

The Association For Rational Thought News
Supporting Skeptical Thinking In Cincinnati
Volume 3, No. 2
December, 1993

The Association for Rational Thought is a new organization committed to encouraging rational, well-informed evaluation of fringe-science, pseudoscience, and paranormal claims. A.R.T. encourages the investigation of paranormal and pseudoscientific claims from a responsible, scientific viewpoint and the distribution of the results of such investigations to the public. You are cordially invited to become a member of A.R.T. Come to the December Meeting and Measure Your Skeptical Opinions!

Lance Moody, Media Resources Coordinator, will provide an opportunity for members to respond to a new questionnaire covering a wide variety of potentially paranormal events. Come compare your opinions with those of other A.R.T. members. The meeting will be held on Saturday, Dec. 11, 10:00 A.M., at the Bethesda Blue Ash Medical Building (directions on the back page of the newsletter). Lunch and more discussion over lunch at the James Tavern across the street from the Medical Building after the meeting. The public is invited.--Editor.
Volunteers Needed: Skeptics Start Blurbing

The next time your local television news tells a story that's short on evidence and long on credulity, pick up your phone and blurb 'em. That's the idea behind Skeptical Blurbs, a new service designed to present the mass media with a critical response to the paranormal. Skeptical Blurbs is scheduled to begin operation in January, 1994.

The heart of the service is a database containing summaries of some of the most common arguments against a variety of claims. UFOs, ghosts and astrologers are discussed with an emphasis on scientific evaluation of these topics.

The system will work like this: After noticing some credulity-impaired presentation from your local TV, radio, or newspaper, note the name of the reporter and call Lance Moody. Lance will then search the SB files for an appropriate response and forward that response to the reporter in question. The database is designed so that a single position paper can be sent immediately to any fax machine. This paper also describes our organization and provides telephone numbers for further information.

We hope that with continued blurbing the local media will become aware of the skeptical presence and turn to our organization for guidance and information in the future.

Skeptical Blurbs cannot work without the help of our members. We desperately need volunteers to assist in writing skeptical summaries. A single topic can be covered in just a few paragraphs. Add two or three suggested readings at the end.

The following topics are now in search of an author:

Psychic Detectives -- Faith Healers -- Bigfoot -- Loch Ness Monster -- Hypnotherapy -- Graphology -- Biorhythms -- The Bermuda Triangle -- Alien Abductions -- Facilitated Communication

Don't let this list limit you. We will be glad to include any other topic with which you have some familiarity. You don't have to be an expert on the subject, just familiar with the common skeptical thinking on the issue.

Send your blurb in today. --Lance Moody, Media Resources Coordinator.
Skeptics Online

The Association for Rational Thought now hosts a forum on Productivity Online, a local computer bulletin board service. A.R.T. members are invited, encouraged and welcomed to participate.

Productivity Online uses a graphical interface, making the service much easier to use and explore. On the computer

screen, a graphical interface presents "windows" where the user just points to an "icon," or picture, to make the computer do what the user wants it to. The service is currently free of charge.

POL's graphical interface makes finding information easier.

A local call from a modem-equipped personal computer accesses the service. After logging in, the user will find a wealth of information, including A.R.T.'s new forum, The Skeptics.

The Skeptics includes a lively discussion among POL members. Topics range from grass circles (a humorous variant of the crop circle) to Kentucky's ghost bullies.

In addition, members will find a growing library of skeptical articles, A.R.T.'s newsletter, and an easy-to-use private electronic mail service.

POL is adding connections to the Internet, a huge information network, and plans to carry the popular SCI.SKEPTIC conference so that discussions will be possible with skeptics all over the world.

Productivity Online is available for Macintosh and Windows- based personal computers. To access the service you must use the First Class client software. This software is available free in limited supplies from A.R.T. member Lance Moody. You may also log onto POL with conventional communications software (at 723-4444) for the purpose of downloading the FirstClass package. --Lance Moody.

May Meeting Recap -- Lance Moody on Unidentified Flying Objects

A.R.T. Media Resources Coordinator Lance Moody, spoke at the May meeting on Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs), a phenomenon he has followed for years. This article summarizes his talk. Unidentified flying objects are, according to Lance, an everyday occurrence, and most have everyday explanations. Lance's talk dealt with explanations for UFOs that have ranged from the mundane to the extraterrestrial?the belief that UFOs are craft piloted by aliens from other worlds.

People have always seen unexplained objects in the sky, but the modern belief in extraterrestrial UFOs began when experienced pilot Kenneth Arnold reported seeing luminous objects in the sky from his cockpit in 1947. He described these to the press as skipping across the air the way a saucer skips across water. Although he never described the objects as shaped like saucers, the saucer notion took hold in the public fancy. Interest in science fiction and the possibilities of modern technology was high, and "flying saucers" entered public consciousness.

U.S. government investigators concluded that such objects were more likely to be secret weapons fielded by another country than craft from outer space. Nonetheless, government concern bout preventing security leaks resulted in an incident that promoted the spread of belief in the existence of alien UFOs and in the existence of a massive government cover-up of the aliens's presence here on earth. Both of these beliefs persist today.

The precipitating incident occurred when one of the TV networks televised a special on flying saucers. In spite of concerns about security leaks, government investigators were included in the program, with the restriction that their remarks be approved beforehand. These investigators were prepared to state that they believed the objects were not extraterrestrial. Major Donald Keyhoe, however, strayed from the government-approved script during the live broadcast, with which a censor cut off the audio. Many in the startled audience concluded that the U. S. government was covering up knowledge of extraterrestrial UFOs.

Several agencies of the U.S. government continued to investigate UFOs, but no evidence of extraterrestrial intervention was found. The investigation culminated in the Air Force's Project Blue Book, which was initiated in the early 1950's. Project Blue Book found no evidence of alien UFOs. Public concern was not dampened, however, and Project Blue Book was followed by the Condon Report, the result of an investigation by a blue-ribbon panel of scientists. The Condon report also found no evidence of alien UFOs, but made no more impression on public opinion than Project Blue Book. Government research in the area ended in the 1960's, but some members of the public continue to believe that some UFOs are piloted by aliens from outer space.

Evidence Offered

Three kinds of evidence for alien UFOs are offered by believers: sightings of UFOs, photographs of UFOs, and various sorts of physical evidence.

Most reputable investigators believe that about 90 % of all UFO sightings (usually lights in the sky) are readily explainable. A portion of the remaining 10% escape definitive explanation. The unexplained sightings, however, do not cause as much trouble for skeptics as some of the explainable sightings. When former President Jimmy Carter was governor of Georgia, he reported that he had seen what he believed was an alien UFO. A CSICOP investigator who looked into the sighting decided that the most likely explanation was that the Governor had spotted the planet Venus and mistaken it for a UFO. When presented with the evidence, Carter agreed that what he had seen was probably Venus. Unfortunately, Carter's seeing a UFO got much greater play in the media than did his retraction, thus fueling another round of growth in belief in alien UFOs.

Photographic "evidence" of UFOs abounds. Typical photographs show points of light in blurry night time landscapes, impossible to identify or evaluate. Clearer and more detailed photographs provide better pictures of alleged UFOs, and are more likely to be identified as hoaxes, because they provide the investigator with more information to use as evidence. Project Blue Book found that no photographs provided reliable evidence of alien UFOs. They also determined that a large proportion of photographs of alleged UFOs were hoaxes perpetrated by teenaged boys.

One of the best known faked UFO photographs involved the use of a teenaged boy as an assistant. These photographs were made in Gulf Breeze, Florida, using double exposures of an "alien spacecraft" assembled out Styrofoam fast food containers. A CSICOP investigator determined the photographs to be faked, and the hoax was clinched when the teenager confessed and the Styrofoam model was found tucked away in the insulation of the Gulf Breeze house where the photographs were taken.

Video tape or motion picture evidence of UFOs is much rarer than still photos, because it is so much more difficult to fake. With the diffusion of video cameras, tapes of many very rare phenomena including tornadoes and crashing jets have been made, but there are no video tapes offering reliable evidence of UFOs.

So many photographs and video tapes have been faked that UFO proponents who believe in the authenticity of some photographs classify others as fakes.

A third kind of evidence cited by UFO believers is physical evidence, including circular marks on the ground where UFOs are believed to have landed. CSICOP investigator Philip Klass, an experienced UFO investigator, has traced such rings to building foundations, a buried circular watering trough, and the common "fairy rings" fungus.

Other kinds of physical evidence offered by believers include car antennas and tree limbs thought to have been broken in a close encounter with a flying saucer, burns on the skin, and "implants." Implants are thought by believers to be objects placed in persons abducted by aliens. These implants are believed to issue commands to the host at the behest of the aliens who implanted them. No reliable evidence of implants or other physical evidence has been collected. Evidence that is reported usually is shown to have a common explanation or to have mysteriously disappeared before it could be verified.

Believers in Two Camps

According to Lance, most current interest in UFOs now falls into one of two camps. The first includes people interested in proving the existence of alien space craft, or, failing that, proving the existence of a government cover-up of evidence of alien space craft. This group continues the tradition of UFO speculation begun after World War II. Philip Klass and others have done a thorough job of discrediting this group's star witnesses.

The second group, larger and of more recent origin, is more interested in the notion of alien abduction of earthlings. The central hypothesis of this group appears to be this: Space aliens are and have been years abducting human beings from earth and holding them in their space craft in order to perform gynecological and implant surgery on them, returning them later to earth. The implants relay delayed orders from the aliens to the implantee, forcing that person to do their

bidding. The evidence presented to support this hypothesis is gathered through hypnotic regression and other forms of "therapy" which lead to the fabrication of false memories. There is no reliable evidence to suggest that anyone has been abducted by aliens.

There is evidence to suggest that the hypno-therapy performed on believers in abduction is done by non- professionals who do not adhere to the standards of International Society of Hypnosis. The picture presented by believers in abduction is similar to that presented by believers in satanic abuse: unsubstantiated stories, often developed during "therapy," told by people, often women, who are clearly unhappy and often frightened by the monstrous beings they so strongly believe in.

Since World War II, Lance concluded, interest in UFOs has moved from curiosity about possible alien space craft to fears of mutilation and control by space aliens. Despite all the interest no reliable evidence of alien UFO's has ever been turned up. --Editor.

October Executive Council Meeting

The Executive Council met Saturday, Oct. 2 , at the Bethesda Blue Ash Medical Building. Present were President Keith Brabender; Vice-President Dick McGrath, Newsletter Editor Virginia Jergens, Media Resources Coordinator Lance Moody, Corresponding Secretary Mary Pacinda, and Membership Chair Roy Auerbach. Treasurer Peggy Borger was ill; Investigations Officer Joe Gastright was in Lexington for the first Kentucky Association of Science Educators and Skeptics (KASES) meeting of the season.

Nonprofit Organization Mailing Permit:

President Keith Brabender reported that after considerable effort he had obtained a tax-exempt organization mailing permit for mailings over 200 pieces which will reduce the cost of mailing the newsletter. Newsletter Editor Virginia Jergens will attend the class offered by the post office to learn how to manage the mailings according to postal regulations.

Income Tax Deductible Contributions:

Keith also discussed his efforts to make donations to A.R.T. deductible for income tax purposes. This permit costs \$75.00 to start, plus \$75.00 a year. The council decided not to pursue this permit now because of cost and unpredictable usefulness.

Newsletter Article Standards

The council also discussed standards for accepting articles for the newsletter. We agreed that standards were needed, including perhaps review by someone other than the editor. In addition, adding a Letters to the Editor column to the newsletter was discussed.

Meeting topics and newsletter mailings were also discussed.- -Editor.

October Membership Meeting

The first meeting of the year was held Oct. 9 at the Bethesda Blue Ash Medical Building. Seventeen members attended. Mailing Permit Reduces Costs:

President Keith Brabender reported that we now have a third class bulk mailing permit which will be used to mail 400 copies of each issue of the newsletter beginning with the December issue, greatly reducing the cost of mailing the newsletter.

On-Line Skeptics Forum Established:

Lance Moody reported that over the summer he, Roy Auerbach, Joe Gastright and Virginia Jergens had established an online forum for skeptics on Productivity Online, a local experimental online service available in the Cincinnati area to those with access to a computer and modem, and invited members to join the conversation. (For information, call Lance Moody, 733-1332). The Skeptics Forum provides a place to exchange opinions and information about topics of skeptical interest. In addition to trading messages, participants may download information from the forum's library files. The library includes a document on Creationism, the October issue of The Association for Rational Thought News, and

a UFO FAQ--Frequently Asked Questions about UFOs.
Media Resources Project:

Lance, in his new role as Media Resources Coordinator, suggested that A.R.T. build a file of brief statements of basic scientific information on a range of common paranormal claims. These statements will be used to respond to requests for information from the media and to respond to local news events involving paranormal claims. Lance set as a goal for the project A.R.T.'s becoming more public in its educational efforts and within a year having a member on a talk show or similar program. At his suggestion, members came up with a list of topics they thought should be included in this file: ESP, psychics, ghosts and spirits, UFOs, astrology, Satanism, near death experiences, the scientific claims made during alleged miracles, for example rosaries turning from base metal into gold, false memories and suggestive therapy, crop circles, Creationism, homeopathy and other alternative medicine, pseudoscience and quack science, perpetual motion machines, cold fusion, talking to plants, and a synopsis of the scientific method.

Members volunteered to write and bring to the November meeting a one to two page summary of scientific evidence, including one or two references for further reading on the following topics: Lance Moody, UFOs and crop circles; Joe Gastright, ghosts and psychics; Virginia Jergens, Satanism; Dick McGrath, near death experiences; Roy Auerbach, astrology; Oran Dent, false memories and mentalism. (See also article on page 1.)

Investigations Officer Interviewed by Enquirer:

Joe Gastright reported that he had been interviewed by John Johnston for an article in the Cincinnati Enquirer. Joe reported that Johnston seems to be a solid skeptic, and has all the back newsletters, complete with underlining and notes. The most common evidence offered for the presence of ghosts, Joe said, are unexplained cold breezes, unexplained sounds, and unexplained movements of objects (finding something you thought you left on the kitchen table in the icebox).

More on Media Resources:

Keith introduced the idea of a speakers bureau, a list of members willing to talk to community groups on a variety of subjects, as a way to reach goal of reaching out to the public. Lance plans to begin a file with a three by five inch card for each subject, just enough space for a realistically short sound bite, references, and the name of a person knowledgeable on the subject who could be called. He plans to notify the media when the file is established and send information to the media when a paranormal claim comes up in the local news.

Letters to the Editor Column for the Newsletter: Members agreed Newsletter Editor Virginia Jergens should start a letter to the editor column. Writers are encouraged to tackle whatever subject they want to, but letters will be edited for brevity and clarity.

False Memories:

Members discussed the problems caused by unsubstantiated recovered memories. Oran Dent passed out a summary of an article by Elizabeth Loftus summarizing findings of research about fabricated memories published in the American Psychologist. Secretary Mary Pacinda suggested that the Executive Council network with the false memory community, for example the American Psychological Association task force now working on a statement of the association's position on false memories.

Members agreed that the false memory problem, which has resulted in such miscarriages of justice as the life imprisonment of child care workers accused of child abuse at the Little Rascal Day Care Center in South Carolina, is probably the paranormal issue with the greatest negative impact on society now. Members reported that Frontline did a six hour special on the problem, and that the American Medical Association has put out a position paper condemning false memories.

After the business meeting, Joe Gastright introduced a videotape of James Randi's lecture to the Skeptics Society of Pasadena, California. The Skeptics Society tapes all of their meetings and then makes them available at a modest price. After the meeting, members continued their conversation over lunch at nearby James Tavern.--Editor.

November Executive Council Meeting

A.R.T.'s Executive Council met at the Bethesda Blue Ash Medical Building, November 6.

Tax Exemption:

President Keith Brabender reported that he had filed the appropriate forms to exempt A.R.T. from Ohio sales tax. He will apply for federal income tax exemption in January when he files income tax forms for 1993.

Newsletter:

The Council decided to mail the December newsletter to about 200 names, made up of 65-70 current members plus courtesy copies to local public libraries, high school science departments, radio and TV stations, and police chiefs. The goal is to have a stable base list of 200 names so that we can use our bulk mailing permit for each issue of the newsletter, and then add more names when we can.

Membership Chair Roy Auerbach has redesigned the mailing labels to meet U.S. postal third class requirements and will add the public libraries, etc. to the mailing list.

Keith and Newsletter Editor Virginia Jergens plan to split the work of editing and publishing the newsletter jobs to move some of the work from Virginia to Keith, beginning with the December issue.

Keith, Investigations Officer Joe Gastright, Virginia and Roy will meet at the Bethesda Blue Ash Medical Building November 20 to assemble and sort the Dec. newsletter to meet third class mailing requirements.

Joe Gastright on WKRC Radio:

Joe reported that because of the recent article about his investigations of local "hauntings" (Cincinnati Enquirer, Sun., Oct. 31), he had been invited to participate in a Halloween talk show on WKRC dealing with a man who claims to document hauntings with videotapes of the ghosts.

Local Folk Tale:

Treasurer Peggy Borger and Keith have investigated stories of satanic, ghostly and other occurrences at Mitchell Memorial Park, Cincinnati, and report that the stories seem to occur because the park is the site of a number of large chunks of granite. These large granite blocks, originally used in a bank building on Fifth Street in Cincinnati, were abandoned at the site when plans to build an observatory there failed.

The land was later donated to the city for use as a park. The trees that have grown up around the granite blocks are now about 30 years old. Now many stories about the site are in circulation, including the idea that it was once an Indian burial ground and a story that it was once the site of a crematorium blown up by angry ghosts of persons cremated there. Park rangers confirm that teenagers use the site for various teen folk ritual activities. Peggy and Keith concluded that the stories provided a fine instance of folk tales in the making.

Membership Opinion Survey:

Media Resources Coordinator Lance Moody presented a draft of a survey of opinions on a variety of paranormal topics. The questions were revised and expanded by the council. Members will be asked to respond to the survey at a meeting, at which the answers will be tabulated and discussed. The survey may be given to other groups later.

Press Releases:

Lance also presented drafts of press releases (Skeptical Blurbs) for several paranormal topics, including Mentalism, UFOs and False Memory Syndrome, as a suggested form for presenting information on paranormal topics to the media. Each blurb includes a statement of the problem, local contacts (if available) and suggested readings in an attractive and professional format. (See article elsewhere in this issue)--Editor.

November Membership Meeting

Twenty-five A.R.T. members met for coffee and skeptical fun at the Bethesda Blue Ash Medical Building November 13. President Keith Brabender reported that the December newsletter would be mailed using our new third class nonprofit organization permit. Media Coordinator Lance Moody invited members with access to personal computers to join the Skeptics Forum on Productivity Online and all members to contribute to Skeptical Blurbs, a program aimed at

maintaining a file of statements of skeptical positions on a wide variety of topics for use by the news media (See articles on both topics elsewhere in this issue). Virginia Jergens, Newsletter Editor, suggested that A.R.T.'s name be changed to something more descriptive and memorable, like "Cincinnati Skeptics." After some discussion it was agreed that changing the organization's name would not be worth the hassle, but that using "Cincinnati Skeptics" as a secondary name would be useful.

Videotape of Psychics on the Jerry Springer Show:

Members watched a brief segment of videotape in which two psychics claimed to communicate with the spirit of an audience member's deceased uncle. The tape clearly showed how collusion between the psychic and the client produces a reading the client believes in. One psychic began by clutching her own chest and mentioning vague lung problems, heart trouble, and feeling pressure in the chest. The client filled in the picture by mentioning that her uncle had died in an automobile accident, and considered the match between a vague reference to heart trouble and death in an automobile accident to be entirely accurate.

Then the psychic went on to mention that the client's uncle was hard to fit, particularly in shoes, and very picky. The client cooperatively mentioned that her uncle was indeed very large and presumably therefore hard to fit, and considered the psychic's nonspecific comment another direct hit. Finally the psychic mentioned seeing a girl, with which the client helped out by mentioning that she herself had four children, one of whom was a girl. Never noticing that girls are not entirely rare in families, the client considered that remark also amazingly revealing. Jerry Springer, not the world's most outstanding skeptic, concluded the segment saying, "Sign me up. I'm a believer."

Joe Gastright pointed out that the reading was successful because the client validated each vague statement by the psychics, applying them to her own life and investing each general comment with a specific meaning in her own life. The psychics wisely did not threaten the client's credulity by mentioning specific facts, but held to general statements the client could herself give meaning to.

Nova Videotape -- James Randi in Russia:

Members watched and analyzed three brief segments of this recently broadcast television program describing Randi's trip to Russia, where paranormal activities have increased greatly in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In the first segment, Russian scientists at a national institute for the study of the brain performed an experiment testing the ability of a psychic to influence a subject's blood pressure or brain waves. Russian scientists have for many years studied such phenomena, and claim to have found evidence that they exist. Randi's experiment suggested that they have deluded themselves, misled by wishful thinking and poor methods.

The subject was isolated from the psychic, and the experimental treatments were chosen randomly. In the first trial, the psychic did nothing. In the second, he tried to raise the subject's blood pressure; in the third, to change his brainwaves, and in the fourth also to change his brainwaves. When the scientists examined the data to see whether the psychic had succeeded, they decided that in the first trial, the psychic had perhaps changed the subject's blood pressure. In the second, they saw a change in brainwaves. They also found a possible change in brainwaves in the third trial, and no change at all in the fourth trial.

Thus their evaluation of the data matched what the psychic had been instructed to do in one case out of four. Despite these discouraging results, the scientists persisted in believing that the psychic with his hand waving and wrinkled brow had influenced the subject.

Randi was not equally convinced. He commented that the psychic had appeared to influence the subject in only one trial out of four, the success rate predicted by chance alone. But there were other flaws as well. In the first place, random chance could have come up with four "successful" trials. There was no control using a non-psychic to compare to such an outcome to. In addition, no standards had been set to define what constituted "influence." Standards were essential, since blood pressure and brainwaves normally vary a good deal. In the absence of standards, the scientists sat around the table and guessed.

After this glaring example of how not to do science, Randi went on to a new organization which provides a variety of

quack (and quite expensive) alternative medical procedures, an eclectic mix of folk remedies. Here the audience was treated to the spectacle of patients sitting classroom style while white lab-coated attendants closed their eyes and waved their hands in mysterious circles in the general direction of the patients, "curing" the patients by "adjusting their bio-fields."

In addition, Randi tried to test whether allegedly curative water "magnetized" by the forces of the attendants's minds was different from ordinary water. This proved to be impossible to carry out. The attendants claimed that the unmagnetized water would be "energized" by their presence and also by the "magnetized" water, and thus impossible to differentiate. In addition, the tool to measure the "magnetic" force of the water was a tipsy metal dowsing rod, with no likelihood of doing anything except shifting suddenly in its user's hands. Finally, the water could not be tested for its effect on Randi, who drank some (it was alleged to lower blood pressure) because Randi refused to accept the local method for measuring blood pressure, which involved a ruler and a pencil, and no one there knew how to use a blood pressure cuff. The episode was a classic example of the difficulties of applying science to pseudoscience.

After the muddled stand-off over the "magnetized" water, Randi went on to a very successful investigation of a pair of psychics who claimed to be able to describe the life and personality of anyone by looking at the person's photograph. From a batch of photographs, the women chose a picture of the notorious serial killer, Ted Bundy. They struggled to describe him, making one very general statement after another, while Randi tried equally hard not to reveal any information to them.

Finally they very nearly begged Randi to say something about their comments. He politely refused. With no help from him, they were limited to things one could say about any young man: he majored in psychology in college (a good bet, since that's the most popular undergraduate major in the U.S.), was married and had a child. They also said he was an athlete, enjoyed wrestling and tennis and was cute and attractive. They also mentioned that something very important had happened to him 3 years ago. (What this was will remain forever shrouded in mystery, since Bundy died by execution four years ago.) They missed entirely the most outstanding facts of his life: he brutally murdered many people, and died by execution.

At last Randi relented and revealed the Bundy's identity, to the great surprise of the psychics, who immediately blamed the failure of the reading on Randi's refusal to cooperate with them. (In this the psychics were entirely correct, as members learned in the last item on the program, a demonstration of cold reading.)

Each segment was followed by discussion of the methods Randi used to expose his subjects' failures to think rationally. One clear conclusion was that whether it's psychic control or the healing powers of "magnetized" water, paranormal activities are a great deal less impressive in person than they are heard about second hand.
Joe Gastright, Psychic, Performs Cold Reading!

The Randi tape was followed by Investigations Officer Joe Gastright's lecture demonstration of cold reading. Appropriately attired in black, complete with gold chains and mysterious symbols around his neck, Joe demonstrated a complete cold reading, divining the character and innermost thoughts of volunteer subject Virginia Jergens, who did her best to cooperate. In his role as "psychic," Joe introduced non-religious credentials for himself and his method, carefully chosen to suit his subject's known atheism, and went onto make a wide variety of vague statements generally true of women like his "client," such as "You have sometimes felt torn between career and family." He even demonstrated the value of what psychics call "hot information"--that is, information about the subject gathered from other sources, in this case, from a phone call to Virginia's husband, Dick Shepherd. Using this clandestine source, he scored a direct hit, "divining" through "psychic intuition"--assisted by inside information and some help from Virginia--that she in fact engages in Japanese flower arranging.

After this astonishing revelation, he described exactly how to do a cold reading, basing his talk on Hyman, 1989. (This and other sources are listed at the end of this article.) Cold reading is a technique by which a "reader" is able to convince a "client" that the reader knows all about the client's personality and problems, even though the reader has never met the client and knows nothing at all about the client's life. The goal of a successful reading is to tell your client what they wish were true about herself or himself.

The key ingredient in a successful reading is confidence. If you have, or can act as though you have, complete confidence in what you are doing, you will be able to sell the accuracy of the reading to your client. When a psychic gives a reading, this confidence is boosted by the trust of the client, who typically comes to the reader for help with an unresolved conflict or problem.

When you begin your reading, set the stage carefully. In addition to maintaining complete confidence in your ability to divine your client's character and problems, admit that you are not always entirely accurate, request cooperation from your client, and explain your philosophy about your psychic powers, where they come from and how they work.

Part of setting the stage includes introducing a "gimmick"-- an object that you claim gives you power or insight, perhaps beads or cards or a crystal ball. Handling these things helps cover the pauses while you formulate your next statement.

Make creative use of what you know about current culture, including polls, surveys, and common knowledge. Most women, for example, are troubled at times about family-career conflict. Most men suffer at times fears of not being able to provide for their families. Younger people are likely to be concerned about finding or getting a long with a mate.

Learn lots of stock phrases to have at the tip of your tongue to add body and credibility to your reading. A good way to learn such phrases is to visit a psychic for a reading. The daily astrology column in the newspaper is also a fine source.

Observe your client carefully, noting any reactions and follow up on them. Be aware of changes in posture, glance, expression, hand movements, as well as of what the client says to you.

Find the information you need by "fishing." Ask questions, let the client talk. A sympathetic, interested expression on your face will draw out your client. Listen carefully and respond specifically?most people love to have someone listen to them, especially when the listener responds directly and with concern to what they have said. When the reading is over, the client will confuse what they told you with what you told them.

Dramatize your reading with bold word pictures, vivid imagery, and even actions. For example, should you think your client may be feeling leg pain, grab your own leg, feigning pain, groan, say that you feel a terrible burning pain in your own leg. Should the client comment that she has never felt such a pain, but that her back troubles her, say something about "Oh, yes, I see it now this pain emanates from your back -- you have a serious problem with your back," grimacing and clutching your lower back.

Give the impression that you know more than you are saying, for example "I think you really would be wise to keep an eye on your back over the next few months." Flatter your client at every opportunity. And finally, remember the golden rule: Tell the client what she or he wants to hear.

Except for skeptics, curiosity seekers and trouble makers, clients will work hard to invest your statements with meaning. Help the client out by keeping your statements vague enough so that you do not create doubt in your client's mind. Whenever possible, make your predictions at least six months in the future. And if you have "hot" facts, by all means use them.

Cold reading is a skill that can be picked up by anyone willing to assume the role. Empathy, observation, knowledge of the culture your client comes from, and a few stock phrases can earn you a solid reputation as a psychic.

After this entertaining and educational lesson in fortune telling, the members adjourned for lunch at the James Tavern.-- Editor.

Sources for Information on Cold Readings:

Foser, B. R. "The Fallacy of Personal Validation." *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 44 (1949): 118-123.

Hyman, R. *The Elusive Quarry*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1989.

Snyder, C R., and R. J. Schenkel. 1975. "The P.T. Barnum Effect." *Psychology Today* 8 (1975): 52-54.

Calendar

A.R.T. meetings are open to the public and are held on the second Saturday of the month, October through May, 10:00 A.M., at the Bethesda Blue Ash Medical Building. Executive Council meetings are usually held the first Saturday of the month, 10:00 A.M., Bethesda Blue Ash Medical Building. Call President Keith Brabender to confirm.

December 11, Saturday, 10:00 A.M. Monthly Meeting. Survey & Discussion: Members Beliefs about Paranormal Phenomena. Bethesda Blue Ash Medical Building. Lunch at the James Tavern afterwards.

January 1. February Newsletter Deadline.

January 8, Saturday, 10:00 A.M. Monthly Meeting. Topic to be announced. Bethesda Blue Ash Medical Building. Lunch at the James Tavern afterwards.

February 12, Saturday, 10:00 A.M. Monthly Meeting. Topic to be announced. Bethesda Blue Ash Medical Building. Lunch at the James Tavern afterwards.

February 19. April Newsletter Deadline.

March 12, Saturday, 10:00 A.M. Monthly Meeting. Topic to be announced. Bethesda Blue Ash Medical Building. Lunch at the James Tavern afterwards.

Other dates for the 1993-94 year: Meetings: April 9, May 14. Newsletter deadline: September 1 for the October issue.
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