term *Pagan* is adopted when speaking about specific individuals or groups.

[2] The capitalization of the word *Witch* is used in the modern context in cases where an individual voluntarily identifies as a Witch; within the historical information presented the word *witch* will not be capitalized as it is unknown whether or not these individuals were voluntarily identifying as witches or not.

[3] www.theyorkshirewitchproject.weebly.com

tions. As with the majority of survey research, there is an issue of low response rates and no opportunity to prompt participants for any further information – moreover data quality will always be an issue. Further discussion of the questionnaire and analysis of the study itself takes place later within the study; first, it becomes apparent the need to root oneself in the historical construct of witchcraft in order to be able to comment on the results of the data more effectively.

## His–Story

History, through the eyes of feminist critiques is, by its very creation is a patriarchal rhetoric; the historical witches are therefore part of a patriarchal story, a 'his-story'[4]. The following section seeks to explore the notion of the historical 'witch'.

## Definitions

The root of the word we know today as *Witch* was traditionally a feminine term. There is general consensus amongst scholars that the term *Witch* originates from the Anglo-Saxon Old English [O.E.] word *wicca* – which was thought to have been pronounced *witch-a* (Doyle-White, 2010:186). Doyle-White (ibid), Russell and Magliocco (2005:9768) agree that the words *wicca* and *Witch* derived from the O.E. word *wicce* meaning 'female magician or sorceress'; later uses of the term twisted it into a form of association with the devil. Today the word *Wicca* is now used to describe revivalist pagan movements who aim to reclaim the once lost heritage.

Doyle-White (2010:187) asserts that the word *wicca* has two distinctively separate meanings, the O.E *wicca* and the Neo-Pagan *Wicca*. Gerald Gardner for instance adopted the term '*Wica*' when speaking about Witches collectively – therefore suggesting that he associates the collective *Wica* with the O.E. tradition of *wicca*:

> I was half-initiated before the word 'Wica' which they used hit me like a thunderbolt, and I knew where I was, and that the Old Religion still existed (Gardner cit. Doyle-White, 2010:189)

Scholars believe that the original concept of witchcraft corresponds to the anthropological idea of sorcery, in which ritual is practiced in order to influence events (Russell and Magliocco, 2005:9768). James Frazer (1971:106) for example remarks that that women are commanded to stay in bed after giving birth, as within them they hold the power to bring about storms. This ability to control weather corresponds to the anthropological notion of sorcery and the ability for women, albeit for a short period, to influence events.

The word *Witch* and *witchcraft* are associated with many negative connotations and stigmas. Vivianne Crowley[5] (1996:3) states that:

> Recognizing the fear that the word conjures in the minds of many ordinary people…who persist in equating Witchcraft with black magic, it is a word which it might be thought tempting to discard. However, most Witches think this would be a mistake and an affront to those of our

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[4] The use of the term *his-story* has only come about from the coining of the term *her-story*. Her-Story, according to Princeton University (www.princeton.edu) refers to a history written from a feminist perspective. The Oxford English Dictionary refers to Robin Morgan's book *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970) as the first user of the term to describe the feminist organization W.I.T.C.H. (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) a group which sought to develop socially engaged feminism through the use of social theatre techniques.

[5] Author, university lecturer and High Priestess who was initiated into the Alexandrian tradition by their founder Alex Sanders aged 18, later joining a Gardenerian coven in London; Hutton (1999:373) remarks that Crowley was the closest heir of the Alexandrian tradition following Sanders' death.

ancestors who died for their beliefs. (Crowley, 1996:3)

Crowley (ibid) is therefore suggesting that the modern practitioner, at least in part, has forged an attachment with a word that may be perceived as negative. This negative word is being used in a process of reclamation for the participants to allow participants to forge their own personal understanding of the importance of their witchcraft within the 21st Century. Consequently as a way of moving forward it should be understood that the modern Witch feels that they have strong historical and emotional associations to the word 'witch' – the following section will explore the historical background to this in more detail.

# Overview of the Historical 'Witch'

What is it that the witch, as a spiritual practitioner, embodies? Mark Gaskill (2010:1) suggests that the word 'witch' describes someone who does not encapsulate the ideals of a society – the uncategorized 'other'. The witch might be the woman[6] who lives on the edge of the society alone, without friends and family, who might have a string of lovers – she becomes the scapegoated witch, the other.

Negative characteristics are those imposed by the society. Moreover it could, and has, been argued that the witch is in fact a representation of counterculture, a collective group of people who are not happy with the way that society is working. One example of this could be the reclaiming traditions of San Francisco who aim to regain their power and authorities both in domestic, personal and spiritual life through the craft (Salomonsen, 2002:35), which will be discussed further later. Though 20th and 21st century witchcraft might be described as a 'counterculture' or lifestyle choice, the historical 'witches' of the 15-17th centuries arguably, despite contrary perceptions, never formed a subculture. The ma-

jority's perception that these historical 'witches' enacted evil led to the unnecessary deaths of between 200,000 and 500,000 people across Europe during the 14th Century up until 1650 and of this figure approximately 85% were women (Ben-Yehuda, 1980:1). This period of aggressive patriarchal rhetoric within history, moreover the *his-story* led not only to the scapegoating of the female 'witches' but generally women being perceived as 'other'. The witchcraft Myth, according to Ben-Yehuda (1980:8), was the creation of a group of Dominican Friars. Up until the 13th Century CE the Church's policy on witchcraft was that it was in fact an illusion; however during the 13th and 14th centuries there was a shift in philosophy from that of Plato to Aristotle.

> Platonic thought allowed for the existence of natural, morally neutral magic between divine miracle and demonic delusion; but Aristotelianism dismissed natural magic and denied the existence of occult natural forces (Russell and Magilocco, 2005:9772)

Since, in the eyes of the Church, a Witch could not control the power of God as the deity of Christianity is omnipotent, and there was no area in which morally neutral magic could occur, the work of the Witch must be associated with that of the Devil. This Satan, or "the Satan" (Oldridge, 2012:21), meaning 'someone who obstructs' within the Old Testament, is not seen as an equal of God; there was therefore a wider tendency within Judaism to "propose the existence of an evil spirit opposed to God" (Ibid, 22). It was through Christian consolidation of pagan sprits that the 'modern' devil comes about – these natural and morally neutral spirits, the daemons, became the wicked demons and devilish forces of the Christian Church.

Nevertheless, there is another side to this argument, as the witch is someone who provides aid to the society; they heal the sick and aid those possessed with demons. Elizabeth Mortlock, for example, was a healer who was branded a witch

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[6] Historically the woman is more likely to be a witch (Ben-Yehuda, 1980:1)

in 1566 for healing through the use of Catholic prayers:

> Mortlock was branded a witch, not because she had physically embraced the devil…but because the church had labeled her a deviant. (Gaskill, 2010:29)

Mortlock is consequently part of a '*his-story*'; the aggressive patriarchal society which sought to see her scapegoated, demonized and is therefore classified as the 'other'.

Historically, the practice of a form of magic took place within most early communities, as there was a respected specialist who practiced various forms of healing for the community – the 'white witch'. From the beginnings of Christianity there was a definite hostility towards witchcraft, but it seemed that for most of history proceeding up until the 14th Century – there was relative peace.

> The early Christian Church expressed hostility towards the practice of magic – but the church tolerated it. (Gaskill, 2010:17)

## Witchcraft Trials of Yorkshire[7]

The county of Yorkshire holds a murky history of Witchcraft within its boundaries; legends still remain regarding the "mother goddess of fertility and rebirth, and [the] horned god of hunting and death" (Crowther[8], 1973:11). Bronze busts of the Horned God have been found said to have belonged to the Brigantes, who believed this deity provided fertility and the protection of heads and cattle (Hartley and Fitts, 1988:10). The horned god still lives on in Yorkshire, according to Crowther (1973:12); his god-like image remains no more, the horned hunter is now depicted as a goblin – this depiction, in the modern era, has been made famous by Wychwood Brewery's 'Hobgoblin ale'.

The mother goddess was one of power – her most famous names being; "Bridget or Brigantia" (Crowther, 1973:15); the Brigantes, named for her, inhabited most of the county of Yorkshire prior to the Romanization of England. Hartley and Fitts (1988) make note that since most documented evidence of the Brigantes comes from Roman sources, the term most likely refers to a collective of tribes larger than the Brigantes themselves.

This following section provides a brief overview of some of the cases against Witchcraft common in Yorkshire[9]. The first legal account of a witch within the county of Yorkshire occurs in 1279 (Rennison, 2012:100); John de Kerneslawe killed an unnamed witch who apparently entered his property. Rennison (2012:100) notes that during these early accusations, matters of witchcraft

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[7] Although there was a possibility to provide information on the witch trials of any county or that of Scotland, the reasoning for choosing Yorkshire is simple; historical materials regarding the witch trials of Yorkshire were readily available to a researcher living in the city.

[8] Patricia Crowther is one of few remaining peers of Gerald Gardner and Alistair Crowley. Initiated into the craft in 1960 by Gardner, Crowther later became High Priestess of the Sheffield coven on October 11th 1961 following her second-degree initiation. Currently Patricia Crowther lives in Sheffield with her husband Ian.http://www.themystica.com/mystica/articles/c/crowther_patricia_c.html

[9] Please see information provided in the works of Wallice Notestein (1911), Patricia Crowther (1973) and Eileen Rennison (2012).

were dealt with by the Church, therefore it is difficult to establish exact records or dates regarding these matters.

One of the few remaining sources of Witch Trials in Yorkshire comes from the *York Castle Depositions*[10] (Raine, 1861) of the seventeenth century. The first case of Witchcraft, which appears in this document, is case number [CN] VIII against Elizabeth Crosley and Others for Witchcraft during December of 1646 (Raine, 1861:6). Crosley is accused of causing harm to a one-year-old child. This is not the only case in which a woman accused of being a Witch is said to have caused harm to a child; for example in 1648 Mary Sykes (CN. XXII) is said to have appeared during the night whilst the family slept and held a child by the throat (Raine, 1861:28). The following year Margaret Morton (CN. XXIX) is alleged to have given a young boy some bread, after consuming he fell sick and withered until he could no longer stand; Morton was called upon to the house where she was pricked with a pin[11], it is noted that the Boy instantly became better (Rennison, 2012:75). Following the presentation of weak evidence Morton was acquitted of the crime (Raine, 1861:38; Rennison, 2012:76). The witch is therefore presented as an anti-image of Woman who is, arguably, traditionally seen as a caring and nurturing seeks to cause harm to a child – this presentation of the witch as Lilith[12] therefore presents the witch as evil, demonic and other. Furthermore Wallace Notestein (1911) remarks, within his thesis, that this was the most common type of case of witchcraft that presented itself within Yorkshire (the strange or unexpected disease or death). Asserting that:

> …it was easy for the morbid mother of a dead child to imagine angry words spoken

to her shortly before the death of her offspring. (Notestien, 1911:221).

Whilst most of the cases that appear within the depositions are for the charge of Witchcraft there was a fascinating case of a male sorcerer that appeared in 1663. The case against Nicholas Battersby (CN. CXIV) is not in fact a prosecution. Battersby, known to be a diviner, was enlisted by the Sheriff of York to divine whether or not the defendant Richard Readshaw had stolen money from Lord Fairfax. Battersby came to the gaol of the Sheriff and concluded that Readshaw was not to blame and that it was two of Fairfax's servants who had committed the crime. Battersby is recorded within the depositions as he had publicly displayed his art. But because of his services Battersby was compensated, Raine (1861:102) noted that he was given five shillings "for his paines in the said business" (ibid). Other cases that seemed to apply under the banner of witchcraft also included the use of charms; in the case of Mrs. Pepper in 1664 this was the use of holy water that was blessed by a Catholic to aid a man who was suffering from fits. Interestingly though, it seems that the only case within the depositions in which a person was rewarded for the use of the magical arts is in fact a man; Mrs. Pepper, for example was released without charge but not compensated for her "paines in the said business" (ibid).

The last case within the depositions in which a person is tried for Witchcraft is Elizabeth Fenwick (CN. CCXXVI) during December of 1680: "being a woman of bad fame for withcraff severall yeares hearetofore" (Raine, 1861:247), she is believed to have cursed the prosecutor's (Nicholas Rames') wife with a tormenting sickness. Furthermore the argument in this case is that Fenwick then pushed Mrs. Rames:

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[11] The pricking of a witch's finger was thought to relieve the curse of the Witch. (Raine, 1861:8)

[12] Lilith is understood as a female demon that seduces men and kills children. *Lil* according to Lesses (2005:5458) is from the Sumerian word for 'wind'. The wind demon seen as *succuba* and therefore "represents an antitype of desired human sexuality and family life" (Lesses, 2005:5459) – meaning that the representation of Lilith as demon comes from a Jewish fear of uncontrollable sexuality.

…on to the flower [floor]; and a blacke man, thinking [he] the deavil, and the said Elizabeth Fenwieke danc[ed] together. (Raine, 1861:247).

Following this event Fenwick was bled (as in the Morton case), and Mr. Rames stated that "if no further prejudice was to him or his wife he would not prosecute her" (ibid).

However, there were also more serious cases of witchcraft, such as the only legal Witch burning that took place in Yorkshire. Isabella Billington was burnt at the stake in York in 1648 (Crowther, 1973:47). Billington was executed during the penultimate year of Charles I's reign – which is unexpected as: "no reign up to the Revolution was marked by so few executions" (Notestein, 1911:146). Nonetheless within the history of York's witches there are records of women, including Old Wife Green of Pocklington, who were turned over to mob-rule and executed, through burning, illegally. This is the true extent of patriarchal *his-story*.

# Her-stories

The following section will deal with the idea of the 'legacy of witchcraft' within Yorkshire. The *his-stories* of the past are making way for the *her-stories* of the present. That is not to say that society is in any way post-patriarchal, but that the aggressive patriarchy of '*his-story*' has given way to a more subversive patriarchy, that within the context of the United Kingdom, can be understood as less aggressive than the past. Witchcraft is now being used as a method to aid the reclamation of gender identity as witches who wish to assert their own identity remain, in essence, tied to the aggressively patriarchal historical narrative about what constitutes a woman (Purkiss, 1996:39). Moreover women are therefore using their own historical legacy to forge plural '*her-stories*' of strength and survival for themselves within the modern era.

## Analysis of Survey: a Snapshot of Modern Witches

From the very outset of this project it was asserted that the responses received from the semi-structured qualitative research would aid to form the end result of the study. The response to this questionnaire was not as large as predicted. During the course of the research there were a total of nineteen (19) form entries, of which a total of thirteen (13) showed some attempt to complete the survey (this was usually the demographics section as it preceded the main body of the study). The remaining six (32%) participants engaged fully with the questionnaire providing rich qualitative data. These participants remained anonymous thought the entire process and therefore will only be known by their assigned code: A, B, C, D, E and F. The breakdown of demographic information provided will include the information from thirteen (68%) of the total number of form entries (100%).

All six participants who fully engaged with the questionnaire were female with an age range spanning from eighteen to fifty-nine years old who all resided in Yorkshire. All six participants, bar one, describe their sexual orientation as heterosexual, the exception being bisexual (participant [Pps.] A) – none of which noted that they had any dependants aged seventeen or under. Participants A to F mainly described their relationship status as a "long standing relationship", bar one participant who was single and one participant who was married. Every participant held a professional qualification (e.g. BA, RGN, DipHE), except the youngest participant (Pps. B), aged 18-19 who stated her highest qualification as A-Levels (an age appropriate qualification).

Each participant's personal practice differed widely, the most common being 'Pagan' which four of the six participants answered. It should be noted here that there was a flaw within the methodology and that it was not possible for participants to rank their personal practice in order; therefore it is not fully possible to ascertain if the participant in question was a practicing Witch with 'pagan-tendencies' or visa-versa. Yet, since five of the six participants in question stated that

witchcraft made up at least part of their personal practice it should be concluded that these participants would be deemed witches.

| Participant code | Personal practice descriptive |
|---|---|
| A | Solitary Witch; Goddess Worship; Pagan |
| B | Pagan; Wicca; White Witchcraft; Other, please specify [No Answer Entered] |
| C | Pagan; White Witchcraft; Other, please specify [No Answer Entered] |
| D | Pagan; Other, please specify [No Answer Entered] |
| E | Hedge Witch; Other, please specify [No Answer Entered] |
| F | Druid; Other, please specify [No Answer Entered] |

Of the six participants two thirds felt that they were stigmatised for their chosen beliefs. The most common form of stigmatisation came in the form of snide remarks to the participants by colleagues, friends and family and one participant gave the answer that:

> I used to have a career in professional health care and was made fun of because of my beliefs and I was told that I was not allowed to wear my pentacle necklace where as [sic] Christians and Catholics within the work place were allowed to wear their crucifix. (Pps. C)

Whereas another participant noted that her "colleagues and family members make silly remarks about my beliefs…" (Pps. E). The other element of stigmatisation comes from a fundamental misunderstanding, on the part of the general public, of the word 'Witch', a subject that has been discussed at some length above. Participant A notes that "some people often believe that the 'occult' is evil and surprisingly many still believe that paganism means that individuals and groups 'worship the devil'" (Pps. A).

When asked what their beliefs and practices meant to them personally all six participants felt that they had a connection with their beliefs and practices that permeated into their daily lives, arguably meaning that they were fully living and embodying their spiritual practices. Participant D, who no longer describes herself as a Witch, asserts that her Pagan beliefs "are a strong part of who [she is]" noting that the practice gives her stronger connections to nature (Pps. D).

It seems as though the legacy of witchcraft was a more complex issue, each of the six female participants approaching the idea of 'legacy' in a different way. Below is a table of their responses located alongside their participant code.

| Participant code | Participant answer to Q.13 "What, personally, does the phrase 'the legacy of Witchcraft' mean to you?" |
|---|---|
| A | First of all I think it is a lovely phrase in which invokes a deep connection to those who have also embarked on this path historically and how their lessons, suffering and successes play a part within our own development. A legacy is something which should not be forgotten but remembered and celebrated. It is something from the past that is continued in the present and will hopefully be passed down and developed in the future. |
| B | Witchcraft has always been ingrained in European culture especially. It is important to be aware that witchcraft has such a legacy, and such scope.. People always refer to the burning times and the prosecution of witches; but I think it is far more important to see that witchcraft has survived and still grows. |
| C | The phrase means to me - working toward a goal so that our religion is preserved and nurtured for further generations to come. |
| D | What the 'forefathers' (Doreen Valiente, Gerald Gardner etc) have passed down to those of us who currently practice witchcraft, and also the cultural memory of the witch trials and persecution in the past. |
| E | What witches have handed down over the years |

| F | To be brutally frank, nothing, I'm afraid ... |
|---|---|

## What is the Legacy of Witchcraft in Yorkshire?

From the findings of the research discussed previously it can be seen that there are several main sections that have influence on the lives of the modern witch in Yorkshire. These elements will be discussed briefly in the following sections.

### Stigmatization

The bloody history of Witchcraft worldwide has meant that the witch has become something to be feared. Ronald Hutton remarks that when Wicca has been released to the public, several newspapers compared it to nothing more than Satanism (1999:253); moreover during the course of his research Hutton notes that his well-educated scholars are more preoccupied with the economic status of the Witch and why they are motivated to embark on that chosen path (Hutton, 1999:271). Stigmatization refers to persons being disgraced by being associated with a particular circumstance. In regard to witchcraft and the media, "Media representations of new religious movements tend to be negative, characterizing them as 'cults,' wacky or deviant…" (Berger and Ezzy, 2009a:503).

Within the research conducted for this study two thirds of participants felt that they had been stigmatized for their beliefs and practices. These stigmatizations ranged from friends' offhand comments about the practitioners' beliefs to work-based harassment in which practitioners wearing a symbol of their religion (in this case a pentacle) have been told to remove it even though their colleagues from mainstream religion are allowed to wear those. Following some investigation into the precise code of dress within the NHS there seems to be no definitive answer to the question of wearing religious symbols and that policy can vary from trust to trust. According to the NHS Mid Yorkshire Hospital's *Trust Dress Code & Uniform Policy*:

Religious symbols may be worn discreetly provided they comply with health and safety, and infection control guidelines. (Ward, 2012:6)

However, neither Ward's document (2012) or the Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust's document *Guidance on Religious/Cultural Dress and Jewellery* (2008-9) recognize either Witchcraft, Wicca or a Paganism as a spiritual path which, arguably, can lead to further stigmatization of healthcare professionals who follow an alternative religious path. In essence, Hutton (2010:244) remarks, magic and religion exist as "different points on a single continuum" meaning that it is up to the society to decide if they should be homogenous, overlapping or completely separate from what is recognized as traditional religion. Along similar lines Participant B noted that within her studentship at University she has found that others find her beliefs and practices hard to accept; alongside this her Roman Catholic family do not understand her personal spiritual choices. There is not just a stigmatization present but a grave misunderstanding of the notion of witchcraft as evil; one example of this form of stigmatization comes from Participant A who notes that "I have also came[sic] across those who believe that magic is inherently evil or bad regardless of the intention".

The Understanding of the word 'Witch' within a contemporary society is miles away from the understanding presented within the 17th Century. Whereas the historical witch was a scapegoat, often from the lower classes, the 21st Century which is a self-definition by mainly middle-class people who have freedom of choice and enjoy a personal pathway. However, the latter acknowledges the former as ancestor and forerunner, partly due to the latter being critical of the aggressive authoritarian patriarchy that resulted in the deaths of the 15th-17th Centuries and less severe, but nevertheless still noticeable, effects today. Within the case of Salem in the USA during the 17th Century and the European Witch Craze it was noted that the Witch usually derived from a low socio-economic status; Boyer

and Nissenbaum (2011:294-5) assert that within Salem the accused in most cases were referred to by a lower social title such as 'Goodman' as was the case with Rebecca Nurse who was hung on a charge of Witchcraft in 1693. Moreover high standing members of society who were accused such as Mr. Daniel Andrew managed to escape the charges, arguably due to their higher social status (ibid, 292). Yet within the geographical situation of modern Yorkshire, the witches are seen to have moved into the middle class, with all six participants holding academic qualifications suitable for their age, some of which have careers within the health or education sectors. However, the upward social mobility of the modern Witch could be purely down to the increasing privatization of religion, leading to people not questioning an individual's spiritual practices; Giddens (cit. Berger and Ezzy, 2009a:501) asserts that "self-identity today is a reflexive achievement" (ibid).

## From Her-Stories to Identities

Wicca, it has been argued, is at the forefront of the Pagan revival leading the way and breaking through into popular culture during the 1990's – American television programs such as *Charmed* and *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* can still be seen daily on British television. Interest in the traditions including Witchcraft and neo-Pagan movements, though, has moved into a new stage – one of consolidation. The once rapidly growing community has now plateaued and has led to an attempt to build a stable community (Berger and Ezzy, 2009b:166). According to Berger and Ezzy's study of internet tag lines the internet searching of the word 'witchcraft' has steadily declined between 2004-2008, though more than anything else, they note, this information only provides an insight into inquisitive individuals not participants (Berger and Ezzy, 2009b:168).

Diane Purkiss (1996:31) suggests that the word Witch within the United Kingdom is not a reminder of a past that is unknowable, but is part of the practitioner's living identity; moreover within the research conducted as part of this study several participant responses suggest that

this is also the case. Participant D for example asserts that the legacy is "what the 'fore-fathers'…have passed down to those of us who currently practice witchcraft" and that there is a "cultural memory" of historical misdemeanors of 15th-17th Century societies aggressive patriarchy. Furthermore a stronger declaration is presented by participant B, who proposes that although it is important to remember the historical legacy of witchcraft the more significant factor is that society "see[s] that witchcraft has survived and still grows"; and that a *her-story* is still developing through the modern era. The modern witch therefore sets her roots within the soil of her social history but in essence uses it to allow for personal spiritual and communal growth; something that can be seen within the Reclaiming Collective of San Francisco.

Within *Enchanted Feminism* (2002) Jone Salomonson provides an interesting insight into the way academics understand Witchcraft. The American tradition of the Reclaiming Witches of San Fransisco (SF Collective) are an informal community of people loosely organized into various cells (Salomonson, 2002:34) in which they operate on a nonhierarchical basis that operate as a network rather than a 'church' in formation. The community is not in essence closed but it has been noted that 'Witches do not actively proselytize' (Salomonson, 2002:46), and this is common within most Wiccan and neo-pagan communities. Yet it is this communal identity that could be seen to bind the witches into a transnational community that Starhawk describes as the:

> Witch's support group, conscious raising group, psychic study centre… the bond is, by tradition, 'closer than family': a sharing of spirits, emotions and imaginations. (Starhawk, 1995:35)

These aspects, at least in part, can be seen by the way in which the participants within the study engage with their spiritual practices. Participant A acknowledges that she is on a "spiritual journey" that interacts, for her, on both physical and emotional levels. Participant A's personal practice

consequently rests on the ability to reflect and gain from personal experience and self-acceptance; furthermore she looks to her spirit helpers for guidance and their advice. Witchcraft and Wicca are the therefore based on the single moral precept, the Wiccan reed; *if it harms none, do what you will* (Crowley, 1996:5) sometimes also recited as *do what thou will, but hurt none*. The practice of witchcraft varies, there is no central institution, and no dogmatic practices that govern the beliefs and practices of witchcraft as a whole (Berger and Ezzy, 2009a:503). Furthermore the Witch, as Purkiss (1996:39) argues, does not see diversity as a problem, but it in fact revives them and allows for greater freedom of spiritual practice than that they would find within an organized religion – as is much the case with the SF Collective.

# Our-stories

The modern Witches bears witness to the '*his-story*' of those who have come before; yet seeks to stride out to fully reclaim the tradition for themselves; to allow the Witch to create '*her-stories*'. The majority of self-identifying Witches are socially empowered females; which arguably, associates itself with a feminist rhetoric. Yet, modern Witchcraft can be seen a collective, it is a neutral ground for all practitioners to engage in freely as they choose, to allow free ground to respond to the '*his-story*' of the past. As Purkiss (1996:31) stated, "witches themselves do not see diversity as a problem…". It is this social-spiritual religious identity, which allows the Witch to strive to engage in their personal spiritual path that relies, partly, on both the '*his-story*' and '*her-stories*' of their predecessors and peers respectively. Whereas the '*his-story*' is singular there is a plurality of belief and practice of the modern Witch meaning that alternate '*her-stories*' can unfold. Therefore this modern Witch collective moves to create rhetoric of unity and communal identity – the '*our-stories*' of futures to come.

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# The Complexities of Evaluating Evidence or "Psychic" Effects: Spontaneous Case Research in Parapsychology and Some Considerations for Progression

## S. Alexander Hardison

The first movements of the table were markedly similar to those from the previous sittings, causing all the sitters to rise from their chairs. The pervading smell of incense, relaxing yet not intoxicating, and the light from a 60 watt red-bulbed lamp filled the room. A sudden depression in temperature had been felt by those present and recorded by the self-registering thermometer – this was accompanied immediately with the table, which was tipping moments before, ignoring the laws of gravity altogether. It levitated a total of three times.

Later in the sitting, the lighter "Crawford" table was borrowed from the adjacent room. The table, which seemed to behave like an adolescent teenager with a temper-tantrum, struck Mr. Harry Price in the chin and eventually fractured into pieces, being reduced down to "little more than matchwood." Full red-light was employed throughout the seance, with daylight being introduced at one point (Turner, 1973, pp. 79-82).

As it is, many people claim to have experienced phenomena that appear inexplicable to them. Self-reports of extraordinary experiences vary greatly. Indeed, the self-assurance with which individuals report witnessing a paranormal event of any kind depends on several factors. These can include:

The competence of the witnesses, the reported conditions under which any given phenomenon was observed and the claims being made about the cause of the occurrence. All these can influence the reader's perceptions of the event(s) in question. Numerous causes can be behind any given phenomenon, but whether or not those propositions are accepted depends on how applicable they are to the belief systems of the percipient(s), or the beliefs of those who examine the claims that did not personally witness the experiences that they're based on. The opening paragraph, which summarizes part of a seance with the historical medium Stella Cranshaw, is a good launching point for this dissection.

A table appears to move on its own, levitating and eventually fracturing in an unnatural way. The mechanisms which caused the supposed anomaly are elusive and without direct evidence of causality, whether psychic or otherwise, one is simply donning whatever hypothesis their belief system permits onto an unexplained phenomenon (i.e. The cause is not a, or b, so it must be c -though, theoretically, it could be d). That said, one might get closer to deducing the cause, or at least some contributing factors, of a purported paranormal phenomena by analysing certain features that accompany their expression. This has been a key aim of parapsychologists for a great deal of time, yet most of the correlates noticed in the past (i.e. Between psi and creativity) have proven inconsistent (Irwin & Watt, 2007, p. 77).

The absence of any obvious mechanism in the production of supposed psychic effects is one of the main criticisms leveled against allegations of their veracity (Stenger, 1997). It has been the aim of many parapsychologists and researchers who believe they've stumbled upon an effect that is outside of current mainstream scientific knowledge to rule out potential natural artifacts,

thus suggesting that something supernormal could be occurring. No alternative explanations exist that circumvent the beliefs of everyone interpreting the phenomena, otherwise the proposed explanations would be largely unquestioned and accepted in mainstream academia. Because of this, numerous possible paranormal and normal explanations for the observed effects are offered, regardless of their tenability; people fill in the gaps, whether by approaching the subject from a position of absolute belief, disbelief, or somewhere in the ever-elusive middle ground of stress, tearing one's hair out and exorbitant doses of whiskey.

Consider this:

Someone approaches a person on the street and introduces themselves as an "amateur mind-reader." With a bit of patter and charismatic presentation, they instruct their victim to think of a word, any word they like, and then to change their mind to something else. They are instructed to change their mind again (if so desired). Slowly, but surely, the apparent miracle worker divines the person's final word, letter by letter. A believer in the paranormal might say that the mind-reader demonstrated psychic functioning. A skeptic of the paranormal might suggest that the over-confident mind-reader used any number of techniques in the domain of mentalism to arrive at their result. But, suspecting the modus operandi does not demonstrate it as being what was used and either one of the deductions could be right. Even if one were to rule out the explanations that they believe may have created the result (i.e. Divining a thought of word), we'd only be able to say what that demonstration was not. And without knowledge of the methods used on any given occasion effects can only be studied indirectly (at best).

The above said, it must be noted that blanket explanations for claims of paranormal phenomena will not do, such as "it's all fraud, wishful thinking and misinterpretation", as causes will necessarily vary on a case by case basis. These, again, can range from something currently unexplained in terms of widely accepted scientific knowledge to the more mundane culprits. The issue of finding out what's going on in the data, in spontaneous cases and in experiments with psychic claimants is infinitely more complex than a passing glance would suggest. Usually when people interpret purported evidence in favor of a controversial topic such as psi, potentially an anomaly in science, an altogether one-sided approach is adopted.

To get past the problems briefly outlined in regard to how evidence is appraised and considered, the issues will have to be approached with more intensity and novelty. The relevant issues are how to get past the fallacies of subjective interpretation, something that is always present, and really evaluate the details of each case in question effectively, assessing all the facts and forming a reasonable conclusion. Additionally, it's very important that any genuine paranormal capacities are given the opportunity to stand out more. Meticulous approaches to both well-trodden and newer areas of inquiry may help narrow down the potential causes, at least on a case by case basis. Not that such meticulous research in parapsychology has not been done in the past (indeed, the literature is full of it), but in attempting to infer the likely unidentified cause in any circumstance, one will need to draw on every possible method of documentation and control to stimulate inquiry and reduce criticism. It is important to work toward removing the intense divergences between subjective interpretations in relation to some of these areas.1

The stalemate that psychic claims have come to reflects the historical problem in dealing with ostensibly extraordinary phenomena outlined by Lamont (2013). In short, people have observed extraordinary events and come to wildly different conclusions about their cause, their authenticity (or lack thereof) and their potential benefits or detriments. In each given case, both proponents and skeptics tend to highlight whatever factors positively contribute to their respective interpretations of the events in question, whilst minimizing or omitting altogether those observations which run contrary to them. In this way, accounts of what occurred on any given occasion are presented in ways that are designed to make

them convincing and beliefs, whether positive or negative, are eventually formed. Additionally, claims of expertise are often made to demonstrate a greater competence in assessing the event(s) in question than that of those who offer different explanations for them – a social phenomenon that Lamont calls "avowals" of prior belief or skepticism.

For psychical research in its broader context, this is a difficult problem to circumvent. By turning on the television to many popular television shows, or even browsing the internet, there exist no shortage of self-proclaimed "experts" purporting knowledge in these subjects. These range from persons who spend their time chasing their shadows in the dark, to those who produce media challenges aimed at "skeptically testing paranormal claims" under thinly veiled pretenses of honest and impartial inquiry. Charles Honorton (1993) once wrote, "the psi controversy is largely characterized by disputes between a group of researchers, the parapsychologists, and a group of critics who do not do experimental research to test psi claims or the viability of their counterhypotheses."

While it can be argued that critics have often researched paranormal claims and come to negative conclusions (i.e. Houdini, 1924; Radford, 2010), it can certainly be affirmed that replication attempts of the most promising lab experiments in parapsychological literature have been pursued predominately by parapsychologists. This is possibly because such lab experiments are often subjected to hostile criticism, usually require a lot of effort and resources and they can fall victim to the same issues with interpretation outlined in the previous paragraph.2 Also, there is the popular stigma and disdain in academia toward the concept of psychic phenomena.

Ironically, while lab research has perhaps given parapsychological interpretations of anomalous experiences one of their strongest measures of support in the last half century, it may not be the most promising area of inquiry – at least in its current incarnation. Spontaneous case research and lab research have always been regarded as different areas of inquiry, each with

their own benefits and detriments. But, one possible means forward is continuing attempts at blending them together. One would hope to capture the natural-elements of spontaneous experiences under conditions which, ideally, capture the rigor of a well-conducted laboratory experiment.

As an example, at the beginning of my own research, I opted to conduct experiments into hypnosis, developing automatisms in hypnotized subjects and exploring the concept of inducing experiences of "communication with the dead" (Hardison, 2013). This was originally an attempt at working on an exploratory method for inducing states conducive to mediumistic experiences, but evolved into a process of using such states to develop motor automatisms in a short span of time. In principle, such automatisms could be used for research, self-exploration and even grief therapy.

Perhaps, as Frederic Myers suggested (1903), experimental methods such as hypnosis can be explored in greater depth in the hope of eliciting "psi" phenomena. Methods, such as Moody's updated psychomanteum (1993) and even sensory deprivation methods like the Ganzfeld, might be modified for the purpose of developing motor and sensory automatisms in subjects. If talented subjects are found or produced through these methods, it doesn't seem to be much of a practical leap in studying whatever may spring from them. Perhaps researchers can develop subjects along the pathways they are most interested in studying (hypnosis could really be an underused tool in parapsychology today; see Cardena, 2006). It is hard to know what will be discovered unless experimental methods, both past and present, are considered, examined and put to the test for more purposes than standard target-guessing.

In accordance with the above, the prospect of focusing on developing subjects for experimentation has several benefits. Primarily, those participants are not only contributing to the study of whatever grouping of phenomena a researcher hopes to document, but they're exploring their own consciousness as well. For example, Moody's famous restructured psychomanteum, as men-

tioned above, offers an obvious model of this in practice; it has demonstrated therapeutic and experimental benefits. Most importantly, one should not become short-sighted, or limited in how they use the tools and resources they have. Innovation, both in concepts, ideas and methodological applications, are the main things that will push parapsychology forward.

The early years of psychical research showed marked advances in theory and methods for studying psychic claimants, but at some point major theoretical progress was largely halted. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the question of Survival vs. Living Agent Psi ("Super-Psi"), since people are still peddling out modestly expanded variations of the same arguments that the founders of psychical research were making as the 20th Century approached (Myers 1891; Podmore 1910/1975; Gauld 1982; Cook 1987; Braude, 1992, 2003; Sudduth 2009). It may be that the pursuit of this question should be made into a secondary pursuit until after psychic causes are indisputably shown to be at the root of many anomalous experiences. Smaller issues confronting parapsychology need to be addressed, such as achieving firm establishment as a science and showing beyond any doubt that "psychic" effects take place at all, before moving onto the greater philosophical questions. But, in passing, perhaps the best way to approach the survival question is to place it into a larger context in relation to the mind/body problem, as Myers stressed (Kelly, 1994).

Looking beyond the survival question, Parapsychology will never be firmly established as a respectable science until it is accepted as the field where the real expertise regarding the study of ostensible paranormal experiences can be found. It is often portrayed by those who hold it in low regard as a science as equivalent with astrology, UFOs, numerology, Bigfoot and a wide array of other highly controversial topics (Hansen, 2001). As long as psi phenomena are popularly lumped into such a domain, the study of such things, coupled with the suggestion that they may be unexplained, will continue to be regarded with contempt by the mainstream. To mend this, conflicting beliefs about extraordinary events will have to be looked beyond by those on both sides of the debate, in a genuine pursuit of the truth; this happens to be something far easier said than done.

The field has been largely driven forward by complex, driven and engaging personalities. People such as Harry Price, the early SPR founders, Rhine, Morris and others like them certainly fit the bill; they understood that being actively involved in publicly debating their critics, then pushing for higher qualities of evidence and discussion were necessary for consideration of the field as a genuinely "scientific endeavor." Parapsychology needs far more of this sort of publicity and drive.

To effectively combat critics, both inside and outside of the field, appeal must be made to the audience's reasoning capacities in effective ways. Ignoring critics and just considering them as closed-minded victims of their world views will be a much less effective approach than actually engaging them on their own platforms. Manipulating and having a far-stronger media presence is one way of doing this, though progress in this area is slow and over-shadowed by "pop-culture paranormal enthusiasts" on one hand and die-hard cynics on the other (though there does exist a minority of knowledgable and balanced skeptics who have some media-presence).

If the issues are to be resolved, regarding whether or not supposed psi effects are genuine, means of adequately documenting and sharing the proceedings and results with the public must be explored. This is particularly important regarding anything suggestive of macro-psi phenomena. For example, there is little excuse, in a modern context, for not training multiple security cameras on someone who claims to be able to bend spoons with the power of their mind alone. This won't prove that no trickery occurred, but it will circumvent certain observational problems and, most importantly, the problems associated with memory recall regarding the proceedings (Hodgson & Davey, 1887; Wiseman and Morris, 1995).

Additionally, the controls that are in place if something occurs will be observable via video media, rather than relying on testimony – poten-

tial sources of error or weak points in the controls would be easier to assess. It may prove useful to document every aspect of an investigation or experiment with video recording apparatus. When possible (dealing with apparent "macro-psi" effects), live streaming the proceedings would appear to exclude any tampering with footage, as would inviting the presence and scrutiny of independent researchers.

From there, it would be pertinent to robustly present such evidence to both the population and the scientific establishment. Publishing in peer-reviewed journals may be an essential aspect of a reputable case in favor of paranormal functioning, but it probably is not enough for modern audiences, especially when dealing with extraordinary claims; particularly when the investigations involved macro effects, as skepticism can be lain onto the fact that modern recording apparatus was not used to document what really happened. Anything that can reduce the confounding variables involved in interpreting the cause of the documented effects will only be beneficial for making a case in one direction or the other.

So, optimal documentation, stringency and publicity must be the goal of all future parapsychological endeavors. There is no excuse for not properly using the technology available and then applying the cumulative knowledge of the past one-hundred and thirty odd years to relevant domains of study. Too often, it seems, parapsychologists themselves are not as well-versed as they should be in past research and tend to think that they've "reinvented the wheel", when someone else has long-ago treaded onto similar territory.

In conclusion, the borders of skepticism and belief, denial and acceptance, will have to be breached; these socially constructed measures of approach can only hold us back in one guise or another, keeping us from either eliminating pre-scientific hopes or demonstrating that there is something unique and unknown about consciousness. Parapsychology should strive to unify the camps and not segregate them. But it is human nature to cling to those who share similar views and belittle those that don't.

Regardless, this child-like game of near pathological disparagement will have to be halted if any real progress between skeptics and believers is to be made. Obviously, beliefs can and will be maintained, but this needs to occur between persons who are pushing toward the same thing – understanding what's really going on. Hopefully, with that elusive thing people call an "open mind", some of those beliefs will be subjected to scrutiny in more respectful ways than they have been in the past (i.e. rhetoric) and either maintained or discarded.

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# Ritual as Therapy:
# Steps Towards and Ethnography of the Invisible
Peter Mark Adams

## Introduction

My interest in ritual goes back many years, but it has been galvanized over the last decade by the increasing accessibility of a ritually based, therapeutic technique known as Family & Systemic Constellation Therapy, Family Constellations for short (FCT). The highly anomalous effects that I have witnessed as a participating-observer during some 20-30 constellations constitutes a fundamental challenge to our conventional understanding of personal identity, consciousness and even the structure of reality itself.

These anomalies exist on the extreme edge of perception and on the borders of our understanding – we feel their impact but their source, the source that powers the therapeutic effect of Family Constellations, and indeed other healing rituals, is for the most part, invisible. As a result, modernity lacks the concepts and language with which to engage with these experiences and those generated by effective rituals.

But if such anomalous phenomena routinely arise in the context of ritualized healing, you would expect them to have been recorded during the 150 years of anthropological research into ritual. I have therefore sought to compare the anomalous occurrences within FCT with well-known ethnographic accounts of magical and healing rituals. These accounts tend to exist on the exotic periphery of the ethnographic record. Well known, but little investigated, they are relegated to Psychology to provide an explanation, with a consequent loss in both content and context.

This paper has three parts:

* The exploration of a case of Family Constellation Therapy that manifested a broad range of anomalous effects.

* A brief review of two well-known accounts of ritual from the ethnographic record that also exhibited highly anomalous effects.

* Drawing out the implications of these accounts using language and concepts derived from the work of Gilles Deleuze and philosopher of anthropology, José Gil.

## A Case of Family Constellation Therapy (FCT)

FCT was developed, by psychiatrist & psychotherapist Dr. Bert Hellinger, from an amalgam of family therapy and traditional African healing ritual. Like family therapy it sees the family as the context for understanding a person's mental and emotional issues. But unlike conventional therapy, it views the family context as possessing deep roots reaching back into the ancestral past and propagating an influence - usually negative, since the context is one of therapy - down to present day generations.

The therapy focuses on the resolution of a specific issue. Volunteers are chosen to represent people who are central to the issue's resolution. The volunteers have no relationship to or knowledge of the family members they are representing (many of whom may be long dead). They are placed to symbolically represent the spatial dynamics of a family group. What then happens is, by any standards, extraordinary.

* Firstly, the mental, physical and emotional characteristics, distinctive attitudes and ethical dilemmas of the people being represented are spontaneously manifested by the volunteers.

* Secondly, through skilled facilitation, the underlying issues are identified and a process of conflict resolution re-harmonizes the family group.

* Thirdly, when this occurs, the corresponding mental, physical and emotional disturbances experienced by a descendant are also resolved.

The actual experience of participating in this therapy is one of remaining fully conscious and self-aware, but experiencing an 'emotional overlay', a secondary emotion, mental attitude and even the physical posture and mannerisms, of the person being represented. This occurs despite the fact that you have no knowledge of, and have never met, that person. This remains valid even if that person is long dead. According to Dr. Bert Hellinger the family system has at its heart a, "…group conscience that regulates innocence and guilt …" (cited Cohen 2006).

Considered from any perspective, these are extraordinary claims that leave us with four (at least four if not far more) unanswered questions:

1. How are affective conflicts and traumas propagated from generation to generation to impact the health and well-being of the present and future generations?
2. What is the medium of transmission?
3. How can a therapeutic intervention spontaneously reconstitute the originating conflicts and traumas?
4. How can therapeutic interventions resolve them without the parties to the original conflict being present?

FCT rests upon the idea of an invisible web or field - a 'knowing field' as it is sometimes called - that propagates information and affect through the family and ancestral network to effect the health and well-being of the living descendants. Skepticism is a natural reaction to such claims.

Nevertheless, the consensus is, FCT is effective (Steifel, Harris, & Zollmann, 2002; Lynch & Tucker, 2005; Cohen, 2006; Thomas, 2010). To keep this discussion as grounded as possible we need to review a documented case (Adams 2014).

The following account details an informant's first-person perspective on their own FCT session. A little background is in order. Since the birth of a child, this woman had lived with a constant anxiety that the child would die - despite the fact that there was no medical reason to justify her fears. She therefore undertook a FCT in order to deal with these unfounded fears.

"The person who represented my mother stood, looking at the floor as if searching for something. The person who represented me was standing next to her, her hands held out as though waiting to receive something. The therapist asked the person representing my mother what she was looking for. She said there had to be more babies. The therapist told me that this meant that there were dead babies that needed to be acknowledged and she placed pillows on the floor to represent them."

"The 'mother' representative did not feel satisfied and kept saying "there are more, there are more", but there were already many pillows on the floor. Then suddenly the therapist asked me if any of the babies had been born. My mother had had a baby and it had died one day later. The therapist brought someone else to stand before the mother and said 'Here is your daughter. Look at her. See her'. The person representing my mother said 'I can't look at her because I never saw her'. I was shocked. This woman who, didn't even know my mother, was talking with her mannerisms, saying things the way she would say them and now she was telling us she had never seen her baby. It was true. For medical reasons my mother had never seen her last daughter."

"Then the therapist began to line women up behind the person representing my mother. Her mother, my great grandmother, her mother … tracing the lineage of women in our family on my mother's side. About eight women down the line …" (8 generations of ancestor using a standard measure of 30 years per generation would,

at a rough estimate, approximate to someone who had lived around 250 years ago) "… she came across the 'blockage' in the female energy. As I watched I understood that the fear I had had since the birth of my son, the fear that he was certain to die, was not mine but energy carried through the women in my family and the person representing me was standing with their arms open ready to accept it." (You will recall that the person representing the client had their hands raised as though waiting to receive something from her mother).

"There and then I decided that I was not going to accept that energy. The therapist put me directly into my own role in the constellation and I refused to accept the fear. A couple of weeks later my fear for my son had almost completely disappeared." (Adams 2014).

## SUMMARY

This account is just one of thousands occurring every day of the week worldwide. The highly anomalous phenomena manifested in these contexts are therefore normative within the context of FCT. What insights can we derive from cases like this? I would like to suggest 5 main points that we need to be aware of:

1. To anyone attending a constellation it is quite clear that you are dealing with strong field effects. The sensations of energy within the constellation emerge quickly once the representatives are all in place and are quite tangible.
2. The symbolic re-enactment of a pattern of relationships is capable of re-constituting the mental, physical & emotional posture, traumas, conflicts and ethical dilemmas of the people being represented. We saw the volunteer representing the client's mother spontaneously adopt the mannerisms and access the knowledge that she had not seen her new-born daughter, she said "I can't look at her because I never saw her".
3. So accurate are these representations that if a key member is left out then the field will indicate their absence and their place within the constellation. Again, we saw this when the

person representing the client's mother felt an absence and was looking for someone else saying "there have to be more babies".
4. The symbolically re-constituted field is amenable to the harmonization of negative affect in real-time. By placing the client into her own constellation and her then refusing to accept the legacy of fear, the inherited negative affect was neutralized and the family and ancestral field harmonized.
5. Symbolic resolution of long standing traumas and ethical conflicts leads to the actual amelioration or removal of the related problems of family members here and now. After the constellation the client's fear rapidly diminished until it became insignificant.

## CONCLUSIONS

We can now draw out four basic conclusions:

1. Firstly, the ritual is of itself sufficient to reconstitute the 'consciousness slice' of a specific time and place - including the affective presence of absent and deceased persons.
2. Secondly, for this to be possible the relevant historical information must already be interwoven, timelessly coded, so to speak, in a place from which it continues to exert it's influence down through all of the living descendants alive and yet to be born. For this reason Dr. Albrecht Mahr has called it the "knowing field".
3. Thirdly, ordinarily fields are extensional objects - they have quantitative (that's to say, measurable) properties. But in this case, in talking of a 'field', we are talking about an 'intensional field', its store of coded affect, ethical dilemma and information on the personal dispositions of the people an extended network. Needless to say, no such field is recognized, or even suspected, in any mainstream field of study.
4. Fourthly, while we have been concerned with a family and ancestral network, we could just as easily re-constitute any other system or network of relations, for example, those of an organization.

But if such easily convened therapeutic rituals can demonstrate such pronounced anomalous field effects, effects that lay at the heart of the ritual's therapeutic efficacy, surely we should see references to them in the ethnographic record? After all ritual has been an interest, if not an obsession, of Anthropology for the last 150 years.

# Two Rituals from the Ethnographic Record

Given anthropology's global reach and obsession with all forms of ritual - any formal, invariant, rule governed and embodied performance (Bell 1997: 138-164) - and given the prevalence of magical and healing rituals worldwide it is not surprising that anomalous phenomena should feature in the ethnographic record of the last 150 years (we can easily cite half a dozen well-known examples: Dunham 1969; Evans-Prichard 1976; Grindal 1983; Long 1974; Stoller 1989; Turner 1993).

Let's briefly review two of these accounts: those of Edith Turner and Bruce Grindal.

# Case 1: Ndembu Healing Ritual

Edith Turner's account of an Ndembu healing ritual stands in stark contrast to the formal structural analysis of the same events provided by her husband, Victor Turner. In Edith Turner's case she describes how during the ritual a profound psycho-physical experience preceded an equally profound shift in the quality and depth of her perception. What is notable in her account is the degree of her personal investment in the success of the healing ritual:

> "I felt the spiritual motion, a tangible feeling of breakthrough going through the whole group …." (Turner 1992 p.149)

She then witnessed the ritual unfold and was able to 'see' what the rite was attempting to accomplish on a level that was otherwise inaccessi-

ble to her. She appears to have witnessed at first hand that 'invisible reality' - in this case the removal of a 'spirit attachment' (the revenant of a deceased person) for which modernity lacks both concepts and language. After observing the healer's hands:

> "Working and scrabbling on the back … I saw with my own eyes a giant thing emerging out of the flesh of her back. This thing was a large gray blob about six inches across, a deep gray opaque thing emerging as a sphere" (Turner 1992 p.149)

In Edith's case her experience was positive. It refreshed her sense of reality and its potentialities:

> "I knew the Africans were right. There is spirit stuff. There is spirit affliction; it is not a matter of metaphor and symbol, or even psychology." (Turner 1993).

# Case 2: Sisala Death Divination Ritual

The second case I would like to consider is, by anyone's standards, extremely bizarre, Bruce Grindal's account of a death divination and burial rite. What he witnessed was also preceded by a sudden and profound psycho-physical experience and an equally profound shift in his awareness. Grindal describes how as the ritual progressed he experienced strong and growing psycho-physical effects until:

> "At first I thought that my mind was playing tricks with my eyes, so I cannot say when the experience first occurred; but it began with moments of anticipation and terror, as though I knew something unthinkable was about to happen. The anticipation left me breathless, gasping for air. In the pit of my stomach I felt a jolting and tightening sensation, which corresponded

to moments of heightened visual aware-ness."

"Then I felt my body become rigid. My jaws tightened and at the base of my skull I felt a jolt as though my head had been snapped off my spinal column.".

At this.

"A terrible and beautiful sight burst upon me. Stretching from the amazingly delicate fingers and mouths of the goka (comment: the ritual performers), strands of fibrous light played upon the head, fingers, and toes of the dead man. The corpse, shaken by spasms, then rose to its feet, spinning and dancing in a frenzy … The corpse picked up the drumsticks and began to play". (Grindal 1983)

Those experienced with such modalities as kundalini yoga may well recognize these psycho-physical symptoms and therefore understand just how powerful the energy field apparently generated by this ritual was.

In some ways, in Grindal's own words, he was never to fully recover from the events of that night. He describes how he needed to undergo a healing ritual himself in order to recover. Of his experience he noted that:

"The canons of empirical research limit reality to that which is verifiable through the consensual validation of rational observers. An understanding of death divination must depart from these canons and assume that reality is relative to one's consciousness of it."

I note in passing that the ritual's participants are not counted amongst the charmed circle of 'rational observers'. Grindal's case is interesting from another perspective. Refused permission to attend the ritual he had entered it obliquely - perhaps naively assuming that it was just another piece of field work. But the ethnography of the invisible is not to be approached lightly. Com-menting on his experience 14 years later he said, "it wounded and sickened my soul." (Grindal 1983).

# DISCUSSION

There are, of course, two major difficulties in reconciling these accounts with any modernist own worldview. They are uncanny, anomalous, intrinsically strange and, perhaps, even - in the case of the dancing & drumming corpse - so far removed from conventional experience as to leave us incredulous.

Psychological rationalization, for example appeals to 'altered state of consciousness do not constitute an explanation. Firstly, because 'ASC' doesn't actually designate any specific state. Secondly, it ignores key aspects of these (and other) equally anomalous experiences.

Specifically psychological rationalization fails to overcome the following five features of many anomalous accounts:

(i) Their intersubjective nature (other people also see the same thing).
(ii) The complex continuity of narrative that they involve (I know of no psychological mechanism to explain this).
(iii) They are localized and specific - they do not occur in the witness's life either before or after the ritual they are participating in.
(iv) They are considered to be normative within their own society, not anomalous.
(v) They exhibit cross-cultural commonalities and similarities, they find recognizable parallels in other cultures.

A complicating factor when dealing with healing rituals, and rituals in general, is their complex, multi-layered character – they may, at one and the same time, serve many different purposes. For example, to facilitate the resolution of tensions and conflicts between different classes, genders, clans or families. They may also employ extensive systems of symbolism reflecting and reinforcing structural features of their society's worldview. But at its core, effective healing rituals

do something. They are therapeutic. But in what does this 'therapeutic effect' reside?

Another psychologizing tendency postulates the fundamentally psychosomatic nature of much illness and the potential for a 'placebo effect' to be triggered through the symbolic re-coding of the subject's self-perception; that's to say, from one of 'sick', 'afflicted', or even 'possessed', to one of 'healthy' or 're-integrated'. Without doubting the suitability of such ideas in a certain range of cases, this form of explanation fails to do justice to the complexity of the phenomena that we have just reviewed. Specifically, it fails to do justice to the fact that at their core, effective rituals generate a force, a psycho-physical force, that is directly experienced by the participants and provides the foundation or platform through which healing and transformation becomes possible.

We have just reviewed experiences of this force, this unknown energy, as it effects the psycho-physical being of the ethnographer, how this leads to a shift in the quality & depth of perception, and finally how the energy deepens the role of participant-observer to a level of engagement parallel to that enjoyed by the participants and reveals a side of the ritual - and of reality - quite outside their own experience. This leaves us in search of answers to (at least) six key questions:

(i) What is the nature of this energy?

(ii) What gives rise to it?

(iii) In what does its efficacy (its ability to facilitate healing and transformation) reside?

(iv) How does it affect us psycho-physically?

(v) What is its role in shifting the quality & depth of our awareness and of our perception?

(vi) And how does it provide access to a reality that is otherwise invisible?

# PART IV: Steps Towards an Ethnography of the Invisible

"Spirit work is based on the emergence of an intersubjective space where individual differences are melded into one field of feeling and experience shared by healer and sufferer"

Koss-Chioino, J.D. (2006).

In a much cited work (Young & Goulet 1994 p.12) we find the following recommendation:

"As a first step... anthropologists can begin to take their informants seriously and to entertain the idea that an informant's account may be more than a "text" to be analyzed. It may have something of value to contribute to our understanding of reality"

That anyone should feel the need to say this shows just how isolated within our own worldview we can become. The experience of ritual has something of major import to teach us. We have looked at three ritual events each with a slightly different profile:

1. In FCT the volunteers symbolic positioning unconsciously generates a field that carries a pattern of relations and related affects representing key aspects of a troubled situation; this field can be interrogated and harmonized in real-time through conflict resolution providing relief to the problems of members of the present generation.
2. Ndembu healing ritual uses a ritual format to generate a field that empowers the participants perceptually and energetically to deal with 'spirit attachment'.
3. Sisala death divination utilizes an elaborate ceremonial to generate an energy field that profoundly affects the quality and depth of

awareness of all of the participants and appears to animate a corpse.

We can compare the Ndembu and Sisala rituals to other classic accounts of healing rituals such as the Kung healing dance (Katz 1982) in which the dance is used to raise inner energy ('num') until it rises up the spinal column ('gams') profoundly affecting the quality and depth of awareness and empowering its subject with the power to undertake shamanic feats of healing and remote viewing. Again the physiology of this process accords with classical yogic descriptions of kundalini energy. Our problem, then, is that we lack concepts and language to allow us to understand the nature of these fields, the conditions for their generation and their potentialities for healing. But on a far more fundamental level, we lack a conception or model of the body beyond the bio-medical body of modern medicine. As we have seen, the bio-medical paradigm is inadequate to encompass the full spectrum of the body's potentialities and so generates 'anomalies' out of the routine experience of people worldwide.

What other bodies are there? There is, of course, the so-called 'Eastern' or 'yogic' body, an anatomy of energy meridians and energy flows. The energy body still provides the dominant psycho-physical model in large parts of the world and within most alternative regimes of healing. But despite the growing body of evidence for its actual, as opposed to metaphorical, existence, it remains firmly outside mainstream bio-medicine and therefore fails to provide an acceptable explanatory model within the context of the social sciences.

The idea of utilizing the 'Eastern Body' to broaden the ontological foundations of the social sciences (Johnston 2009) is appealing but likely to back-fire. It can just as easily lead to the entire contested baggage train of Vedic, Tantric, Buddhist, Daoist & Neoplatonic historical and cultural scholarship attaching itself to (and fatally undermining) any interpretive endeavour.

The ritual language of traditional societies harks back to pre-modernity. Our problem is that we can no longer 'adopt' a pre-modern world-view and still communicate within and across disciplines. There is no way back from what we now know. We therefore need fresh language and new ways of conceptualizing that predict, capture and begin to explain so-called 'anomalous' phenomena.

Epistemologically, ethnography traverses an axis from 'emic' description to 'etic' interpretation; from description in the language of the society under study to Clifford Geertz's 'thick description', interpretation arising from the theoretical models deployed by the researcher. But on an alternative axis, that of ontology, the theory of what there is, the foundational concepts that underlay all interpretation stand in need of a major upgrade.

In fact fresh language and concepts do already exist and have started to be deployed. Philosopher of Anthropology José Gil has pioneered the application of several key insights derived from the work of philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Gil's insights encompass the arenas of both ritual and performance, though more specifically, modern dance. At root, ritual is embodied performance. It is not the symbols employed but the people deployed who generate its transformative force. Through the pioneering work of people like Merce Cunningham, the 'language' of dance has been deconstructed, stripped bare of its narrative and expressive elements leaving nothing except the movements of the dancer in response to the flow of energy that they follow. This has had the effect of emphasizing and making explicit the energetic dynamics of performance. Concerning the psycho-energetics of performance José Gil says:

> "the dancer evolves in a particular space, different from objective space. The dancer does not move in space, rather, the dancer secretes, creates space with his movement…a new space emerges. We will call it the space of the body." (José Gil's 2006).

The space created by the body is characterized by 'depth' - its texture, density and viscosity, its 'speed' and impact on our sense of duration - which is alternatively dilated and contracted.

The secretion of such fields involves a displacement or 'emptying out' of the performer. A contemporary dancer compares the space extruded or exfoliated from herself to a cocoon spun from the threads of her own being:

> "I like the feeling of the texture of cocoons. A cocoon produces numerous threads. The threads come out so fast that my body is often left behind. At such times my body is empty, I wonder where my stomach and other organs have gone … All that's left of me is contours." (Akeno Ashikawa).

The critical point is that accounts like this are neither metaphors nor are they only subjective. They attempt to put into words the creation of a unique kind of space through and around the ritualist/performer. The healing processes we have reviwed are, on one level, social and cultural performances. But their plane of manifestation is not just that of social reality. It is a unique space generated from the affective intensities experienced by both the performer/ritualist and the spectator/celebrant. The confluence of affective intensities constitutes, in Gilles Deleuze's terms, an 'assemblage', a third - and independent - order of being, what Deleuze, in his notoriously oblique diction, refers to as a 'plane of immanence' or 'a body without organs' (BwO).

As the range of experiences that we have explored indicates, the BwO can be used in a variety of ways: to retrieve information, to recover the ethical and traumatic setting of people long past, to energize an arena of activity or to create the distinct aesthetic of modernist performance. Physics has no vocabulary for these kinds of spaces. They are 'intensional fields' (in the modal sense), that's to say, impossible and unthinkable 'objects' from the perspective of conventional dualistic thought. Being neither subjective nor objective such fields provide a mode of ingress into parallel - but otherwise invisible - folds and densities of reality. Fields in which strange, non-local and synchronistic events can and do occur.

For the last 500 years the modernist worldview has been shaped by Descartes sharp distinction between res extensa and res cogitans, between extension and intension, mind and body. But here we are faced with a direct challenge to this culturally embedded narrative. We are faced with a hybrid – an extensional field with intensional properties, an externalized, inter-subjective field of consciousness. What Gilles Deleuze called 'spatium': " … space as an intensive quantity" (Deleuze 1968).

Deleuze's eerie 'body without organs' has risen like a ghost and haunts all of the social sciences. In order to keep up with our multiplying conceptions of physical reality the commonsense space of Euclidean geometry and the bi-valent logic of true or false has given way to a non-Euclidean and multi-valent realities; and our conception of causation through local interaction has had to be expanded to include non-locality, what Einstein described as 'spooky action at a distance'. In a similar way Descartes' dualist world, the metaphysical and misleading separation of reality into mind and body, is finally due for demolition.

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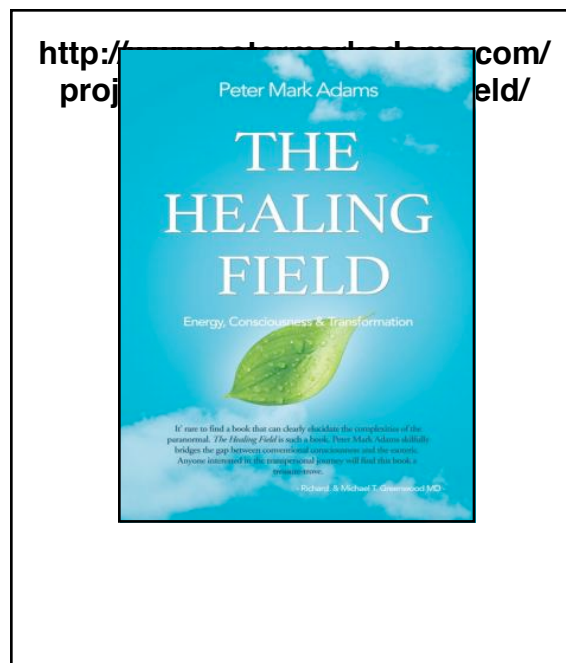
# ABSTRACTS:
# 'Research Among Spirits, Ghosts and Deities: How to Study Non-Ordinary Realities' Panel at BASR Annual Conference, The Open University, September 2014
### Chairs: Bettina Schmidt & David Gordon Wilson

Though anthropologists have discussed the study of experiences "behind the veil" of non-ordinary reality since decades (e.g. Harner 1982), it is still regarded as contested field. On one side it is not for us to judge as Lewis already wrote (1971). But, as Glass-Coffin recently wrote in the International Journal of Transpersonal Studies (2013) cultural relativism has 'allowed a side-stepping by the more fundamental question of the transpersonal'. Anthropologists tend to contextualise the local accounts, 'domesticating and dismissing them, colonializing knowledge even as they claim to honour the truth of the Other' (2013: 117).

## Transformational Encounters with Non-Ordinary Realities
### Fiona Bowie (King's College London)

When we are studying psychic phenomena the narratives of those involved are often central to the research. Whereas direct evidence or data of non-ordinary realities can be hard to come by, the often transformative effects of encounters with spirits, or of an awareness of consciousness existing outside the physical body, are amenable to study. Transformational encounters often form a key element in the narratives of research subjects, and these narratives, both published and oral, provide a rich source of data.

In this talk I will attempt to do three things:

(1) Outline a general approach to the study of non-ordinary reality through a form of cognitive, empathetic engagement;
(2) Briefly survey some of the cross-cultural and historical evidence for an experiential source for many non-ordinary phenomena, including after-death contacts, reincarnation, spirit possession, near death experience and out of body travel.
(3) Examine what narratives of personal transformation might tell us about encounters with non-ordinary realities.

## Paranthropology, Transpersonal Anthropology and the Ontology of the Unseen: How do we know what is really real?
### Jack Hunter (University of Bristol)

This paper will present a brief overview of the fields of transpersonal anthropology, the anthropology of consciousness and, the most recent development in this lineage, paranthropology. It will outline the contributions of these fields to the development of a new approach to the investigation of so-called non-ordinary realities which emphasises the need for ethnographers to participate in the transpersonal practices and experiences of their fieldwork informants. In the words of Edith Turner, the anthropologist must learn to 'see as the Native sees' in order to truly grasp the experiential foundations of religious and spiritual belief, and escape from the hegemonic dismissal of alternative ontologies. The paper will explore the limitations of traditional anthropological approaches to the study of religion, which often fall short of providing a satisfactory account of the richness and complexity of ethnographic reality, and will offer suggestions for ways to overcome such problems.

**Performative Boundaries and the Art of Not Being Oneself: Association and Disassociation in Spiritualist Mediumship**

David Wilson (Edinburgh University)

In Western medical tradition, mediumship has often been characterised as a form of illness. This attitude persists but has become more sophisticated; for example, eighteenth century comparisons with epilepsy might now be replaced with suggestions of dissociation. In some cases (e.g. Huskinson), this can be seen as positive, with mediumistic training involving the learning of techniques that enable forms of psychological healing. Such analyses remain opposed to mediums' own accounts, which involve the development of relationships with distinct, real others, and not with 'other' aspects of the medium's own personality. This paper accepts that mediumistic training involves healing aspects, but notes that the art of being oneself is utilised in Spiritualist demonstrations so as to be someone distinctly 'other' on a continuing basis over a period of years, and potentially indefinitely. The performative conventions that bound demonstrations of mediumship therefore prevent mediumistic apprenticeships from being only pathways to personal integration, suggesting that comparisons between mediumship and dissociation can, at best, only partially illuminate.

**The Prejudices in Non-ordinary Reality**

Jonathan Tuckett (Stirling University)

Over the course of its history Religious Studies has come to use many terms to describe beings that to a certain mind frame are difficult to grasp. Thus we have spoken of "non-ordinary reality", "superhuman beings", "non-natural entities", "humanlike but non-human beings", "counter-intuitive agents", and "non-falsifiable alternate realities" to name but a few. It is the contention of this paper that all these terms despite their laudable attempts to escape older prejudices nevertheless fail to justify themselves as social scientific concepts. Each of them implicitly appeals to a conception of reality that it is presumed that the "believers" under study have in some deviated from. Based on a phenomenological analysis I argue this is a vestige of rationalism, the view that there is only one form of rationality against which all others are to be measured. Pursuing the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz and Jean-Paul Sartre it will be argued that the continued use of such concepts fails not only to appreciate the multiplicity of rationalities but also to meet the standards of social scientific rationality.

**Platform Mediumship: Acts of Sacred Communion or Mere Performances?**

Maxine Meilleur (Harvard Divinity School) and Andy Byng (Birkbeck College (University of London)

The religion of Spiritualism, formally legalized in the United Kingdom in 1951, is based on 7 Principles one of which involves 'The Communion of Spirits'. Therefore, divine services within Spiritualism contain public demonstrations of mediumship in which a medium stands in front of the congregation and acts as an intermediary between an audience member and someone who is deceased in order to evidentially prove the continuity of life and to provide an opportunity for communion between them. Additionally, many Spiritualists churches schedule additional evenings purely devoted to these public demonstrations. Further, several long running and successful television shows such as 'The Best of British Mediumship' feature spiritualist mediums who 'perform' for millions of viewers. This paper will examine how these demonstrations inside and outside formal divine services both detract from and add to the religion. Further questions to be explored include: 'What are the historical roots of these demonstrations?' and 'Why were these public demonstrations crucial to the evolution and recognition of Spiritualism?' The presentation of this paper may include brief visual images (displayed via projector) and very brief audio recordings (or summarized transcripts of these events) to enhance audience understanding of this paper's arguments. Finally, this paper will combine elements of the anthropological, psychological and sociological approaches to the study of religion and may reference first-hand accounts of mediums, observers, and officials of the Spiritualist National Union (the largest governing body for Spiritualism in the world) as well as cite current literature on or related to this phenomenon.

**My Brother, the Insect: Researching the Indigo Children and their New Age Cosmologies and Spiritual Guides**
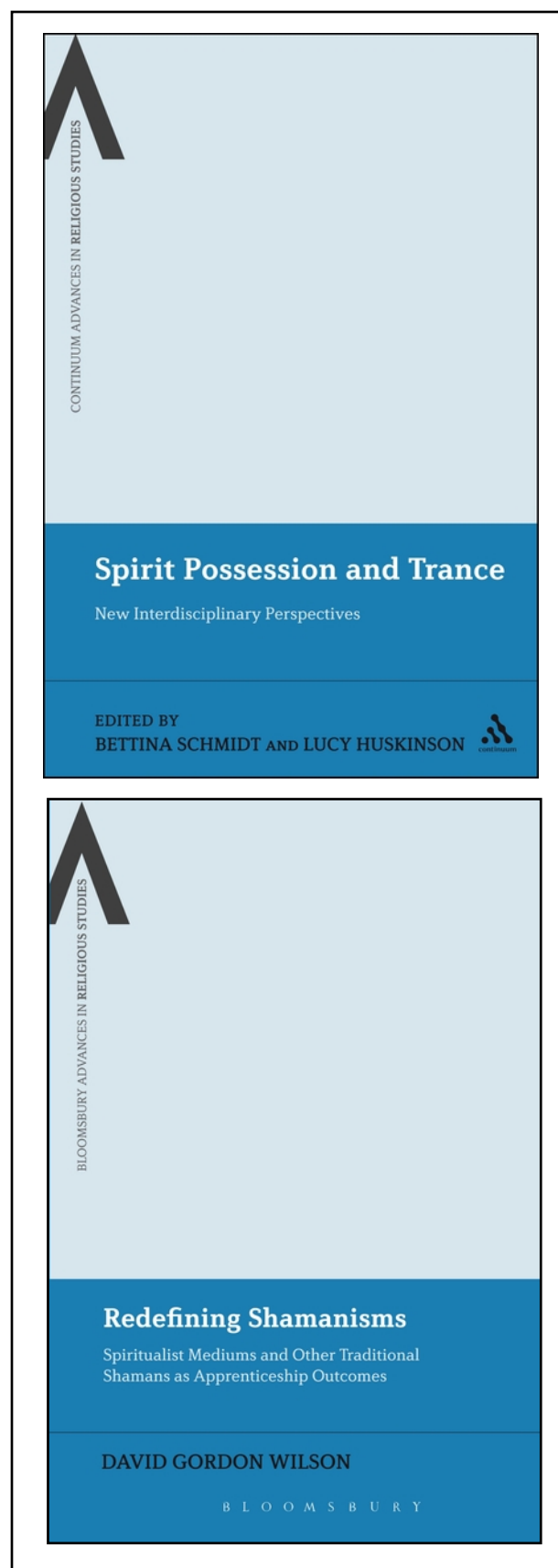
Beth Singler (University of Cambridge)

The Indigo Child is a concept that emerged in the New Age Movement around the early 1980s and describes a more spiritually evolved generation that is thought to be here to save the world. This paper con-

siders how to approach accounts by Indigos about their relationships with entities from non-ordinary realities, such as the spirit guides and Ascended Masters seen in historical antecedents such as Spiritualism and Theosophy. However, informants have also provided accounts of more exotic beings such as an insect brother in spirit, a former employer who communicates through a fridge, and angelic beings that provide 'DNA activation' and 'five dimensional protections'. Further, the place of the Indigo Children themselves in the wider cosmologies that they are describing will be discussed. These more highly evolved beings represent a self-distancing from mere 'normals' and the carving out of a cosmology of Self as a non-ordinary reality or entity. The issues that arise around the study of, and interaction with, self-described enlightened beings will be shown to parallel those around studying more familiar beings such as spirits, ghosts and deities by the anthropologist.

**How to study Spirit Possession? Reflection from the ethnographic field in Brazil**

Bettina Schmidt (University of Wales Trinity Saint David)

Spirit possession belongs to a range of religious experiences that can be observed all over the world. It usually takes place in public rituals where participants behave in a way that is interpreted as being possessed by spirits. Outsiders often perceive it as negative and spirit possession is seen as a kind of "demonic possession" that puts people in danger. However, people experiencing it often describe what they experience with positive terms. It empowers them and enriches their life. This paper will reflect on fieldwork among different Brazilian religious communities in São Paulo. With participant observations and the collection of subjective narratives via open-ended interviews I gained insight into Brazilian possession religions from the adepts' point of view. However, it confronted me with complex methodological issues which I will discuss in this paper. I will argue that it is not relevant to question whether the spirits, the deities, or God exist. Important is how the relationship between human and non-human beings is maintained. The paper will show that focusing on the practical dimension of religious experience (hence, on what devotees do) will help us to avoid the trap of well defined (and limited) academic categories.

CONTINUUM ADVANCES IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

**Spirit Possession and Trance**

New Interdisciplinary Perspectives

EDITED BY
BETTINA SCHMIDT AND LUCY HUSKINSON

BLOOMSBURY ADVANCES IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

**Redefining Shamanisms**

Spiritualist Mediums and Other Traditional Shamans as Apprenticeship Outcomes

DAVID GORDON WILSON

BLOOMSBURY

# COMMENTARY:
# Progressivism, Materialism, Anthropology, Politics, and the Paranormal: Reflections on a Talk on William James' "Excision"

T. Peter Park

A presentation I attended last March on philosopher, psychologist, and psychical researcher William James (1844-1910) and his place in the history of American academic psychology stimulated some interesting reflections on the interplay of parapsychology, religion, philosophy, and politics, in William James' time but also in the 21st century as well.

On March 21-23, 2014, I attended the 6th "Exploring the Extraordinary" Conference at Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA, organized by the "Exploring the Extraordinary" network of mainly British students of the paranormal and its place in society and culture. My report on the conference was published in Paranthropology Vol. 5, No. 2 (April 2014). One particularly interesting talk there was a Saturday, March 22 presentation on "Thinking Beyond the 'Primitive': Exclusionary Rhetoric and Cosmological Blind Spots in Parapsychological History," by Darryl Caterine of the Le Moyne College (Syracuse NY) History Department, a specialist on the history and sociology of U.S. and Latin American religious movements. In his talk, Dr. Caterine gave a most intriguing analysis of William James' "excision" from the history of American academic psychology as reflecting psychology's struggle to establish itself as a serious legitimate science in the Progressive Era, when elite American academics increasingly espoused an anti-religious philosophy of scientific rationalism and materialism disdainful of the "primitive"–and of the paranormal as just "primitive superstition."

As Dr. Caterine noted in his talk, and I emphasized in my April 2014 Paranthropology report on the Conference, with his sympathetic interest in religious experience and the paranormal William James scandalized intellectuals nurtured on works like John W. Draper's A History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science (1875), Andrew D. White's A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom (1896), and James G. Frazer's The Golden Bough (1890, 1900, 1906-1915), all defining "progress" and "enlightenment" as the banishing of "myth," "magic," and "superstition" by "science" and "reason" in the general acceptance of a basically materialistic world-picture. As I also noted in my report on the Conference, their outlook has often reminded me of the remark by the 18th century French Enlightenment philosophe Denis Diderot (1713-1784) that Humanity would only be free when "the last king is strangled in the entrails of the last priest," a sentiment I see still pretty much echoed in our own time by the Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris type "New Atheists" and by the Carl Sagan, Paul Kurtz, Neil de Grasse Tyson, and CSICOP~CSI style "skept-debunkers"!

In private conversation at one of the intermissions during the Conference, I also told Dr. Caterine of my own long-time observation that something like the outlook of William James' late 19th/early 20th century academic detractors in the Progressive Era–and of Messrs. Diderot, Draper, A.D. White, and Frazer–still tends to dominate the thinking today of what might be called contemporary "organized progressivism" (on the analogy of "organized religion")–e.g., of

most of the editors and frequent contributors of "organized progressivist" magazines like the Nation and the New Republic, and of most writers for progressivist blogs like the Daily Kos! A lot of zealous progressive commentary these days on issues like abortion, "Obamacare's" contraceptive coverage provisions, and gay marriage, for instance, sometimes almost seems a wee bit to suggest reincarnations of Denis Diderot updating his 18th century bon mot for our own time to cover strangling the last corporate executive or the last Tea Party activist in the entrails of the last Catholic bishop or the last "Religious Right" evangelist! At times it almost seems as if we're having a reprise in late 20th/early 21st century America of late 19th/early 20th century *belle époque* Europe's bitter political split of "clericals" and "anti-clericals," almost seeing a replay of the "Two Frances" in the Dreyfus Affair–though, thankfully, this time around we at least don't see an anti-Semitic aspect in our polarization!

Actually, of course, in so far as this involves religion, the true issue to my mind is one of intransigent sectarian dogmatism, stubborn clinging to long-standing religiously justified mores and folkways, and ultra-literal interpretation of certain passages in ancient religious texts. HOWEVER, most unfortunately, a lot of the rancor gets understandably but erroneously attached to supernatural and non-materialistic belief in general, in a widespread but (I think) really quite mistaken assumption that ANY departure from scientific materialist or positivist orthodoxy, ANY deviation from the infallible metaphysical and cosmological beliefs of Denis Diderot, Auguste Comte, T.H. Huxley, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Bertrand Russell, John W. Draper, Andrew Dixon White, James G. Frazer, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Carl Sagan, or Neil de Grasse Tyson, ANY suggestion that God, the soul, life after death, ghosts, telepathy, clairvoyance, séance communications, or near-death and out-of-the-body experiences might perhaps "be for real," after all, is a treacherous fatal step down the slippery slope to relegating women to baby-making machines in Kinder, Kirche, and Küche, outlawing condoms,

returning to the good or bad old days of back-alley abortions, burning homosexuals at the stake, and subjecting scientists once more to the sort of treatment endured by Galileo at the hands of the Inquisition in the 17th century and by evolutionary biologists in the 1925 Scopes "Monkey Trial"!

Among other scholars, I think women's and religious historian Ann Braude of the Harvard Divinity School has done a good job in helping dispel some of this unfair one-sided historical and philosophical myopia by emphasizing the links between 19th century America's Spiritualist and women's rights movements, and trying to counteract some of the predominantly secular emphasis of many contemporary historians and observers of feminism, in Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America, 2nd edn. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989, 2001).

The cover blurb of my copy of Radical Spirits (2nd ed., 2001) summarizes Ann Braude as proposing that "the engagement of women in the Spiritualist movement not only provided a religious alternative to make-dominated mainstream religions, but also gave women a social and political voice," so that "for some women, Spiritualism and the early woman's rights movement went hand in hand." While "feminist historians continue to view religion as the enemy of women's emancipation," on the other hand "Historians of religion see signs of feminism in women's religious activities," a "scholarly impasse" Ann Braude addresses in her introduction to the new edition. The current political clout and media prominence of the "Religious Right," one could suppose, would make it all too easy for feminist historians to just take it granted that the churches have obviously "always" preached so-called "family values" and "woman's proper place"! Moreover, I also suspect, echoing for a moment here the "Religious Right," many "organized progressives," including "organized feminists," have a kind of "secular bias" or "Enlightenment bias," tending to assume that any self- respecting true-blue consistent liberal (or feminist) must be an agnostic/atheist secular

humanist, a child of the 18th century Enlightenment and its 19th and 20th century heirs, a spiritual and cultural grandson or granddaughter of Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Helvétius, Hume, Bentham, Comte, Marx, Mill, and Huxley. They seem to agree with Diderot's famous (or infamous) 18th century outburst that Humanity will be free only when the last king is strangled in the entrails of the last priest (or as he might put it in our own day, the last corporate CEO or Tea Party activist in the entrails of the last evangelist ). As I've sometimes half-jokingly put it, they seem to wish the Democratic Party would merge with the American Humanist Association and incorporate the Humanist Manifesto (and the Skeptical Inquirer magazine!) in its party platforms!

Anyway, reading her book for myself, I found that Ann Braude herself, in her "Introduction to the Second Edition," declared (p. xvii) that in writing her *Radical Spirits* it "seemed to me then, and does now, that a certain squeamishness about religious faith on the part of some scholars (many feminists among them) obscured important aspects of women's cultures." The "rejection of religious belief and practice as analytic categories" by such scholars and such feminists "seemed, in some sense" to Braude to "presuppose an opposition between faith and reason and to privilege the side of the binary historically associated with masculinity"--in other words, their Enlightenment worship of reason marked figures like Diderot with his "last king strangled in the entrails of the last priest" and Marx with his "religion is the opiate of the people" as unwitting Male Chauvinist Pigs whether they realized it or not! By "ignoring or downplaying the role of religious motivations, experiences, and meaning-systems," she felt, historians "downplayed arenas of American culture in which women might be more important than in--say--politics, business, or international affairs." Braude hoped that "by demonstrating the religious motivations of historical actors who would appeal to contemporary readers," like campaigners for Black and women's rights, she might "convince my colleagues to take religion more seriously." For instance, by introducing the upstate New York Fox

family rappings in the 1840's "from the point of view of dedicated Quaker abolitionists," she hoped she would "encourage readers to question their own easy dismissal of Spiritualists." Her "goal" was "not that readers should take spirit communications more seriously," but "rather that they should take those who spoke to spirits more seriously," and that "they should accept the belief in spirit communication as an aspect of those people's worldview." Whether "as a result of Radical Spirits or not," she added, "Spiritualism has been taken more seriously as a theological, intellectual, and social movement in subsequent scholarly treatments" since 1989-1990 (Ann Braude, Radical Spirits, 2nd edn., 2001, p. xvii).

A few pages further on (p. xxi), Braude noted that while "the discussion of an overlap between Spiritualism and the women's rights movement was greeted with interest by religious and cultural historians in the 1990's after the original publication of Radical Spirits, it "has been received more coolly by political historians and historians of the women's rights tradition," perhaps because, as I have suggested, of what I've called the "Enlightenment bias" of "organized progressivism." When this "overlap" is mentioned, Braude noted, she was "frequently asked for the names of women's rights activists who became adherents" of Spiritualism. Upon "learning that the Spiritualists were not among the handful of well-known suffrage leaders" like Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, and Lucretia Mott, "many dismiss the overlap as insignificant." They were "disappointed" to learn that "those in the vanguard of women's rights" who "espoused Spiritualism" included Lucy Stone's sister-in-law Anna Blackwell, Susan B. Anthony's cousin Sarah Anthony Burtis, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's neighbors Mary Ann and Thomas McClintock, and Lucretia Mott's numerous dinner guests, "not the famous leaders themselves." These friends and relatives of the famous , "in part because of their unconventional religious views," played "only a small role in histories of the women's rights movement," which have "tended to focus on the two giants" Stanton and Anthony, "as well as on the notorious Victoria Woodhull." The "tone-

deafness to religion in this literature," Braude lamented, was "exemplified" by Ken Burns' "otherwise excellent" 1999 documentary *Not for Ourselves Alone*, where Frances Willard, who "led the largest nineteenth-century organization to support woman suffrage," was "described as an enemy of freedom who hoped to use the vote to enforce Christian morality," alluding to Willard's zealous temperance activism and leadership of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, ignoring the fact that the temperance movement was widely perceived as a progressive social reform movement in Victorian America, rather than as a narrowly moralistic expression of fanatical Christian fundamentalism. Barbara Goldsmith's Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1998), "worse than ignoring religion, holds up the involvement of suffragists with Spiritualism as a source of shock and sensationalism," a trivialization "*Radical Spirits hoped to prevent*" (pp. xxi-xxii).

The "inclusion of religion within the historical assessment of feminism in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries," she felt (p. xxii), was "important for several reasons." First, it could "help dispel the idea that religion and feminism are opposing forces in American culture," an "assumption" she thought "undergirds many positions articulated both within conservative religious circles and within progressive feminism." Thus, "Some contemporary feminists assume that religious women suffer from false consciousness and that their allegiance to patriarchal religious organizations makes them incapable of authentic work on behalf of women"--essentially my point in alluding to what I have called the "Enlightenment bias" of "organized progressivism" and "organized feminism." However, she continued, "religious hierarchies often discourage or prohibit women's public leadership and assume that those who work to improve women's status lack authentic faith." Both "assumptions," Braude felt, were "based on misconceptions about the relationship between religion and feminism." Both, she noted, "make recurrent references to 'secular feminism,' most often exem-

plified by the National Organization of Women (NOW)." (p. xxii).

"Even the history of NOW itself," however, Braude continued, "suggests problems with the characterization of feminism as an exclusively secular movement." An "oft-reprinted photograph of the founders of NOW" began to "tell the story" of feminism's religious side. It showed a nun in full habit and Pauli Murray, the first African-American woman ordained as an Episcopal priest, standing beside Betty Friedan. In addition to "including religious women among its founders," NOW in its early years "included religion as an arena of feminist activism," sponsoring an Ecumenical Task Force on Women and Religion among its early activities. Ms. magazine likewise, from its beginning, reported on feminist activity within religious groups. Thus, its December 1974 issue featured the first ordination of women as priests in the Episcopal Church and an excerpt from Catholic feminist theologian Mary Daly's Beyond God the Father, "while the July issue included the response of three religious Jews to the question, "Is It Kosher to Be a Feminist?" Including religion in discussions of feminism's history, Braude felt, was "also necessary to provide an accurate assessment of the movement's impact." Just as the exclusion of Spiritualists left only a small number of prominent public figures identified with 19th century suffragism, the "exclusion of religious women from the 'second wave'" of post-1960 feminists "makes it appear to effect a relatively narrow and homogeneous group." Attention to "Catholic, Evangelical, Mormon, Jewish, and Muslim feminists, for example," suggested "the movement's deep and broad reach into every region and sector of American life" beyond a small minority of "cultural elite" college-educated upper-bourgeois urban agnostics. (pp. xxii-xxiii)

While "many feminists chose their religious communities as their sphere of feminist activism," Braude noted, others "became convinced that their faith traditions could not be cleansed of sexism, and left them behind." However, "even among this group, religion was often a focus of feminist activity." The feminist spirituality movement thus emerged as "an alternative for

those who hoped to abandon patriarchal traditions without abandoning religious experience," who might cease to identify as Catholics, Jews, Baptists, or Presbyterians without thereby also declaring themselves daughters of Voltaire, Comte, Mill, T.H. Huxley, or Marx, or sisters of Bertrand Russell, Alfred Jules Ayer, Ayn Rand, Madalyn Murray O'Hair, Carl Sagan, Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Neil de Grasse Tyson, or the ladies and gentlemen of CSICOP~CSI. "Feminist witchcraft, goddess worship, and a variety of New Age spiritualties" thus "incorporated feminism and spread it into new arenas" as did Braude's protagonists a century earlier. "As in Spiritualism, many of these groups eventually found kinship with male co-religionists in neopaganism." (pp. xxiii-xxiv).

T. Peter Park was born in Tallinn, Estonia in 1941, but has lived in the United States since 1948, and is an American citizen. He received his BA from Adelphi College (now Adelphi University) in Garden City NY in 1963, his PhD in Modern European History from the University of Virginia in 1970, and his Master's in Library Science from the University of Maryland in 1972. He retired as Reference Librarian and copy-machine unjammer at the Lynbrook Public Library in Lynbrook, Long Island, and lives in Franklin Square, Long Island, as a free-lance independent scholar and researcher. Dr. Park considers himself a mental amphibian, equally at home in the "two cultures" of "mainstream" academic research and scholarship (chiefly in intellectual and cultural history, linguistics, sociology, philosophy, and comparative religion) and of the anomalous and paranormal. He has published articles on the Fortean and paranormal in The Anomalist and Fate, has been and is active on various on-line paranormal-themed lists, and has presented papers at the New Jersey UFO, ET, and Paranormal Conferences in the Trenton area. He is working on a collection of essays on the paranormal and its social & cultural aspects, tentatively titled Explorations of a Mental Amphibian.
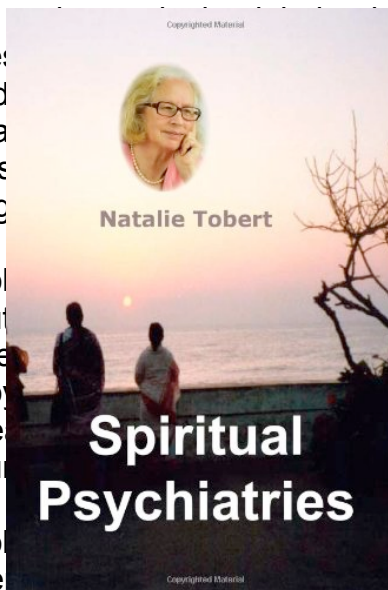
In _____ c health arena, migrant populations feel they receive poor access _____ s due to cultural misunderstandings, and this may lead to provid _____ Through extensive fieldwork, British medical anthropologist Dr. Na _____ spirituality and traditional medical and religious practices. The res _____ ch, *Spiritual Psychiatries*, provides a fresh blueprint for improving _____ nental health and the human condition.



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Tol _____ rituality and traditional practices will support medical practitione _____ and patients to open the door to a more holistic view of psychiatric treatment. In a style reminiscent of noted scholars like Anne Fadiman or Cecil Helman, *Spiritual Psychiatries* brings previously ignored beliefs about human existential realities and practices into the mainstream global public health dialogue. In order to improve patient care in an increasingly interconnected global community, effective treatment must address deeply held cultural and spiritual beliefs.

http://www.amazon.com/Spiritual-Psychiatries-Mental-Health-Practices/dp/149496225X

# REVIEW:
# 'Talking With the Spirits: Ethnographies from Between the Worlds'
# Edited by Jack Hunter & David Luke

## William Rowlandson

What exemplary method. These ethnographic studies are informed and informative with a quality that demonstrates deep participation, curiosity and reflective observation. This is the value of the ethnographic method, as not one of the contributors is deflected by that most vexing and persistent of terms – ontology – a term reflected in a child asking 'but are fairies real.' Even the more scientific accounts, such as Chapter Ten, report on the field of study without spinning off into concerns about who and where these medium-encountered spirits really are. These are questions, I feel, that often entertain or befuddle at the expense of direct experience.

I am dazzled at the close relationship these authors have with their material. The realities described are as they are, how they are; and critical observation carries no judgment. This is ethnographic research at its best – involvement, sympathy, consideration and reflection. So when Fiona Bowie asks, amidst other important questions, 'Can we find an approach that retains academic rigour while also admitting that not all reality is immediately apprehensible and visible?' (20), the answer is a resounding yes! Here is the fruit of that approach. This is why ontological ruminations can be a deflection, as they can serve to keep the anomalous anomalous, to keep certain experiences at arm's length until their location and status can be fixed. There is a welcome sense of normalcy within these essays. This is how things are in Montreal, reports Deirdre Meintel. This is how they are in Brazil, say Bettina Schmidt and the authors of Chapter Ten. Jack Hunter examines the work of the Bris-
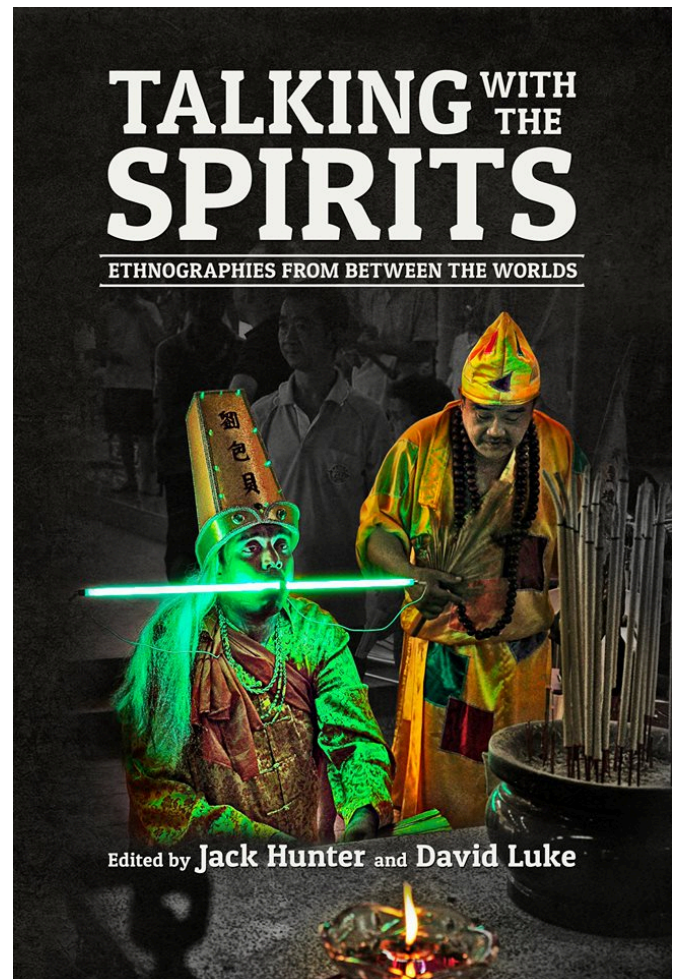
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tol Spirit Lodge, and demonstrates the unsensational yet sensational presence of mediumship practices in the UK. Charles Emmons draws on decades of profound experiential research in practices of ancestor-worship, mediumship and domestic daimons both in Hong Kong (and China) and the US. David Luke asks some pressing questions about mediumship and possession within shamanic entheogenic practices, especially ayahuasca. Other chapters reflect other contexts, traditions and cultures.

My attention, to be fair, is drawn to Chapter Six, Diana Espirito Santo's embodied research into Cuba's santos, as this is an area of which I have more experience than the contexts of the other chapters. (I work in Hispanic Studies, as a *cubanista*). This chapter is so rich, covering history, tradition, practices and ceremonies, and, compellingly, the ethics and politics of the Afro-Cuban religious cultures. She addresses the complex and sensitive questions of spiritual practices, mediumship and mental health, and the role of mediumship from a healing, curative, perspective.

One thing that seems to surprise visitors to Cuba's *santería*, *palo* and *espiritista* traditions is the day-to-day, domestic, turbulent and often spiteful nature of the dealings with the *muertos* and the santos. It is an integral part of the busy, noisy, overcrowded life of Havana, and a dead uncle can still be as much of a pain in death as he was in life. Many *santos* demand rum, candy and tobacco. Mediumship is often gossip and political squabble. There is nothing anomalous about it, unless you arrive with the understanding that such a standard aspect of life is somehow illegitimate. 'We would be missing the point,' she argues, 'if we ignored the fact that for mediums, spirits are nothing if not social creatures, made real via their materialization in the world, among the living, and through the living' (200).

Diana concludes her chapter with a sentiment appropriate for the book as a whole. Communication is an act of will, the result of engagement. This is as true between me and my neighbour as it is between me and *mis muertos*. Relationships may begin spontaneously but they require investment, and, as Jung would aver,

greater involvement with the many selves within ourselves is an act of empowerment. 'Only when acted upon, materialized, acknowledged, and socialized, do spirits begin to exist for their mediums; until then, they are merely untapped potentialities – shadows of selves' (202), she writes.

This book does precisely that.
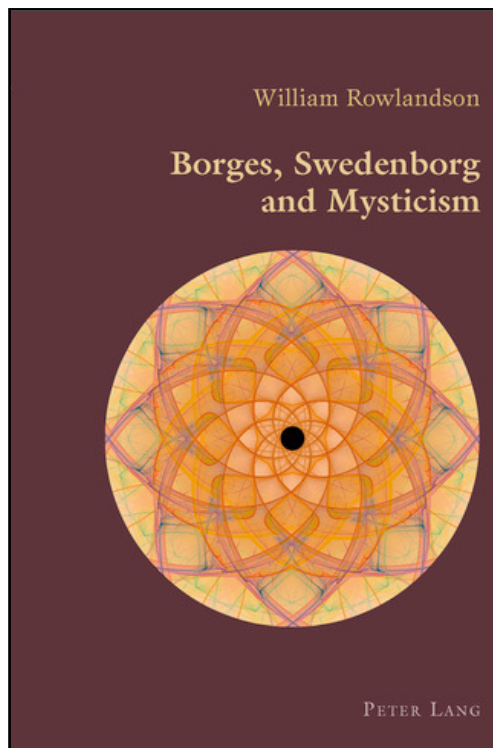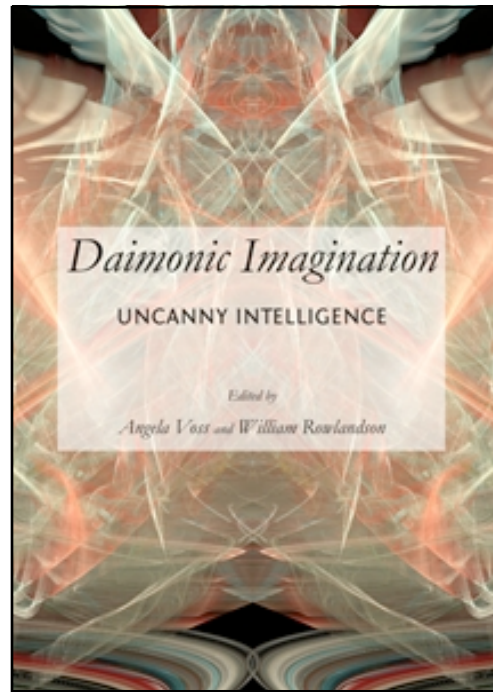
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